

JEN CLOHER

Jen Cloher

Album Biography: June 6, 2017

Album Release: August 11, 2017

"It's self-titled." The three-word answer is all that Jen Cloher requires to describe her new album, a letter in triplicate addressed to music, to Australia and to love. It's the most honest album she's ever written. Jen likes best to tell the truth.

Jen Cloher is the culmination of a period of artistic and personal growth in which the artist took her rightful place as the punk-rock figurehead of Melbourne's famous DIY music scene. The NIDA graduate is an outspoken advocate for artist rights, a label boss and band-leader, she also happens to be the partner of acclaimed songwriter Courtney Barnett. Cloher's fascinating life-story is enough justification to take notice here, but it's the music that will have you returning to this album again and again.

Cloher says: "It's a classic rock album, recorded live in one room with minimal overdubs... I'm not too good at going into descriptive language around my own music but I suppose it is intimate without ever feeling too precious."

The bulk of Cloher's album was recorded in October 2016 by Greg Walker amidst the rolling greenery of Jumbunna in Victoria's Gippsland, these are songs of distance and songs of driving. Four years on, the band that first played together on Cloher's acclaimed third album, the Australian Music Prize nominated *In Blood Memory*, are bold and assured. The songs are split here and there by the melodic intricacy of guitarist Courtney Barnett while drummer Jen Sholak and bassist Bones Sloane add weight and space, playing only what is needed, leaving room for the songs to breathe, transform and soar.

The record was completed in March 2017 with Tom Schick at Jeff Tweedy's famous 'Loft' Studios in the depths of Chicago's winter.

The work is political, more so than it has ever been. It is a work about myopia and the denial of equality. "I think everyone has that quandary as an artist: How far do I go down that path?" Jen says. "Whether you have the right or the knowledge or the understanding." Her favourite line on the record is from the 8-minute epic *Analysis Paralysis*:

I'm paralysed
In paradise
While the Hansonites
Take a plebiscite
To decide
If I can have a wife
I pay my fines
Taxes on time
But the feral right
Get to decide
If I can have a wife
If I can have a wife?

The record is a landscape of Myna birds and backyard pools, a national dream from which Australia won't wake. She mentions Australian poet Les Murray: "He had this wonderful line about 'a kind of regional echo', and I stole that straight

away as a title,” Jen says. “I talk about pavements and wheelie bins and prawns, but I don’t think we dream big. We have this regional mentality, which is nothing new. People have written about that experience.

“I literally spent about two weeks trying to find the right words, then I found this thing about crabs in a bucket and they will never escape because even if one gets to the top of the bucket the rest will pull them back down.”

The lyric she mentions comes in the last verse of a song called *The Great Australian Bite*:

On this fatal shore
Forgotten and ignored
Crabs in a bucket
Maggots in a sore

Jen remembers standing side of stage during a transcendent Dirty Three show early 2015 in Melbourne and recalling poet Mary Oliver’s line, “about poetry being as important as food in the pockets of the hungry”. The experience became the song *Loose Magic*, “I had this moment, seeing the audience in absolute need. This is humanity coming to feed. I watched tears rolling down people’s faces, and no one on stage is saying a word. And Warren Ellis introduces Jim White ‘all the way from Clifton Hill’. And I thought, ‘Fuck, he’s from just up the road.’”



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