

# SCHOOL OF SEVEN BELLS

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## SVIIB

Benjamin and I, although both from NYC, met in LA in November 2004, when my first band went on tour with Secret Machines and Interpol. It wasn't until we were at an afterparty one night, a few dates into that tour that we actually had our first real conversation. The minute we looked in each other's eyes, I honestly felt like something hit me, and I knew that I recognized him. Like, "I already know this person, I've known him for a thousand years." And immediately after that, we were inseparable. We never had to explain anything. We never had to talk about it. It was just that's him and that's her and that's that.

The summer of 2012, when Benj and I started making SVIIB, was one of the most amazing times of our relationship as two people. We were so happy, and we'd finally reached this perfect balance, after going through all the things we did together. There was no baggage, no hurt anymore, everything was pure, true friendship. We'd hit every color on the spectrum. We were so close, and we had this flow like we'd never had before. That summer was so happy, and the mood and energy of this album perfectly captures that time.

I would get to Benj's apartment in Brooklyn every day at 11 a.m. and we'd work until 10 or 11 at night, recording in his bedroom or in our rehearsal space down the street. We never really had demos but we'd record things and keep tweaking them and making them better. He would start out with a loop or maybe a verse or chorus arrangement and he'd give me that piece of music to write to, and then he'd build parts and changes and landscapes around whatever vocal melody I'd come up with. It was never just one process for these songs, it was always something different. I feel like, with these songs, we finally found a way to fit in every single influence we've ever had in the span of School of Seven Bells and have it make sense.

I remember that when we started working on "Open Your Eyes," it kind of scared the shit out of me because it was so different from anything else we'd ever done. It was

really wild -- I felt like I was just winging it. I had never heard Benj's production sound like that. It was these very present moments where we were making decisions right there, not really thinking about where it was going to end up. That song was definitely one of Benj's favorites.

With "A Thousand Times More," Benj was going through a really harsh break-up, and I wrote that song for him. He'd given me a loop of music, and the melody was one of those things that seriously just came out in a day. Life was happening in this very fast way, and I didn't understand why back then. I didn't understand what was going on, but there was all this stuff that had to come out.

"Ablaze" was definitely my big love song for Benj. I remember feeling nervous having to show him the lyrics and sing them, because I was so incredibly bare. Sometimes when I listen back to these songs now, I have to wonder, "Did I even know what I was writing?" It just seems to make even more sense now. I don't ever set out to have the songs be about a particular thing -- it's just whatever is coming out at the time. And for some reason, at the time, all that was coming out of me were songs about him. It was like this weird compulsion to tell our story, even if he didn't know the songs were about him. A lot of it was stuff that I was honestly scared to tell him.

For this album, Benj really challenged me to write differently, as far as lyrics go, and differently as far as the rhythms I was using. The music he gave me forced me to do that, in a really awesome way. On our earlier records, the lyrics are definitely a little more esoteric, whereas with this record he was like, "How can we say this clearer?" He was trying to push me to grow and expand. I knew where he was going musically and I knew I needed to step up, too. He forced me out of my comfort zone. It was extra hard, considering this time I was writing a lot of things I'd never expressed to him, and he was the person I had to express them to in order for this record to come out.

We worked on this album that summer, and into the fall, and then when Benj got sick, we set it aside. We didn't do any more work on it until the following spring, when we wrote and recorded "Confusion" together in the same room. After Benj passed and we got his computer, his brother Brandon went through all the song files one by one, sorting out which were the right versions of the tracks. I couldn't listen to anything that reminded me of School of Seven Bells -- even our older music. It was brutal. It's all our story and it was just too hard. My sister Claudia helped me finish the vocal recording for "Music Takes Me" in NY the following winter, and just that completely dismantled me.

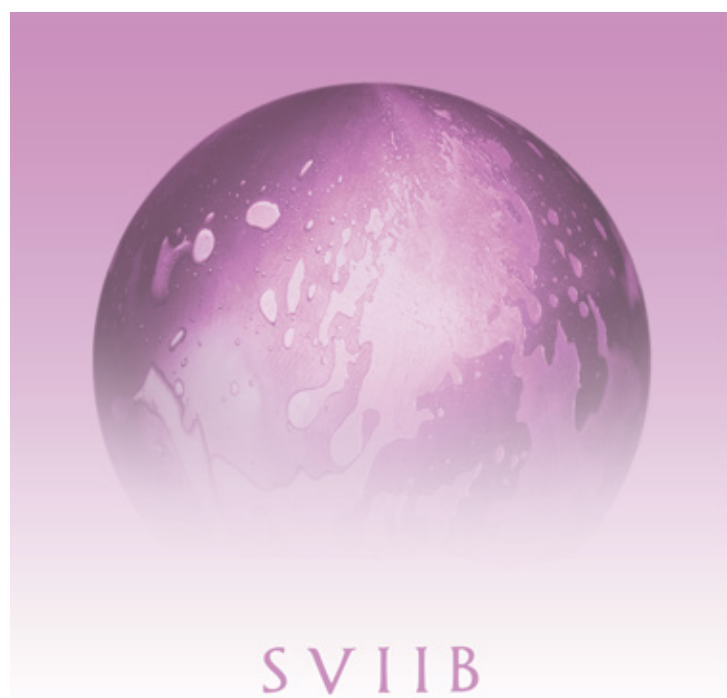
But there was this big part of my life that wasn't finished yet, and finally this spring I got back together with Justin Meldal-Johnsen in LA to record any unfinished parts and mix the tracks for SVIIB. We had planned to work with him on this album before Benj got sick, and he'd come to New York in 2013 to help us record "Confusion." Justin was always very involved and extremely respectful and sensitive to the situation. And when the right time came, he was there.

We were working off demos, so we knew what they were supposed to sound like. It was important to keep it as close as possible to when Benj and I were creating it -- that life that they had when we were super inspired that summer. I wanted to keep that vision really pure. I also

only wanted to use the songs that were almost done. I didn't want to put anything on the album that wasn't almost 100% me and Benj, because it's not School of Seven Bells if it's not the both of us. So we ended up with nine songs.

There were definitely points where I didn't think I could finish this album. But it had to happen. I knew I had to finish it, because we had already put so much work into it. I knew how much this meant to Benj. His entire life, everything in his body was music and making it. He never stopped. He had grown so much as a producer and a writer and he'd accomplished so much from the time I first met him. I couldn't not let people see this work, because he deserves it.

I know right now Benjamin is somewhere else. He's a spirit. He's a foal somewhere. I know for him, wherever he is, this is the last thing on his mind. But it's really important for me. I need people to hear this because I want them to hear what he did. He was holed up for hours in the studio working so hard. I am so fucking proud of him. He did everything that he wanted to do for this record. I want people to see that. And maybe somewhere he will catch some vibration of it. He might not recognize it, he might not know what it is anymore, but somehow he will catch some happiness from it.



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