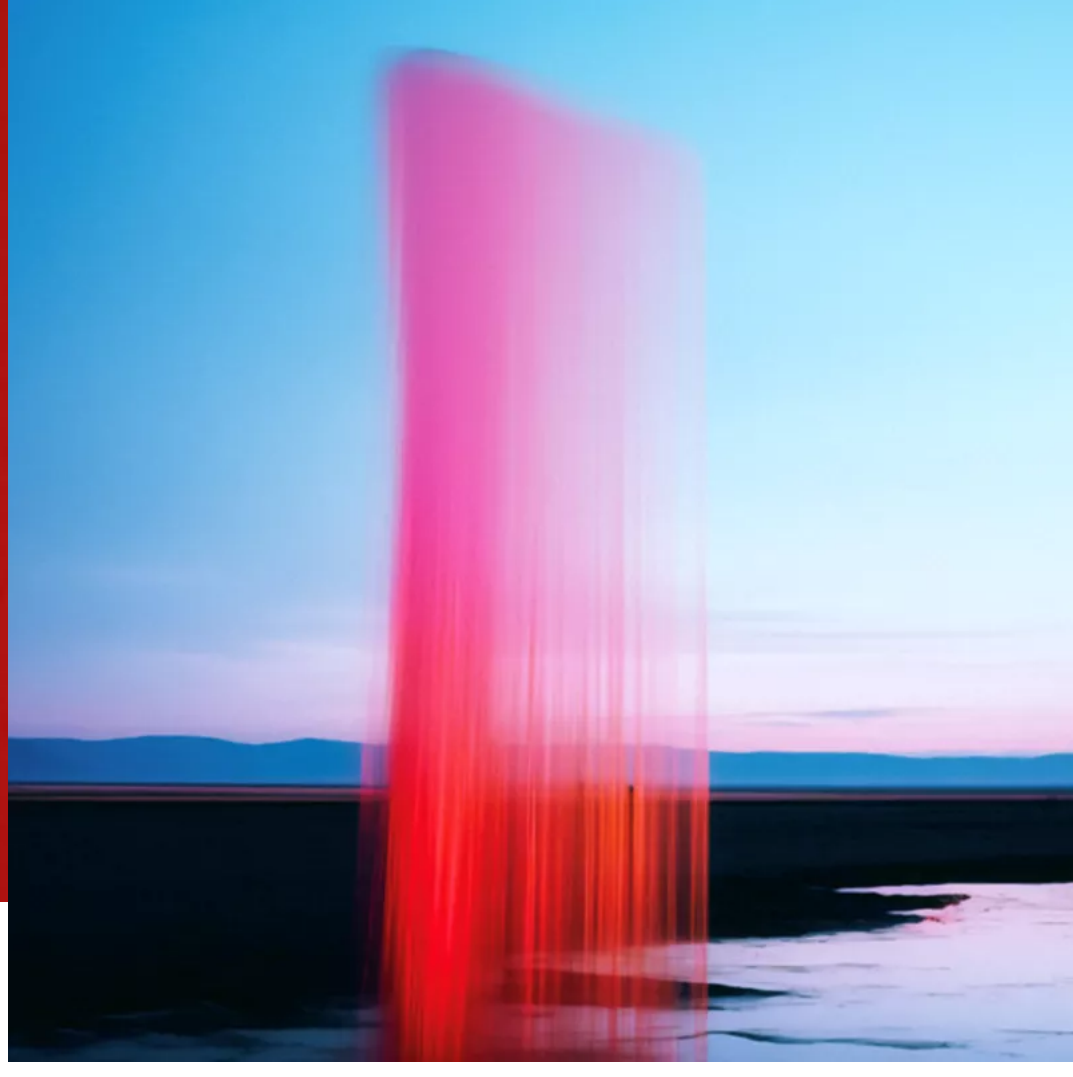


ALBUM REVIEW

# Who slipped the Seattle quartet a magic potion?



DEEP SEA DIVER

Billboard Heart

★★★★★

/ SUB POP / PLAYGROUND MUSIC  
RELEASE 28.02.2025

## A sonically daring release that lands with real impact

BY **NICOLAJ ROOS** / PHOTO: SUB POP, PRESS PHOTO

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Deep Sea Diver, based in Seattle, has been navigating the indie/alternative waters since 2012. Fronted by Californian Jessica Dobson, her vocals aren't entirely unlike those of Karen O from Yeah Yeah Yeahs—whom she's incidentally also performed with. She's also toured with Beck and The Shins, and the band has supported Pearl Jam. The lineup is a fairly traditional mix of bass, guitar, and drums.

In 2024, Deep Sea Diver signed with Sub Pop (home to Beach House, Father John Misty, Fleet Foxes, Nirvana). This is their first album on the new label, and I find myself wondering whether it sparked bigger ambitions—or maybe just a bigger budget. Or both.

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Where the band's earlier albums often featured straightforward 1:1 production that barely masked their influences (Radiohead, TV On The Radio, etc.), *Billboard Heart* feels more adventurous, playful, and filled with all sorts of experimental sounds.

