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Ghost Bitch | Interview | Exclusive video premiere of 'My Wings' | New Album, 'Blood and Honey'

March 17, 2022



Privacy

Exclusive video premiere of 'My Wings' by Ghost Bitch, taken from the upcoming album, 'Blood and Honey', out March 25th, 2022 via K Records.

The Ghost Bitch story begins in Silver Spring, MD (just outside of the District of Columbia) where Stasia Kowaleski wandered the streets. Yes, her first concert was Britney Spears; Stasia's mother accompanied her and pointed out there were def times when Britney was lip syncing to her own music. To Stasia it didn't matter, "I really liked her clothes and her attitude, the dancing and her weird voice."

Ghost Bitch- My Wings (Official Video)



The first time Stasia sang in front of other people it was karaoke to a Spice Girls song at one of her mother's work events. "She was shocked because I was so shy. I just loved music, I loved performing and singing, that was more important than what people were watching." Totally. Stasia spent two and a half years at Brooklyn's Pratt Institute studying visual art, sculpture. Her interest was in readymades, Duchamp, using trash, stuff found on the street. Her approach to music is more personal and emotional. That's where the Rowland S. Howard comes in: "I watched this German movie and it had a Birthday Party song in it, a long Rowland S. Howard riff at the beginning that was strange and mesmerizing. I never realized how magical the guitar could be and there were so many possibilities." Stasia found the music and art scene in New York stifling, "I was disillusioned by the art scene in NY because I felt the artists were motivated by money and careerism. I didn't feel a sense of community and was overwhelmed by the isolation and chaos of NY." She was ready for the big leagues and headed for the West Coast. "Olympia seemed the polar opposite of New York, I definitely found community here. I was particularly impressed that you could start a band and play a show the next week." Stasia played in several combos in Olymp. "I've certainly learned a lot more since I started playing in bands. I always thought (perhaps wrongly) that if I knew too much technical stuff it would be a hindrance to my creativity."



Ghost Bitch is just Stasia making all the crucial soundz. “I write by myself, I cement things and, for better or worse, take up so much sonic space there’s not a whole lot of room for other people.” The first two self-released Ghost Bitch tapes were recorded with Capt. Tripps Ballsington at High Command Studio. The third she recorded herself, and has worked with other Olymp studio pioneers, like Bryce Aguirre. For the new Ghost Bitch album ‘Blood and Honey’ it was back to Capt. Tripps. “I really appreciate his approach to recording. He doesn’t impose anything on me or have an agenda.” At High Command it is absolute heavy chains, plus sonic jewelry. The results are ‘Blood and Honey’, expressing the purist of Ghost Bitch sympathies. It’s not all screech and confusion. Ghost Bitch will be touring the East Coast in early spring 2022, around the time of ‘Blood and Honey’s’ release date.



Photo by Dave Harvey

Interview

This is a transcription of a long distance conversation between Stasia Kowaleski, and long time friend, fan and poet Luz Sacaan about the eight songs on 'Blood and Honey' and how their sonic emotional depth and power came to be. Luz and Stasia met some years ago at OHC (Olympia Hardcore Fest) and immediately bonded over their mutual adoration of Artaud, Coil and Rowland S. Howard.

When did Blood and Honey start to come together and how did that timeline interact with the pandemic?

Stasia Kowaleski: It's hard to say when it all started to come together! I recorded in October 2021, but the oldest songs I started writing early on in the pandemic and the newest was finished a couple weeks before I recorded. I thought I was going to record much earlier in the year, but I badly injured my wrists from playing guitar with poor form, so I had to stop everything for a while then re-learn how to play guitar.

That sucks you got injured! Did that reset change your songwriting? Were you intentionally writing for the album or had you started writing the songs without a project in mind?

The older songs changed a lot over time. I tend to half-write songs and leave them unfinished until a month before recording, which was aggravated early in the pandemic since I didn't have any shows to prepare for and motivate me. I normally just collect songs (or half-songs haha) until there's enough for an album.

I would have never guessed there were interruptions in the creation of this album! 'Blood and Honey' feels so intentionally put together and thematically cohesive despite the disruptions mentioned.

Usually in the month and a half before recording, I do quite a bit of editing and focus on making them sound like they come from the same planet.

What were the first songs that came to be?

