**Multitudes, by Feist**

Throughout her new album *Multitudes*, 11-time Juno Award-winning artist Feist sets her observation on the countless ways we seek out or deliberately hide from the truth: searching the natural world for portents and good omens, pulling tarot cards and masking our true emotions to spare our loved ones from pain. From a lyrical honesty that’s as confronting as it is unguarded, Feist writes of “A crucible of apex events that brought life to a new temperature.” and of “A new dimension of self awareness that time and experience seemed to require.” Her sixth full-length and first release since 2017’s critically lauded *Pleasure*, *Multitudes* took shape soon after the birth of her daughter and sudden death of her father, a back-to-back convergence of life-altering events that left the Canadian singer/songwriter with “Nothing performative in me anymore.” As she cleansed her songwriting of any tendency to obscure unwanted truths, Feist slowly made her way toward a batch of songs rooted in a raw and potent realism which is touched with otherworldly beauty.

Largely written and workshopped during an intensely communal experimental show of the same name through 2021 and 2022, the songs developed in parallel with and were deeply influenced by the mutuality of the unconventional experience. Incorporating such elements as real-time video explorations of the audience, a subtle dramaturgical disarming of normalized conventions between performer and observer, and ATMOS surround sound, the “egalitarian theatre experiment”, created in collaboration with Rob Sinclair (Peter Gabriel, David Byrne) embodied an expansive, exploratory, and elegantly wayward sound that immediately invited a more receptive state of mind, and was lauded as “A work of genius.” (Toronto Star)

At the completion of the developmental run of residencies and in turning to the task of creating the album in a bespoke residential studio in the California Redwoods, Feist produced alongside her frequent co-producers Mocky and Robbie Lackritz, with an ensemble including Todd Dahlhoff, Amir Yaghmai, Shahzad Ismaily (Lou Reed, Tom Waits) and Gabe Noel (Kendrick Lamar, Kamasi Washington) with guest appearances by Blake Mills (Bob Dylan, Perfume Genius) and longtime collaborator Chilly Gonzales. A supreme setting for her enchanting voice and all its manifestations, *Multitudes* unfolds with a near-symphonic grandeur despite its moments of absolute starkness, lending an endlessly mesmeric quality to Feist’s meditations on mortality and connection and the frenetic state of the human condition.

*Multitudes* opens on the sublime cacophony of “In Lightning”. In its glorious collision of clattering percussion, explosive guitar and brightly fluttering strings (courtesy of string arranger Miguel Atwood-Ferguson), “In Lightning” shuts out the modern world’s incessant buzz to charge the listener with the electrifying dare to look themselves straight in the eye to find something infinitely more elemental and personal than what the mirror reveals (“And in lighting flashes flash to show our natural age/And the lightning lights me up to be as God as I say”). Far more fragile in delivery but no less powerful in impact we have the ageless sentiment of “Love Who We Are Meant To” which, with it’s cascading pattern of solo nylon string guitar against lush orchestral swells, conveys a jazz standard’s wide angle lens on a delicate quagmire and presents Feist’s heavy-hearted revelation (“We will struggle with the truth/That sometimes we don’t get to/Love who we are meant to”). Next, on “Hiding Out In The Open,” Feist’s hypnotically layered vocals sing in the round, presenting another piece of incandescent wisdom (“Love is not a thing you try to do/It wants to be the thing compelling you/To be you”) with the simple and open hearted cadence of a campfire sing along. And on “The Redwing”—one of many songs featuring bassist Todd Dahlhoff and guitarist Amir Yaghmai, both of whom performed in the *Multitudes* live show—Feist slips into a moment of folky reflection imbued with bracing self-awareness (“I live up to what I sing to/As if I’m telling the truth/ I imagine who is listening/ And it’s not all of you that I mean”), which startlingly breaks the fourth wall and echoes the unorthodox communion with *Multitudes*’ live audience. In the acoustic-turned-space-jam opus of “I Took All of My Rings Off”, Feist holds up the intimately honoured totem of the wedding ring and plants it in the earth where it can provoke nature’s generative reframe, and spans from the subjective to the universal with the cacophonously woozy outro’s declaration that such willingness to scrutinize our choices will (“Lift up the whole earth to singing.”)