The music is slightly more commercial now—which isn't necessarily a bad thing—but also more ambitious. There's playfulness in the vocal textures and instrumentation. The soundscape has gained dimension, like stepping into a 3D universe, with sound design I found lacking in their earlier work.

At the risk of sounding like a cliché, the album opener "Billboard Heart" is a minor tour de force. The diver's gotten a serious shot of oxygen, and you can feel it. They take more chances here, playing with sonic textures, reverb, and studio tricks. Playful synths sneak in along the way. You'd be forgiven for thinking the track was produced by Rostam Batmanglij (Clairo's producer), since the melodic ring-modulated guitar is nearly identical to the one in "Bags."

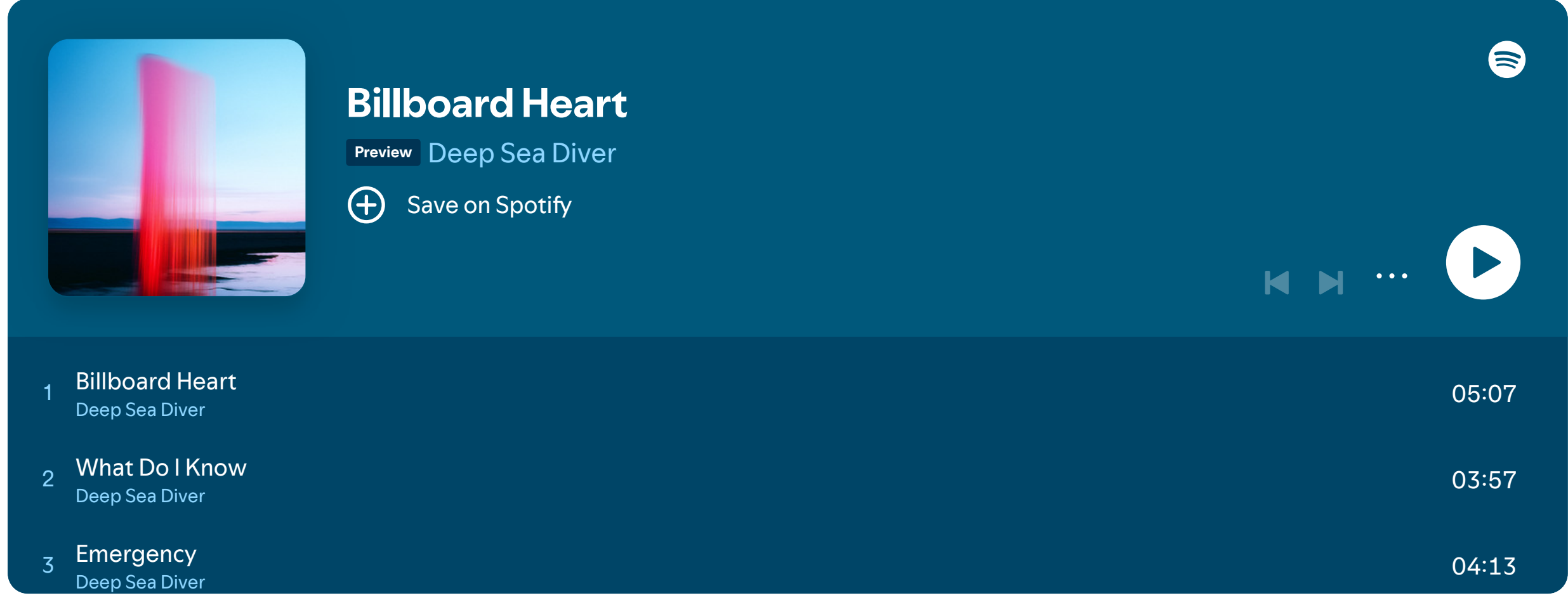
On previous releases, the vocals have unfortunately felt a bit one-note. But especially on "Loose Change," we get a welcome unison double-tracking of Jessica Dobson's voice. The energy gives me slight Smashing Pumpkins and Liz Phair vibes. This track also stands out with its added layers of synths. "Always Waving Goodbye" continues in the same vein ... though it's a bit too singalong, cell-phone/lighter-waving for my taste.

With "Emergency," we unfortunately regress a bit into the cliché rock of earlier days. That said, the track is incredibly well mixed. The intro moves from ultra-wide stereo into an ultra-mono vocal. It challenges the ear—and that's a good thing; our ears want to be challenged.

Deep Sea Diver has been on my radar for years, orbiting quietly. But their slightly anemic, organic, and weakly produced indie pop always held me back from a deeper listen. That may be about to change.

I'm pleasantly mystified by just how much of a leap this is from their previous albums to *Billboard Heart*. Andy D. Park (Chance the Rapper, Ariana Grande, Death Cab for Cutie) co-produced and mixed this one—just like some of their earlier records. And yet, this latest release is markedly different and manages to hold your attention for longer. Where Deep Sea Diver once waded, they're now diving all the way down to touch the coral.

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