The first song I completed was probably 'My Wings'. I wrote it on an acoustic and it's very simple chords and there's something that naturally happens when you start singing and playing chords on an acoustic guitar.

When did K records become involved?

K became involved in November 2021 once the album was done being recorded.

This is your first album released on a label. How has being on a label been a different process?

Well, I was listening to Traegermethod podcast and they were talking about how it's "Do-it-yourself" not "Do-it-by-yourself!" It's a sentiment I can relate to cuz I've self-released four solo cassettes prior to this, one of which I also recorded myself, and I'm very weary of doing everything on my own. I do not actually aspire to total self-reliance, so more than anything it's just been wonderful having that support, and I'm making more of an effort to collaborate where I can in the process. In the past, it's been less a choice than a necessity for me to self-release, since I seemed to be too electronic or weird for the punk labels and too raw and guitar-oriented for electronic and experimental labels. I was really inspired to play music when I heard Teenage Jesus and Kat Bjelland's exquisite screams, so it came as quite a shock to me that some people into punk have a very small, specific sound in mind when they hear that word and they really do not want to be challenged. How bizarre! Anyways, I'm grateful to K for all the help and for getting my music, because ultimately I do want people to hear it. I'll continue to make it regardless of whether anyone listens, but having a creative community and live music is very meaningful to me!



It IS bizarre. It's so cool when you find people that respect and see your creative vision especially for artists like you that genre bend. Punk should always have room for experimentation! How did the title 'Blood and Honey' come to be?

I realized that I used the word "blood" a lot on the album, and then one of the first words on the album is "honey." I like things that are soft and hard... when there is some sweetness with the harsh.

I see both how they contrast and relate! They are both viscous and both have a corporeal feeling to them, one (blood) an internal process and the other (honey) an external process. I feel like those sentiments make a lot of sense with your album.

Yes! Have you ever read Julia Kristeva on abjection?

I have been meaning to read more of her.

I was obsessed. I haven't read the whole book, it's a lot and it's been awhile, but it goes with what you're saying...this experience of horror and the confusion of "what is me and not me".

Accidental fluids, or abject substances that then become useful or fuel for obsession, I see the Kristeva influence in the album!

Then there is also the more sensual side of it.

Blood is very sensual. Honey also has those connotations. Your music definitely has an intense sensuality.

Thank you, I'm glad to hear that.

On the Kristeva note, it seems philosophy and other artforms are huge influences on your music (you do mention the writer Kathy Acker in a song title on the album!). What have you been reading and what are some other influences for this album?

I've been bad at reading lately, but Kathy Acker and Bataille are two things I always come back to. I did get really inspired by Peter Perrett's songwriting though I don't think it shows. I also got my mind blown when I heard Koko Taylor and Willie Dixon's "Insane Asylum" for the first time in 2020. I think it's one of the greatest songs EVER! I'd been listening to Diamanda Galas' cover of it for years without knowing the original was even better and just absolutely perfect in every way.

Speaking of influences, I know we touched a little on the pandemic before but how do you feel the pandemic influenced your writing and musical process? Quarantine was a wild circumstance to be making art in, do you think being forced to be with yourself informed the end product?

I definitely think it had a big impact. I think I kept writing about blood in part, because I wanted to have a real visceral experience and was having a really hard time with how Olympia can be, it can already feel so stagnant here, and with the pandemic, and me having plans to move to Australia, but not being able to for a very long period of time, there was a lot of pent up energy. And that was probably why I used more percussion too. The songs feel shorter than my songs from the past, although I am unsure if they actually are, but they feel like shorter bursts of energy.

It does sound really full and textural, intense in a way that is different from your previous recordings. Full bodied. Some themes between your previous album 'Underworld Pearl', and 'Blood and Honey' are similar yet evolved in this album. What were some changes intentional or organic between 'Underworld Pearl' and 'Blood and Honey'? Did you start incorporating any new instruments?

One intentional thing is that I wanted to use more drums, for a long time I didn't have any drums in my music at all.

I did notice there was a lot more percussion and I love it. What drums were you using?

It was a mix of things. I started out just using a drum machine app on my phone, because it was what I had available. I had started using that with 'Underworld Pearl'. But then what I got really into for 'Blood and Honey' was this keyboard from the thrift store that I ran through this crazy distortion pedal my friend built. There was a drum setting on the keyboard, and it just made the most wonderful, wild, terrible sounds!

