



Hipsters flocked to Fleet Foxes shows and lapped up their debut album and EP after the band were picked up by Sub Pop in 2008. In 2011 the acclaimed six-piece return with Helplessness Blues.

by Sarah Illingworth

It's possible that indie folksters Fleet Foxes, along with Zach Galifianakis, could be to blame - or thank, depending on your preference - for the bearded, plaid wearing hipster trend that's rippled its way around indie folk world over the last few years. When the act released their eponymous debut album in 2008 they basically bumped folk - and its aforementioned accessories - into the mainstream. Both the album and their Sun Giant EP were met with widespread critical and popular acclaim. Three years

There wasn't a lot of pressure from the labels or anything to keep the wagon train rolling. They were pretty chill about it.

Are you feeling excited about the release of your new album, or a little daunted at the prospect of hitting the road again?

It's always daunting to be like, 'ok the next year and a half of my life is totally planned already' - but it'll be exciting. I imagine after this album we'll probably move to a more non-traditional method of touring and releasing music, so this is kind of like one more big go 'round, you know?

What do you mean by non-traditional? More like the [three free Robin Pecknold] songs you released in early March?

Yeah, like release stuff more frequently, and touring in small bursts - not necessarily attached to the [album cycle] that you end up in on a record label.

What with?

I just got a pretty bad sinus infection that lingered for a number of months, so I was just congested when I was trying to sing [on] the vocal takes on the record. That happened on the last record, and there's a song where I sound really congested - so the extra two months was worth it for me, rather than a lifetime of stuffy nose regret.

Is this album similar in style to your last one?

I see it as the unfinished business from the first one. It's not a hugely drastic stylistic change, but I think

I think this record is way closer to what I respond to in listening to [folk] music than the first one is.

- Robin Pecknold

How did you hear 'Where Is My Wild Rose?', which you covered? It was written by a New Zealand artist, Chris Thompson.

My friend Sasha who works at Sup Pop sent it to me. She was like, 'this song's awesome, check it out.' And then I got the Chris Thompson record. I think that's a bonus track on the version I have.

Can you explain a bit about what the song 'Helplessness Blues' is about?

I didn't want it to be a political song or anything, but the stuff that was going on at the time I wrote that song was, like, the oil spill and the financial crisis. These things were happening that seemed really out of anyone's control, or it just seemed like there's nothing that any normal person could have done to stop those things from happening. I had [also] recently interviewed Graham Nash [for] Uncut magazine, so I was doing a



on, and Fleet Foxes finally have a follow up, Helplessness Blues, in the can. According to frontman Robin Pecknold, long hours spent touring and a stuffy nose are to blame for the wait.

Is there a reason it's been so long between albums?

I think we just wanted a break from touring - we ended up touring for a pretty long time on the first album. I think by the time we started working on the second one we weren't too concerned about it taking too long to record, just because the longer it took to record, that just meant it's more of a break from touring. And everyone has other projects that they're working on that we try and make time for.

Who did you record Helplessness Blues with and where?

We recorded with Phil Ek again. We started the record last April, in Woodstock. We got most of the basic stuff done there, and then just brought it back to Seattle. We did things at a couple of studios in Seattle, but mostly recorded it ourselves at home, and just wrote more songs, and kept doing different versions of things, and just took our time with it. [Also] I did a couple of solo tours, and then Josh did some touring, and that took some time away from just straight working on the record. And I was pretty sick for a number of months.

this record is way closer to what I respond to in listening to [folk] music than the first one is. I think you can expect to listen to a couple of the songs once - and some of the other ones more than once.

Considering how people responded to your last album, I'm sure your songs will get a few more listens than that.

There's one song that took by far the most amount of work... it's like [how] you can see a movie once and be like, 'I love that movie so much,' and you can be a huge fan of the movie, but [not really want] to rewatch it, you know? There's ['The Shrine/An Argument'] on there that I was like, 'this is a one time listen,' but not in a bad way.

lot of research on him to get ready for that interview. So all this shit that was going on, I was comparing it to Vietnam, or the Kent State shootings, the stuff that Neil Young and [Crosby, Stills & Nash] latched on to at that time, and wrote songs about - and they're just such completely incomparable problems, I guess. So that came into it a little bit too.

Helplessness Blues is out 3 May 2011.

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