

JULIANA HATFIELD “WEIRD”

Album Bio by Laura Fisher



“When I wanna block out the world, I do it to music,” Juliana Hatfield sings in the final track on *Weird* (2018), “just a set of headphones and a girl.” Her words incarnate the spirit of an album that translates solitude and renunciation into soaring melodies and cunning guitar parts. The marriage of guitar rock to Loner Philosophy is a classic Hatfield move. Radical solitude—not quite the same as loneliness—is this musician’s great theme, one she has explored from many different angles over the course of a 30-year career in music. But on her latest full-length solo release, radical solitude is the

stuff of manifesto. Why *wouldn’t* you want to block out the world? Hatfield asks us. Outside the home are people who misread your facial expressions (“Staying In”), whose gestures of love feel like efforts to possess you (“It’s So Weird”), who drag you into a vortex of lies and gaslighting (“Paid to Lie”), and who have allowed every last shred of human experience to be commodified, from dignity, religion, and privacy to fake IDs and opioids (“Everything’s For Sale”). Outside the glowing orb of independence are other people’s demands, their power plays, their lies and misinterpretations. Who needs it?

As it turns out, all kinds of personal and sonic possibilities open up when you shut the door on the long con of romance, not to mention capitalism and politics.

One way of thinking about the art of *Weird* is to see the record as a sort of diorama: an artful display of Hatfield’s world arranged in miniature. Like a miniature diorama, which is tiny in scale but vast in scope and implication, *Weird* presents a small-scale representation of life behind her apartment’s closed door. Just as the miniature diorama focuses on a single event or freeze-framed instant, Hatfield’s songs stun listeners with their precise attention to everyday moments and textures. Imagining herself as a broken doll in a song of the same name, Hatfield becomes a roving eye zeroing in on the smudges and imperfections dotting the surface of her body (“I’ve got a scar on my knuckle from where I got burnt... a hair on my chin and ink on my face and bruises on both of my knees”) and her domestic space (“there’s mud on the rug and a ring around the tub... there’s blood in the bathroom sink when I brush my teeth”). A similar emotional and domestic vocabulary shows up in “It’s So Weird” when Hatfield declares herself happy to lock romance out for good: “I tore myself up for no reward behind those heavy doors, and I’m never gonna go back inside.”

But here's the key to Juliana Hatfield: radical solitude is not a tragedy. Not even close. Staying in doesn't mean surrendering pleasure. Witness the upbeat "All Right, Yeah," a celebration of dancing solo in the breeze of an oscillating fan: it's all sensuous warmth and motion without the drag of a bumner party. In "Sugar," an ode to that sweet, addictive substance/rival whose transcendent chorus features a glimmering, almost sickly guitar effect, Hatfield makes peace with her own patterns of desire and repulsion, and with the fact that her "world is so small" when she "could have had it all."

Weird makes staying in a kind of holy rite. "I wanted to make an album about the contentment of being inside an apartment and living inside a very small radius," Hatfield explains. Her original goal for the album was to explore the concept of "contentment in a small space," a contentment that satisfies her larger "desire to keep a barrier between me and other people who are trying to get inside of me." Is it *weird* to embrace your true nature?

But for all of their attention to interior detail, Hatfield's songs also express the wish to transcend everyday life altogether: to obliterate meaning and breathe the pure air of abstraction. And so we might also approach *Weird* as a transcendentalist treasure hunt. A native New Englander, Hatfield has always shown an affinity for the individualism of the nineteenth-century writers and philosophers we call transcendentalists. Hunt around in *Weird* and you'll find they've taken up residence there. When Hatfield explains that she stays inside her own home because she wishes to live deliberately, she sings in a Thoreauvian tongue. She chooses to "close the Valves of her attention — Like Stone" like a latter-day Emily Dickinson. And in the gorgeous "Lost Ship," she imagines her mind as a solitary space craft barreling through time and space. Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1836: "Standing on the bare ground,—my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space,—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball. I am nothing. I see all." Juliana Hatfield, 2018: "I wanna ride on the spaceship in my mind and transcend emotion / close the door, kill the lights, lie back and fly so low across my own private ocean / no tenuous intimacies / I'm weightless, airtight and empty / I just want to be where I want to be / I want to see what I want to see."

In Hatfield's hands, there is no tension between the small enclosed world and the soaring vision of the artist. It may look weird from the outside, but there are interior depths to be revealed when you shut out the noise.

Weird is available on CD, LP, CS & DL January 18, 2019 on American Laundromat Records