The percussion really is captivating in this album, hypnotic and explosive. It drew me to it, especially how it begins with that drawn out drum bell sound. Did the song structure change once you added more percussion?

I also started writing more straight forward songs, rock songs.

“Writing my version of a pop song”

Yeah yeah! there is more of a “pop format” to these songs , which is surprising yet appealing.

It’s funny, it’s something I have always had tension with and still do. No wave more than “punk rock” made me believe I could play music, so a part of me always feels guilty for using a guitar in a conventional way. I do want to try to make something original. And it is hard once you know how to write a pop song not to just do what everyone else has been doing for decades, but I just really enjoy writing my version of a pop song I guess. So I just went with it.

The experimentation within the “rock song” in this album is so successful. I love hearing you play with these song structures and make them your own. Expanding the boundaries of what punk can be! Your sound and power has evolved so much since your early shows. The way your vocals have developed has probably been one of the biggest progressions, taking up space, adding texture and intonation.

When I started, I didn’t do vocals at all. I was afraid to sing, especially to sing words of my own and have them be heard (and judged) by other people. Playing guitar didn’t seem that scary to me in comparison, though I did gravitate toward making synthesizer-based noise music initially, because I was intimidated by the history of the guitar and rock bros judging me for how I might not be using it properly. I definitely love singing but it’s something I still have to put intention into to sing loud. I always get shy and sing quietly at sound check even though I love singing probably more than any other aspect of it.

What is it about singing?

I think I feel a lot more control over my voice and there are a lot more subtleties. You can say a word in a different way and the meaning can change completely. I think it’s also that it uses your breath, so it’s moving things in a more direct body way.

That comes through , when I first read the lyrics, it was a different experience than hearing them. You add something to it vocally.

I am glad that is happening, sometimes when I read the lyrics, I think “oh this is a little dryer than I would like.”



The lyrical themes in this album seem to be transformation, evolution, change...These themes are present throughout the album but perhaps the most clearly in the track Butterfly where you sing “driving me into a new being”. These themes of transformation seem to contrast with this period of quarantine in which you had mentioned feeling stagnant, how did they inform each other? How did you end up writing so many songs about evolving while being stuck?

Even though there was a lot of stuck feeling of having to stay somewhere I did not want to be, I think I was aware, and definitely am now, that there was a lot shifting for me internally. That yes I was being forced to stay here for two years when I was ready to hop on a plane to the other side of the world, but maybe there was a good reason... that I wasn't ready to leave and needed to transform a lot of things internally. That song (butterfly) for me, follows a theme from 'Underworld Pearl', which kind of felt more, like after all my old bands breaking up, then me getting into a motorcycle accident and breaking my knee, then shocking romantic ending and all this crazy shit, Underworld Pearl kind of felt like I was desperately speaking to being in the thick of that grief, and that I could not process it until after, when quarantine happened. I was really forced to sit with myself, I guess there was only so long where I could be pouty and be like “I don't want to be where I am!” without eventually being like okay, we gotta go in deeper.

Yes! I definitely noticed that although the theme of desire and yearning was present in both albums, that those themes grew and became more transformative in Blood and Honey as well. You seem to have more ownership over your emotions. One of my favorite songs on the album is Ridin' (for Kathy Acker), what elements of Kathy Acker is that song dedicated to? The percussion on that song is incredible.

I got obsessed with Kathy Acker's “Eurydice in the Underworld” when I was writing 'Underworld Pearl', particularly this poem in the beginning, but I didn't even know Kathy Acker took a bunch of the poem from Rilke. It's the Rilke Elegy that starts with “beauty is nothing but the beginning of terror [...] every angel is terrifying.” it's my kind of romantic ...Orpheus and the journey to the underworld. I took a few lines from Kathy Acker's poem to sing- “in and out of death [...] this is where love is taking me” and I felt it was also inhabiting a bit of her vibe, though I was writing about myself in a more heroic tone haha. I was also thinking about astrology when writing it.

How did astrology inspire you?

In Rowland S. Howard's solo music and These Immortal Souls, he frequently references the stars and planets, which I likedand I got inspired by these mythical archetypes of Venus and Mars.

I immediately think of the opening line in the Rowland S. Howard song Sleep Alone “First I shut down the stars, because you said they ruled us”, where he continues to also reference Mars!

