

Mp3 Rachel Taylor Brown - Half Hours With The Lower Creatures



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Supporting the USA and fighting terrorism at Hot Dog on a Stick. 12 MP3 Songs POP: Beatles-pop, POP: Chamber Pop Show all album songs: Half Hours With the Lower Creatures Songs Details: FULL BIO-HALF HOURS WITH THE LOWER CREATURES from In Music We Trust. Rachel Taylor Brown Bio for "Half Hours With the Lower Creatures" (Cutthroat Pop) Theres this Kurt Vonnegut quote--Just because some of us can read and write and do a little math, that doesnt mean we deserve to conquer the Universe, says Portland, Oregon piano-Creep-Pop singer-songwriter Rachel Taylor Brown. But I deserve to conquer the universe, and goddammit, so do you. Thats what this albums all about. Just kidding. The title of Browns new album, Half Hours With the Lower Creatures, comes from a 1918 marine biology textbook she picked up at one of her favorite bookstores. The title and its implicit declaration of species superiority was the perfect umbrella for a collection of songs about the centuries-old, tragic-comedy of human desire to be king, and to rule over something, anything. Not unlike the writers she admires --Vonnegut, Randy Newman, graphic novelist Lynda Barry, Katherine Dunn--Brown is a storyteller, an observer of peripheral characters, frankly focusing on uncomfortable situations and scenarios with an unflinching gaze. Her desire to detail the disturbing side of life, sometimes quite humorously, springs from the manner in which she has dealt with her own troubled history. Rachel came into her own as a songwriter when a nervous breakdown and subsequent depression made her a hermit for about eight years. She could have put pen to paper to reflect on her past. Instead she turned her gaze outward, toward the hypocrisy in traditional institutions like family and church that are so fiercely maintained despite all manner of common sense and truth. Her obsession with the underbelly of denial and human frailty is not so much an intellectual exercise as the natural expression of empathy and a love for flawed

humanity, despite a dismay of it. Her music reflects that love/hate relationship and persistent awe at the beauty and horror in the world. I want to capture that sweet and sour thing in a song. Interestingly, the uncomfortable nature of her taboo topics often informs her arrangements and instrumentation. She sculpts synthetic and organic elements into a crumbling sonic landscape with the skill of an orchestral arranger. Rachel's music is a unique blend of chamber pop, choral elements, anthemic arena rock and found sound. To try to categorize it presents a puzzle: its a combination that blurs the line between pop and indie-rock and uses her classically-trained skills to create traditional and abstract constructions. But I generally write on a very subconscious level and just try to go with the flow Brown admits. Later, I usually figure out what my brain was trying to say. I dont pay attention to what key Im in or what chords or notes Im playing until later, and then I have to figure it out. And where putting the album together is concerned--right now I may sound like I know what its about because at this point, I do. At the start, though, I just have a feeling. All the stuff you take in agitates around in your head and sort of spills out and some songs come out that just kind of belong together. Its when theyre done that I connect the dots. Sounds so arty-farty, but I feel like songs really do have a mind of their own. The peculiarity of her sound makes it difficult to link her music to anyone else's. Though always growing as a songwriter, she has consistently been unafraid to write what she hears in her head, which often challenges the listener. Names that come up are Rufus Wainwright, P.J. Harvey, Kate Bush, and Frankenixon (Sword of Exactly) conjoined with Charles Ives and Benjamin Britten. Her complex, polyphonic arrangements also conjure comparisons to Elliott Smith, Sufjan Stevens, Jeff Lynne, Laura Nyro and The Beatles/George Martin, and smart/poignant lyrics bring to mind Randy Newman. Though she has sung for years in small, classical ensembles like Portlands Cappella Romana, Rachel uses her flexible and powerful voice pointedly, never overdoing it or flaunting it. Her first steps out of the house where shed been holed up for years were to go record her debut solo album, 2001s Do Not Stare (Shrewd Rube), after a local housepainter/musician overheard her music and offered to help. She followed that up with 2005s Jonah Days (also on Shrewd Rube) which featured some of the world class Baroque musicians shed worked with over the years, including Grammy-nominated harpsichordist Richard Egarr. In 2006 she quietly released a big step in her musical vision, Ormolu: her first release for Cutthroat Pop Records and her first record really working with engineer/producer Jeff Stuart Saltzman. Saltzman, a Jackpot! Studio mainstay and Portland audio guru whos worked w/, among others, Stephen Malkmus, Sleater-Kinney, and Menomena, mastered her first

