

Far at night we live

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Before their recent reformation and new album, *At Night We Live*, Far were seemingly destined to be adored by a precious few and largely ignored in the rock pantheon. They were at once misunderstood and vastly ahead of their time. Much like their mid-90s counterparts Jawbox and Shudder to Think, they were an anomaly: intense, emotional rock without a macho stance. Far were too outside of the box, but they liked it that way. That's what made Far special: their music was a dialogue-starter for fans who were just like them.

To those who stumbled onto the band, Far were ahead of the curve, onto something before it was a "something." They had hardcore elements, but they weren't hardcore. They rocked, but they certainly weren't metal. They crafted hooky melodies, but they were by no means a power pop act. Their music was authentically emotional, but bore no real resemblance to the eventual explosion of the «emo» scene that many journalists have credited them with being the forefathers of. They combined all those elements and more. They were on a major label, but they were steadfastly DIY, refusing to cater to any one scene or marketing plan.

For 1996's *Tin Cans With Strings to You* and 1998's *Water & Solutions*, both of which were released by Immortal/Epic, Far were promoted by the label to the nü metal crowd and the radio rock crowd. Neither specification suited them. In those days, there was no clearly defined "post-whatever" scene to properly place them in. Over several years of constant touring, Far played with everyone from Deftones to Promise Ring, from Sepultura to Monster Magnet. Until recently, the band's last show was in 1998, in Chicago. Frontman Jonah Matranga went on to enjoy a prolific solo career under the Onlinedrawing moniker and formed two short-lived bands, New End Original and Gratitude. Guitarist Shaun Lopez founded The Revolution Smile before focusing on production. Bassist John Gutenberger played with indie outfits Jackpot and Two Sheds, and drummer Chris Robyn played live and did session work with many bands.

Though Far have been gone for over a decade, their posthumous popularity has steadily increased. Many like-minded bands that have gone on to be bigger than Far ever were have consistently reference them in interviews. Bands as diverse as Thursday, Jimmy Eat World and Blink-182 claim Far as an influence, as do a host of others. A new wave of listeners have discovered *Water & Solutions* for themselves. The years have gone by, but Far's music has stayed relevant.

But none of that was the catalyst for the reunion that resulted in the band's first album in 12 years, *At Night We Live*. The reunion started with a few simple conversations in Lopez's backyard and some loud, messy rehearsals. There was no label, no publicity, no management team. That previously mentioned DIY ethos remained solidly intact. The band's initial plan was to play a few shows in Far-friendly markets, hit a few festivals and call it a day. The band planned a couple of secret shows under the fake name Hot Little Pony, with no hype other than a fake MySpace page. They needed a song for the music player, so they bashed out a quick cover of Ginuwine's 90's R&B classic, "Pony". That's when things snowballed. A friend handed the track to radio stations and it garnered huge airplay at notable stations such as KROQ, Live 105 and 91X. The phones lit up. The song was the #1 most requested track at KROQ for several weeks straight, beating out bands with huge promotional budgets and labels behind them. Since then, the song has been downloaded and played literally millions of times on iTunes, MySpace and more.

No one was more confused about the song's takeoff than the band itself. It begged the question: What's next? And so the seeds of *At Night We Live*, the band's first new album in 12 years, were planted. Lopez started sending Matranga demos to work on. Between a handful of casual shows, ideas were exchanged via e-mail. Haphazard trips to Lopez's studio in Los Angeles were made. Somehow, with all 4 band members living in different places, over several months, the record was finished.

The result is an album that references music as wide and varied as U2, Nine Inch Nails, Band Of Horses and Doves. (See the accompanying track-by-track.) "Deafening" features a monstrous riff, huge hooks and a confrontational, complex lyric. "Give Me A Reason" bounces and sways, somehow mellow and brutal simultaneously. Faithful as ever to their fans, the track "Fight Song #16,233,241" features a scream-a-long vocal recorded by dozens of people around the world, submitted via the internet. Meanwhile, title track "At Night We Live" is based on a dream Matranga had about Chi Cheng, the Deftones bassist that remains incapacitated after a car accident. Overall, *At Night We Live* maintains all the elements that define the band: soaring choruses, ear-splitting riffs, thought-provoking lyrics and sweeping dynamics.

Nothing good or worth fighting for ever comes easy, and that's abundantly clear with Far. Far lives on with *At Night We Live*.



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at night we live

Track by Track with Jonah Matranga and Shaun Lopez

“Deafening”:

JM: “When this song kicks in, I forget that I helped to make it, which is always a good sign. The way my voice sounds...it doesn't sound like me to me and I love when I find new voices. When I sing, 'We're damned if we think we're divine,' I don't think I have ever made that noise before.”

SL: “I was writing stuff and in the back of my mind, I thought, 'What could I could get away with?' I would send a song to Jonah or the whole band and walk away and hide, and this is one of those moments. It is heavier than anything we've done. Jonah is singing in ways he's never done. I am proud of that. I never thought Jonah would sing over that. I said, 'The way I wanted to produce this is garage'y, in a PJ Harvey way.' I was totally lying. I knew it was a big rock song but I was trying to sell it!”