Yes! “Then I took out Mars, He was the cruelest, His lover followed suit by way of suicide and the others stood there silent as I dealt out peace of mind.”

What about these archetypes inspire you, how does that tie into your sound and music?

I think I was just really indulging. I guess Venus and Mars are talked about as these opposing archetypes, Venus being the goddess of love and beauty and pregnant women vs. Mars, the god of war, who is also her lover, and they say it's only as lovers they can relate. My Venus is in Aries, a Mars-ruled sign, and the ancient Hellenistic astrologers were like ‘THIS IS A HORRIBLE POSITION FOR VENUS! DOOM BEFALL HER!’ Aleister Crowley ghost wrote an astrology book where he said he found women with Venus in Aries to be “exceptionally unpleasant,” and references Baudelaire as an example of what a wretched placement it is. Too much passion! I love Baudelaire. Of course, I think those opinions really speak to the values of their times and the desire for submission, but then my Mars is also in Cancer, which the ancients also thought was terrible, because Mars is allegedly not supposed to be so emotionally-motivated, sensitive and relationally-oriented. I guess I was just indulging those a lot. This kinda circles back to the blood and honey theme! My idea of beauty is pretty fierce and maybe a bit twisted, or at least, unconventional, while I think my toughness comes from being emotionally open and resilient even when I feel like I'm gonna die of feeling haha! Hopefully that makes some sense.

Vulnerability and emotional openness is tough. Having your astrological placements historically viewed as undesirable, and using that to reckon with your ideas of beauty and love is a push and pull I hear in Blood and Honey. Owing your depth of feeling! I viscerally feel this in the song Tears of Fire, the emotions in that song are so intense. The closing line “Dear Lover God, come and shatter me” really embodies what you are saying. What was the story and process behind that song?

Oh my that line was my little Baudelaire moment! That was the last song I put lyrics to. I had written the music, and I was kind of stuck with lyrics and then I dug out the repetitive bit ‘Tears of Fire’ that I had written for a collaboration with Chris McDonnell that never fully came to fruition, so I was trying to rework it. I wanted it to be cathartic. I am a little superstitious about lyrics. I guess that's why I try to make them have a transformational energy rather than just being like “I hate myself! I hate the world! I feel like shit!”

What are your superstitions behind lyrics!?

I guess I am superstitious in that I want to sing something that feels empowering to me, that doesn't mean not being honest in having challenging emotions or experiences, but I do think words have a lot of power! Ultimately, I just want to be sure strength and resilience are the undertone. I think that is what my superstition really is about.

That is what I was trying to say earlier by “ownership of your desire.” Regardless of being broken or hurt, what comes through the most is your strength within that depth of feeling, both sonically and lyrically. The opening song ‘My Wings really’ sets the listener up for that.

It's my favorite! It makes me feel powerful even though it's also very vulnerable for me to perform.



Photo by Jenna Fitton

Before we end the interview, what is next for Ghost Bitch? What do we have to look forward to in upcoming projects of yours?

It was fun to play more conventionally but now I think I need to do something weird. I am getting interested in open tunings. Even though I am playing more conventionally than I have in the past, I try to find the weird sounds or the weird minor chords nobody wants to use, because they sound too sad. I'll take them! I really want to collaborate with other people when I get to Naarm. I wanna get to have the full band experience!

Luz Sacaan

Headline photo: Madison Nadine


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Vinyl of the Day



Farm – 'Farm' (Guerssen reissue, 1971/2022). Originally released as private pressing in 1971, the Farm album is highly sought after and revered by collectors. Recorded by this Southern Illinois band in 1971 at the legendary Golden Voice studios, it's full choc of jammy, bluesy guitar psych with heavy dual guitars, organ, congas, harp... Recommended if you like Quicksilver, Allman Brothers, Canned Heat, Ten Years After... Original artwork. The booklet includes extensive liner notes by Kevin Rathert (It's Psychedelic Baby!) and photos. Remastered sound.

	Farm by Farm
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Farm interview



Farm was an early 70's band from Southern Illinois. They were amazing musicians and

sounded very similar to The Allman Brothers. They released only one LP from 1971. Kevin Rathert spoke with two members of the band. Gary was the guitarist and George was their manager and sound man. Shadoks will be releasing reissue of ... Continue reading



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