two records. Ormolu marked the forming of an important musical bond w/ Saltzman that has found Brown more comfortable and at ease with her own creative process. Meeting Jeff was like coming home. He's become a trusted friend. We're a little too much alike in many ways, and neither of us unopinionated, but it works out somehow. His attention to sounds goes way deeper than anyones I know. A friend once described him as my soulcoproducermate and I think that's about right. I feel lucky to know Jeff, let alone work with him. Following up Ormolu in 2007 Brown, again with Saltzman behind the board, recorded and released a haunting seven-song holiday album that she wrote in one day and recorded in three: 7 Small Winter Songs (Cutthroat Pop). Now, expanding on the vision and scope of Ormolu, Brown is back with Half Hours With the Lower Creatures (Cutthroat Pop). Creatures originates with her curiosity. Call it a fascination with people watching or just plain interest in understanding what makes not only herself, but also her fellow man, tick. This is music cloaked in intelligent lyrics, dissonant forwardness, and out-of-nowhere pop sensibilities. The music is just as much about what she hears in her head as what she thinks in her head. The big questions, not only regarding her own music but humanity and human nature, are a source of inspiration for Rachel. Im curious about motivation, she elaborates, and why people do the things they do--partly due to my own personal history and pathology. I think my songs tend to reflect a preoccupation with injustice and the underdog, but (I hope) with some humor, too. The songs on this album--as they kind of shuffled together out of my neurotic mind--led naturally toward thinking about war and that human desire for control. But I think what I'm really talking about here is human nature and hierarchy. An analytical thinker and curious observer of life and human nature, Brown reflects heavily in her songwriting, pondering and asking questions and trying at times to answer them, while at other times accepting the fact that there is no answer; just more questions. Its the thought process that created and melded Half Hours with the Lower Creatures: the lyrics driving the album while the melodies maneuver it. The book thats the albums namesake made Brown laugh. That title sort of said everything to me about who we are. We always have to be at least one rung up the ladder from something else, even if it's a jellyfish. It's the history of humankind, one-upsmanship. It's the disease that leads to things like war. Continuing to talk about the albums core themes, she says, Its not a novel thought, but one I subscribe to, especially given my history as a former born-again Lutheran turned hopeful heretic, the thought that God didn't create us in His image--we create God in our image, to do what we want, Brown says. To be able to point to this giant, invisible outside force and say HE says so! effectively passes the buck from mankind to

God and allows sanctions - people to do horrible things, in the name of God. Like make war." With the album concept in mind, something lost on today's iTunes/download/single-song mentality, Brown, always true to herself, opens the album with Hemocult/I Care About You, a seemingly hard first-listen with its seven minutes of footsteps, various voices, cash registers ringing and the shuffle of shopping bags, creating the sense of walking around in a cheerful mall that goes horribly awry and begins melting around you. Brown describes Hemocult as The Mall before the Storm. Remember when the president urged us all to shop after 9/11? For Hemocult, Jeff and I used mall sounds and this is one of those times that I was idly noodling around w/ a melody on toy piano and something else and he set up mics around me (he's very sneaky and good at that). Everything was improvised and recorded in one take. For me, it was the obvious choice to open the album. I could picture us in our malls, pushing carts and shopping and eating at the food court; supporting the USA and fighting terrorism at Hot Dog on a Stick. I like the mood it sets. It lulls and yet unsettles you, which is just what I wanted at the beginning of the record. Though the album follows the title's theme, a free spirit roams through songs with an interesting array of instruments that include bulbul, toy piano, marxophone, garbage can and vss-30, along with some truly awe-inspiring vocal layerings. Brown also pays close special attention to sequencing, and the song transitions and arc and flow of the record are integral to enhancing the album's themes. "You're Alright, Sorla One" has an uplifting, early McCartney feel, with happy, jangly piano, flute, simple snare, tambourine and catchy harmonies. But true to Rachel's style, the lyrics go in a different direction. This song, I wrote about Alzheimer's--from the perspective of a loved one or caretaker. It's maybe more like something they would sing to themselves when they knew no one could hear them. I wanted a happy-sounding Alzheimer's song; the aural equivalent of the false face of positivity when confronted w/ a death sentence. I wasn't feeling scornful of that. I was thinking more about the sweetness in that impulse, the there, there, everything's gonna be alright impulse that humans have. It's wonderful, and usually kind. In the context of the album storyline, You're Alright becomes more like a soothing there, there before the violence of the rest of the record. Stagg Field, which is about the little known super secret development of the first nuclear reactor under the University of Chicago athletic field, comes out of the gates at full, Raymond Scott Powerhouse strength, complete with assembly line clanging and Chris Robley's driving guitar work, then roller coasters finally to something that could be described as an aural likeness of Picasso's horrific painting, Guernica. This song grew from an old children's book I found, called Atomic Energy and You!

