

Flora Hibberd – *Swirl* – Album Bio

Like a textile artist, Flora Hibberd weaves layers of meaning into her music. *Swirl*, the debut album from the British songwriter based in Paris, is a cycle of songs about codes and decoding. Drawing upon her professional experience as a translator of art history texts, Hibberd searches for slippages, where French and English words rub up against each other in uncanny ways. Strange poetry appears in these moments, giving rare glimpses at life's hidden threads, and illuminating our understanding.

"Sometimes I write songs by looking for moments where words jar and don't seem natural," says Hibberd. "My work as a translator is relevant to my lyrics, because it provides a framework of how languages, symbols, and meanings can change. There are loads of metaphors in my songs because music itself is a language, every instrument is a language, and it goes down in layers from there."

Secret codes, non-verbal signifiers, and musical manifestations filter throughout *Swirl*'s 11 songs, expertly captured by producer Shane Leonard at his home studio in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. As the hometown of Bon Iver's Justin Vernon, located between Green Bay and Minneapolis, Eau Claire has become an unlikely indie-rock hub.

"We didn't talk much about what the songs meant to me before we started recording them," explains Hibberd. "Instead, we talked about codes, symbols, and machines. Almost intuitively, Shane built up these layers of morse-code-like synths or pedal steel riffs." Alongside Leonard's own contributions to *Swirl*'s lush arrangements, the producer invited versatile drummer JT Bates (Bon Iver, Taylor Swift), pedal steel player Ben Lester (Sufjan Stevens, The Tallest Man On Earth), bassist Pat Keen, singer/songwriter JE Sunde, and Hibberd's longtime collaborator Victor Claass filling various roles.

Swirl is an amalgamation of influences, such as Jason Molina's plainspoken, no frills indie rock, Josephine Foster's juxtaposition of modern concerns with mystical folk songs, and the quasi-surrealist lyrics of French artist Bertrand Belin. Hibberd's first single "Auto Icon" launches the album with a tasteful art-rock transmission, not a tambourine out of place. Sounding reminiscent of Cate Le Bon or Chris Cohen, she sings about radio signals getting lost, and the errors that result.

"Code" is immediately catchy, setting lyrics inspired by textile artist Anni Albers to sonorous curlicues of guitar. By contrast, "Baby" could be described as the album's Lou Reed moment, Hibberd switching to first person to quiver about a vulnerable yet ultimately valuable experience. "Canopy" will appeal to Big Thief and Adrienne Lenker fans, its subtle country-dappled sound providing an ideal platform for Hibberd's duet with backing vocalist JE Sunde — their Kris Kristofferson and Rita Coolidge moment.

Before *Swirl* concludes with the mesmerizing fingerstyle guitars, galloping snare patterns, and shimmering, Mort-Garson-esque synth swells of closer "Ticket," we hear "Jesse." This organ-forward album highlight was written after Hibberd performed on Cerys Mathews' BBC6 program, playfully conjuring feelings of anticipation and excitement. "It's about the sense of extreme energy experiences like that give you," explains Hibberd, "which also fits into the album's themes of radio transmissions and physical sensations."

Placing herself in a continuum of songwriters, translators, and visual artists from various mediums, Hibberd ultimately sees *Swirl* as an album about communication. "I decided to write specifically about the transmission of songs and how they democratize things for different voices to be heard, which are not always recorded," she concludes. "What's truly magical about sharing music is that you're creating an ephemeral, time-specific piece of art that may never happen again."

- Jesse Locke