

Dream Wave

you tune out the classroom and spin
they caught you walking, naturally, away.

school field - it's a troubled desert terrain
a mirage unfolding

always a dream wave drawing you off track
dream wave, a coast calls you back
coast calling you back

you circle the corners, the city has gone
meeting in the dark woods is the lowering sun
in splinters certain, all pieces one

always a dream wave drawing you off track
dream wave, a coast calls you back
coast calling you back



Interview with David Lynch (first appeared in *Faster Louder* for Vivid Live Festival, 31 May 2016).

David Lynch: What is your first musical memory?

Hollie Fullbrook: Nursery rhymes sung by Mum before we went to sleep. She also played the guitar. I loved the sound of the muddling of hard nails and steel strings. She was never a loud or particularly confident player – I had to insist she played it to us. She would play ‘Blackbird’ by the Beatles or ‘Fire and Rain’ by James Taylor. Mum had played the autoharp and sung backing vocals in a 70s London folk band before she had us. She found her guitar in Spain, where she taught English for a couple of years. It’s a Japanese Suzuki guitar, and is the one I learnt on and still play.

The first memory I have of listening to a recording was when I was around three. I would listen with headphones to Dad’s Walkman. I became very taken by a Tanita Tikaram cassette tape. I knew all the words, and have a vivid memory of seeing her performing inside a cave on TV. I wanted to be like her.

DL: When did you start playing music?

HF: Mum really wanted us to learn an instrument, something she hadn’t been given the chance to do as a child. I began cello lessons when I was seven, and it was a big part of my life until I was eighteen. I stopped playing when I moved to Wellington to study. I decided I couldn’t pursue classical music, it felt like so narrow a discipline. The cello sat in the corner for a while, and it felt a bit like breaking up with someone. I often add the cello to my recordings now, though. I’m at a level of rustiness that makes it feel quite free.

With the guitar, it was my Granddad who encouraged me to learn the chords for ‘Amazing Grace’ when I was 11, and I more or less taught myself from thereon. I wrote my first song when I was 14. It was called ‘In My Dreams’. A couple of my friends at high school wrote poems, songs, and had

bands – it felt like it was something I had a knack for. My school had a great music department, where I made a lot of my friends, so that was a huge factor in keeping me involved with it all.

I never considered myself a singer, though. I had many hangups about what a “singer” was meant to sound, and even look like. I sang in order to express the words I’d written, but I didn’t think very much of my abilities. I really looked up to the jazz singers at school. I admired them from the sidelines.

DL: When was the first time you recall hearing yourself played back on a recording? What was your impression?

HF: I was 10 when we moved to New Zealand from Bristol in England. It was the mid-’90s. My parents bought a single-tape recorder, a small flat box, so that we could make recordings of our voices to send back to our grandparents and friends. I enjoyed making the tapes, and would often add musical interludes, playing covers on the guitar of songs from my parents’ record collection, which I’d commandeered. I remember my friend Natalie playing the “drums” alongside me on one occasion, on Lindisfarne’s ‘Winter Song’. It may have been on saucepans. But I listened back to it, and I loved hearing the drum fill.

When I was 17, the horticulture teacher at my high school, Mr. Wishart, kindly offered to record some of my early songs on a basic digital recording device he had. It was my first home-burned CD. I was proud of it, even though I found my voice embarrassing and difficult to listen to.

DL: How do you write a song?

HF: I enjoyed your conversation with Patti Smith about your thoughts on process, and I felt your “puzzle in another room” metaphor was perfect – it’s difficult to express the feeling better than that. There’s also a trepidation in looking into it too much. But... here goes, speaking just for my own experience of course... I think anything can spark an initial idea. It might be a street sign, a newspaper article, a conversation, a dream, something that strikes me as amusing. It is often a person, a feeling, or a memory. It is more your frame of mind, than the inspiration itself, that makes it into a song, I think. I would say I’m usually in a “floating” mood, when a line or a visual ‘scene’ for a song hits me. A bit released from any day to day routine, maybe.

The musical side is generally easy – I just follow a run of chords that I find interesting. That’s sort of a joy ride. The lyrics are trickier, and require a bit more problem solving. I suspect it’s a mixture of a sub-conscious drift of thoughts and then a conscious “honing” of that stuff. That’s why it can sometimes feel like you didn’t really write the song – because you’re not super aware of it happening until it’s happened.

I have notebooks which I fill with observations, or just free-association splurging of thoughts. I wish I was more disciplined, but I know pressure or too much self-criticism can stall me rather than make me this ideal prolific person. I’m okay with never being that. I work pretty slowly. But I do work hard.

