



PAT SHEPHERD

Styled by JOLENE PARKER using M.A.C Cosmetics

L.A. Mitchell

There is an honesty and complicated beauty to L.A. Mitchell's debut album, 'Debut', which weaves Mitchell's voice flawlessly into the sumptuous threads of her jazz-inspired background. One listen of 'Debut', which Mitchell self-produced, takes you on a journey into the depths of what it means to be a musician and to try and silence that ceaseless need to write and make music.

In what ways has making your album been a journey of self-discovery?

An album is a giant, and so the journey is multifaceted. I learnt primarily to trust my creative ideas. I learnt the discipline to follow through in situations of creative spontaneity without doubting your direction or ability to communicate your ideas and pull them off. I learnt to separate myself as the songwriter to develop a relationship with the songs as a producer. I don't know if I was successful at that.

I discovered I know a lot about music, and that that doesn't always mean you'll make the right decision. I discovered I didn't really know intellectually what the right decision was. I discovered you have to be shameless in asking for more from your players, and that I had to lead them. I was always cautious with this.

I feel intensely that the moment is more important, and if I tried to change everything, take every option, I'd risk never completing a thing. I discovered money was found or earned from somewhere and champions emerged to support and carry you some way. In retrospect, I am unsure how this happened. At the time I tried not to think about the business, and concentrate on doing all I was able to do to bring these songs together. The better question was always, 'What does this song want?', which meant finding something fundamental in my writing or melody or in what the band was doing over the period of time we jammed the tunes. In every capacity I search for honesty, with myself, with the band, with my songs, with production, with my business structure and marketing – constantly asking, 'Am I being honest in my representation of this thing?'

How much of your inspiration comes from looking internally rather than at external influencers?

Inspiration is a curious thing. I am not sure that I am ever in tune with it enough to be aware of my

influences, so by that assumption, they are internal. However, one is a mirror for the other and at some point we rest. I don't do it on purpose. Inspiration occurs, and I follow it, chasing chords and sounds and directions and words and rhythms. There are many and they are not always meant to fit together. In one instance they are not mine – I see them as gifts I get given if I do myself the justice of staying connected.

I have a tendency to be introverted. I have and do suffer depression, anxiety, fatigue, and the consequences of all of these states of mind. They always represent an imbalance so I constantly reach for an answer. How to balance? How did I lose balance? How do I get it back? I am significantly further through those questions now than during the making of this album, so 'Debut' was a battle and its sound to me now is cooler and detached and less sure of itself than I feel right now.

How does Christchurch foster and simultaneously limit your music?

Christchurch works for me because it was where I started the process. I moved here when I was 21 for the sole purpose of studying music. I have players I have worked with here for six years, and their support and knowledge of my past is sometimes invaluable. They are my community. They are open and they enjoy it and work hard for it. I respect them. They respect me. Creatives anywhere need that community – they go daft when they spend too much time alone. Christchurch also works because those same people give me work so I have money to invest in furthering my own music, and the biggest benefit of that is that the work I get, I also really enjoy. I don't believe a location can limit you if you are proactive in finding other people in other places to support and encourage you and you make an effort to go get it. The only person who ever limits me is myself.



Seeing as you play keys in The Dukes, is it important for you to have a number of projects on the go?

Yes! Diversity, in my opinion, is key. I have learnt more about the business and working as a musician from working in other bands. I have spent more time on the road, played bigger gigs and bigger tours with music that I would never get a chance to play or perform alongside if it wasn't for being involved in multiple genres. I never get frustrated with my stuff as a consequence because I always have breaks from it. It's not always my sole focus so I get perspective on my own personal projects. I love not fronting a band and being on the

sidelines of organisation and management/promotion. Currently, there is no downside to working in multiple projects at this level that I can see, unless you're disorganised.

The biggest consideration is personal, and that's making sure I put a cap on my time and don't overcommit to too many projects in one time frame, otherwise I get this imbalance thing happening again and it makes it harder to be.

What are your beliefs about taking creative risks?

If you think you can do it, you should. In my opinion, you can never lose trying. Making an album is a risk. Playing music and being a musician full time ... I don't think any of that would happen if people didn't take a risk, personal, creative, or otherwise. It's a great risk for some people to even consider creative work. I thought I would be an architect when I was a kid because I thought music was too risky. I still think music is too risky, but I've since discovered it's unhealthy for me not to write. It means too much to me to stop. So I would take them! Take as many as you can, as often as they arrive, and if they don't show themselves to you, go looking for them.

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