“If You Cared Enough”:

JM: “I remember doing vocals when I was in Europe, in a hotel room somewhere in the UK, I think, singing that chorus the first time and being excited and playing for the guy I was on tour with and hoped he loved it as much as I did. I love the way the words flowed in the demo and I approximated syllables and built a lyric from the sound, in a Michael Stipe vocal approach. I loved the chorus. It almost sounds like *War*-era U2 in a neat way.”

SL: “I liked the drums and bass and this was one Jonah sent back and I remember when the chorus hit, thinking, 'This is going to be great.' It has a U2 vibe, but I was going for a Coldplay thing with more muscle. A muscular Coldplay!”

“When I Could See”:

JM: “It took a while to get my head around this and to have Shaun be OK with me messing with his demo that much. Most people perceive the sonic tone and interpret it as dark, but the end of second verse, I sing, 'My love, will you go blind with me?' It's a romantic song. It starts dark, but now, I really see that I want to do this with you and go blind. It's saying, 'Let's not be ignorant together... will you let go of this sort of endless search for the perfect mate and will you stop looking for other people with me?’”

SL: “This is one of the early ones that I wrote and it's something ambient and dark and pretty.”

“Give Me A Reason”:

JM: “The demo was called 'Busy Beat.' Shaun wrote a beat that I love, so I wrote a bouncy verse and I love the way the chorus came together. Lyrically, it's an homage to a Robert Plant solo song, 'In the Mood.'”

SL: “This is the second song I wrote when I was trying to be in a Water & Solutions mindset. That was my least favorite song when I wrote the music. It reminded me of a rip off of Far, of myself. Jonah sent it back and I do like it now. I was writing that song for Jonah.”

“Dear Enemy”:

JM: “These were the last vocals to come out. It has a Pantera-style heavy riff. The chorus was dissonant and the changes were so weird. I know Shaun really loved it. Me and Shaun were fighting a lot, sorting out our past issues and working together again and trying to create a new way to communicate. This was written after a particularly bummed fight we had. It applies to anyone who knows that they are close to someone but you have a troublesome closeness. This was a peace offering.”

SL: “This was another one of me trying to be sneaky. I never thought Jonah would sing over that. It took a nasty argument for Jonah to finish it. But I was flattered. Whatever it takes to make a great song, I'm in.”

“Fight Song #16,233,241”:

JM: “It has a cool, old-school, CIV vibe, sort of a rave-up, 'rah rah' song. It has these punk gang vocals that we had people from around the world send

in. Kevin Seconds is a big influence on me. He is so unabashedly romantic and celebratory about being in a band. It's a nod to that kind of writing, that 'we're in this together' ethos. I've never written such direct lyrics on that level.”

SL: “I was trying to really make something that gave me not a 'British band trying to be punk rock' vibe, but a 'Brit pop band trying to be punk rock' vibe.”

“At Night We Live”:

JM: “I had a dream about [comatose Deftones bassist] Chi [Cheng]. I had to visit him a few times, so I am sure he is a part of it. He looks really good, well kept, sitting up in a chair device. His eyes are open and I can look directly into them, but they don't react. He is there but we don't know how to get in touch with him. In the dream, the remarkable thing I remember is his eyes. Shaun's sister died a while back and I thinking of her, as much as this is for and about Chi, the idea of that central hook, 'Daytime we're dead, at night we live.' If people are gone, that dream was as real as anything. I felt like hanging out with Chi. Who's to say I wasn't?”

SL: “I wrote that at 5 in the morning. The guys in the band call me the vampire, because I am on that schedule. I walked outside when it was done, since my studio has no windows, so I don't know what time it is. It was sunlight.”

“Burns”:

JM: “The chorus came in a dream, many years ago. I wrote that a long time before this started. I woke up with the chorus, wrote it down and the rest came after that. It's a hateful song to someone else. It's a nod to 'Since You've Been Gone,' one of my favorite songs of the past five years.”

SL: “This is the only song we kept from EP session tracking early on. We changed the arrangement quite a bit. It's a rocker.”

“Better Surrender”:

JM: “We do rhythmic stuff we've never done and this is a revved up, Motown song in a certain way. It's a nod to 'Surrender,' by Cheap Trick. I am not inferring that ours is a better version. It's me being confused about what the fuck was happening with this band in a good way. I did not see this coming!”

SL: “I wrote this when I was thinking of starting a new band before Far got back up and running. That's me ripping off the British band Doves.”

“Are You Sure”:

JM: “This is from the B-sides for my last solo record, but not on the record or widely released. It dates all the way back to 2001 with New End Original and was never on a record. The lyric that people get confused about is, 'We get a lot of help from people, not from God' but it's not anti-God. People fuck with each other a lot and blame religion for problems. It's not God's fault we're assholes. He gives us choice, we fuck it up.”

SL: “This is a Jonah song. We recorded it initially in the first session, scrapped it, then had a new arrangement.”

The Ghost That Kept on Haunting:

JM: “I've missed a lot of people in my life. I make a sport of it. This song is me trying to come to peace with that feeling. Sonically, that's my favorite on the record. It's some sort of cross between Nine Inch Nails and Band Of Horses. The kick-in at the end is apocalyptic.”

SL: “This is the first song I wrote. I was being selfish and wanted to write what I wanted to write. I never thought Jonah would sing over this, either. I am into this band M83 and the feeling they give me and I wanted to get that into a song.”

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