The second part – the “honing” – is just as important for me. Sometimes I write lyric ideas on my phone or laptop. It’s usually on paper, though, or typewriter, as I quite like seeing the initial thought, without any editing. I might work for a few minutes, feel excited about it, but then I need to “pull back”. It’s like a hot potato. So I come back to it in a day or two – sometimes it gets written right there and then, with the guitar in hand, more often it sits around for a month or sometimes more, sometimes years. I do several drafts, incarnations, but sometimes go back to the original.

DL: Do you experience stage fright?

HF: When I first played live, for maybe the first 10 to 15 shows, yes, absolutely! I was wracked with nerves and felt nauseous all day. It took a few pep talks with myself. It was about getting to the stage where it didn't matter what people thought of me anymore. About letting go of worries of what I looked like, how people perceived me. I had to get over that self-consciousness, and get to a stage of being comfortable in my own skin, which I've found to be a really great side effect of playing music. I feel more myself these days, on stage playing music. I've taken the bull by the horns and embraced it as something I can do now.

DL: What is something non-musical that inspires your music?

HF: I like reading newspapers and circling words that jump out at me. I often pick up books – novels, poems, short stories – anything really – and immerse myself in it for ten or so minutes before starting to write. Getting my mind into the world of language, of words, is good – for me, it means I'm not distracted by other things I need to do – I can get lost in someone else's world by reading.

It can be high brow or low brow – I will be open to anything that comes along my way. I like dry humour and word play. I am a bit of a sucker for the classics. Poets or writers like John Steinbeck, Stevie Smith, Walt Whitman, Carson McCullers, Anton Chekhov, Emily Dickinson, Vladimir Nabokov, haiku, ancient Greek poets. I kind of love all the arts – film, theatre, paintings and sculptures and photography.

I also enjoy talking to other people who are doing something creative – I loved talking to you, for instance – those interactions often stay with me for a long time. People probably inspire me more than anything. I definitely have muses.

DL: Give one example of a perfect song.

HF: Okay, well maybe it's just word association, but I love 'Perfect Day' by Lou Reed. It's happy, it's sad, it's heartbreaking, it's specific, it's broad – all the things I would hope for in a song. The recording is so full – a beautiful, raw, close vocal, great rhythm section, and then those lush strings that fall in. The outro has an old world wisdom to it – you're going to reap just what you sow – but it's not overwrought, there's humour in the song, there's that sweetness of a picnic, sangria – but then all the subtext of you made me forget myself. I love things that make me feel mixed up.

DL: What were you experiencing when you wrote 'Dream Wave'?

HF: I was seeing someone for a while who would often talk about how tough high school was, when the beach was just a short drive away. He was always tempted to wag school to go surfing. So it's about high school, growing up. The song is about escaping the city – reality, perhaps – and going to some other place. I wrote it very quickly, sitting on the bedroom floor. It was a very easy song to write.

DL: What are the best things about New Zealand?

HF: You'd be able to order a good coffee, just the way you like it. A geologically lively place of volcanoes, bubbling mud, hot springs, mountains and black sand beaches – it can look like

another planet, or like paradise. I grew up fairly close to the West Coast of Auckland – you would recognise the landscape from Jane Campion's *The Piano*.

You're never really more than an hour away from a beach. The air is clear, there is a great big sky and lots of birds. There is a fair amount of idiosyncratic weirdness going on – in the local dialect, slang and sense of humour. A healthy scene of creative pursuits – people are quite free to try their ideas out, and there's not so much competition or infrastructure to stifle it. I liken the place to a petri dish.

It is a culturally diverse place. The indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand – Māori and their tikanga, or culture – are what make the place truly unique. Values of guardianship, sustainable use of resources and community mindedness; Te Reo (the language), music, comedy, contemporary film, radio and TV, politics – the fabric of our society is increasingly interwoven with it, and is so much better for it. New Zealand has a chequered history, like all colonised countries. Studying that history at high school left a big impression on me, because it still informs so much.

I was at Māori Television one day last year, and a kaumātua (Māori elder) asked where I was from, and I explained I'd moved to New Zealand when I was 10. He chuckled and said "well, you are tangata whenua ["people of the land"] by now, then". He had fought for Maori TV & Radio for decades. An old egalitarian attitude, expressing itself in friendliness, kindness and mateship is still a part of our national identity.

DL: Do you like animals in the house?

HF: Yes. I never had cats or dogs in the house growing up, because my Mum suffers from asthma attacks. All my animals were outdoor pets – snails, frogs, mice, rabbits, a guinea pig. I don't mind spiders. In my teens, I took in an old lab rat, a lovely creature, who had suffered many tumours from a life of experiments. I shared her with my neighbour Alistair. I live with two cats at the moment – it's a good start to the day when they come and say hello in the morning.