with happy illustrations. It's chilling. It took them a few tries before they realized they'd need to build a radiation shield. Passion develops like a Bach chorale, complete w/ choir but with only bare bones piano accompaniment and a simply sung vocal. The song considers our weird religious obsessions and beliefs and wonders why we feel the need for them, containing the thought-provoking lines: Some people need a sacrifice; some gods do, too. And an Us and a Them and a chosen few, And the whips and the nails and the spear and sword, And the Happy End; and the Dreadful Lord. Says Brown, I wrote this song after accidentally channel surfing over the religious channel and seeing them show, over and over again, the writhing animatronic hand of Christ with the nail in it from the gory Mel Gibson movie. As if to say, Look at the blood and agony! See? NOW don't you believe? And I thought (not for the first time), WTF? Who wants a god who wants blood? His son's blood?! You should run, screaming, from such a fucked up, unreasonable god! Right? Again, I think Kurt Vonnegut says it way better--The most important message of a crucifix, to me anyway, was how unspeakably cruel supposedly sane human beings can be when under orders from a superior authority. "Abraham Isaac, a four-minute mini-rock drama about a father who agrees to kill his son because God says so, opens with the lines: Did Abraham say anything To Isaac, like, "Im killing you today. Better bring a coat; It looks like rain." Brown modeled the song's doubled lead vocal on the two tiny twins from the Mothra vs. Godzilla movies. "I wanted something to cut the drama of the rest of the song," she says. The straight, almost choirboy-ish vocals deliver the father's demented explanations with spooky sweetness and calm. I do love hearing innocent little girlish voices singing about killing, she says with a grin. "Beautiful Saviour (B.S.)" is a chilling tale of carnage, of children/soldiers being sacrificed, and how the U.S. blusters all over the world as Big Daddy. Our government kind of regards and treats the rest of the world as an idiot lower creature. Meanwhile, we all know the rest of the world regards America as the ultimate interfering boor, only way too dangerous to be ignored. I wanted this song to sound alternately soothing and reassuring (we're here to help you!) and big, threatening and war-like. Jeff and I tried to make some of the entrances hit you like missiles screaming through the sky (esp. coming out of the little hymn section). John Stewarts powerful, relentless drumming really helped pull that off. The sadly based-on-true-events number "Another Dead Soldier in Fallujah" is simple, sparse and haunting, with vocals and piano that cut deep with their restraint and unexpected harmonic clashes. I wrote Another Dead Soldier in Fallujah in about 10 minutes. After guiltily stopping myself from flipping channels, I watched the news on the latest roadside bomb killing of a U.S.soldier in

Iraq. They were interviewing the kids parents, up in Washington. It was Christmas, and they and their home were all decked out in holiday stuff. There was an American flag in the background. They were clearly a really patriotic pair, and their obvious sense of duty was at war with the gigantic, unfathomable loss of their son. That confusion was written all over their faces and it just broke my heart. They wanted his death to have meaning, but you could see the struggle. And it was Christmas. I just kept thinking of how they would dread Christmas for the rest of their lives. I cried the whole time I wrote that song, because people are so beautiful and so awful. Mette in Madagascar recalls the Beatles with its bouncy opening and closing passages and Arthur Parkers poignant counter-melody bass line, but the unsettling and eerie middle section is of another world. Mette is about my own great great aunt who was something like 100 when I was a kid and who was one of the first missionaries to go to Madagascar. She really did used to write me letters. I'm trying to contrast the sweet little old lady w/ the damage done in the world by such sweet little old ladies and nice people. We all think we're just helping. That impulse to tell others what's best for them, even if it means tearing their country apart, seems scarily alive in America. "Vireo" pulls you in like a slow-motion dream that you don't want to end, skillfully using dissonance, carefully layered sounds and hypnotic vocals for a particularly disturbing/addictive effect. Says Brown, Nobody but another bird nerd would know this... but in this song, which is called after a very shy bird, I managed to work in the bona fide (a la Roger Tory Peterson) characteristics of the Vireo, including grey and solitary (varieties) and up on Alder, underground (Vireos like alder trees and Alder is a street in Portland). The person I'm describing in that song is reclusive and anti-social, so the bird fit. Yes, I am a dork. But things like that give me a little secret thrill as a songwriter. I figure no one will notice but I'm always beyond delighted when someone catches it. "This is a Song" is what it sounds like--a weird apology, says Brown. Summing up the album, with powerful and unexpected instrumental and vocal arrangements, Brown reflects on all our little human hierarchies and how disastrous they've proven to be, "The hierarchies all shift a little, but the one thing they all have in common is that we determine and enforce them. Were not much for learning from history--you know well do the same things over again and again; the wars, the power struggles. Its all so predictable and painful. Its a reminder to me of how small we are. You know; awful little creatures, she smiles. But just when humanity frightens me the most, the beauty in the world and in people touches me. And blows me away." Alex Steininger, In Music We Trust

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