Although all of *Multitudes* arose from a careful excavation of personal truth, in another song that examines a more universal theme, "Of Womankind” reads like a transcript from a lunch with old friends who have witnessed each other navigate the variables within modern power structures. Framing the notion that “womankind” is meant to encapsulate any adaptive and intelligent strength, it’s abstract conversation is between multitudes of people who (“Overflow the cup of words/ That the body politic deserves”). The counterpoint between an unearthly choir and a solitary voice reflects the mutuality of collective confoundedness against the solitary experience of fear (“Hugging pepper spray at night/We check under our cars/To navigate this subtle maze/Be exactly who we are”). Later, in a stoic reflection on grief, “Become The Earth” expresses that the experience of love is inextricably connected to the pain of loss and to the provisional nature of life (“We aim for the air/ One wing, then the other/ Gets us there/ Above the dirt/ Until one day/ Unphased/ We become the earth”) and lists the debris and ephemera left standing in the absent loved one’s stead, revealing in relief the shape of a life. (“Dust into dust as material must/ Ash in to ash into plexi and trash/Skilled eyes, monument, styrofoam, time/ Carried remainders on overgrown vines”).

Over the course of its 12 songs, *Multitudes* affirms Feist’s ability to construct elaborate sonic worlds by following her singular songwriting to its most poetic yet unbridled expression. Born in Nova Scotia but mostly raised in Calgary, she first explored her idiosyncratic musicality by playing in a local punk band as a teenager and later made her debut with 1999’s *Monarch (Lay Your Jewelled Head Down)* (an independent release primarily sold at merch tables). Along with co-founding Juno Award-winning indie-rock collective Broken Social Scene, Feist next achieved breakout success with her full-length sophomore effort *Let It Die* (winner of Alternative Album of the Year at the 2004 Juno Awards). Released in 2007, *The Reminder* earned international acclaim and landed on best-of-the-year lists from outlets like Pitchfork, NPR, Spin, and Rolling Stone, in addition to winning Feist the 2007 Shortlist Music Prize and garnering four Grammy Award nominations. Now certified gold, the album features her iconic smash single “1234,” a Billboard Hot 100-charting hit that paved the way for Feist’s appearance on “Saturday Night Live” and “Sesame Street.” In 2011, Feist returned with the Polaris Music Prize-winning *Metals*, named the best album of the year by New York Times chief popular music critic Jon Pareles. With AV Club hailing 2017’s *Pleasure* as her “most daring work to date” and NPR praising the album as “wrenching in its honesty,” Feist went on to premiere the storytelling podcast *Pleasure Studies* in 2019 and soon began developing the *Multitudes* live show—a boundary-pushing collaboration conceived by Feist and Robbie Lackritz and developed with artist/filmmaker Colby Richardson, artist Heather Goodchild and Artistic Producer Mary Hickson.

As she reveals, the *Multitudes* live show emerged in part from a certain dismantling of egoic pride that occurred in the aftermath of deeply transformative events in her personal life, with Feist noting that through birth and death “There’s an arrival of a new sense of time as finite, time as precious, time as how are we going to spend it with one another?” And while that dismantling led to the many moments of painful realization threading throughout her new album, Feist’s latest body of workultimately radiates an ineffable hope—an element encapsulated in the radical empathy and optimism of *Multitudes*’ closing lines, from the exquisitely tender “Song For Sad Friends”: “Well, things are bad, my friends/And you feel exactly the way/That proves the mettle of your heart /That won’t be undermined/By the overwhelming times/Holding out but not holding in/And it’s from here, we can really begin.”