

The Devil and Miss Charles



Jim Thirlwell interviews Jennifer Charles

Jim G. Thirlwell (aka Foetus) chats it up with Jennifer Charles, the sultry singer/siren of Elysian Fields, the hypnotic New York band with their first EP out on Radioactive Records.

JGT: What would drive you to murder? Vengeance, possibly?

JC: Maybe love.

JGT: Love scorned? Are you capable of a crime of passion?

JC: I don't like to think so. But I think everybody has that in them.

JGT: I know I sure do. What's the difference between trustin' and thrustin'?

JC: (silent)

JGT: Okay, moving right along...do you think it's ever necessary to kill?

JC: You don't know what the difference between trusting and thrusting is?

JGT: I just like it 'cause it rhymes. Your lyrics openly celebrate sexuality.

JC: I think all music is about seduction in some way.

JGT: Does that openness make you feel vulnerable?

JC: Sure.

JGT: Are you adopting a role?

JC: No.

JGT: Exaggerating?

JC: No. I want to bring my audience on a trip with me.

JGT: You invite them into your bedroom, metaphorically.

JC: Metaphorically.

JGT: Your lyrics are full of innuendo, but they couldn't put a parental advisory sticker on your record, which I really like. You can say a word like "window" or something, and imbue it with so much sexual mystery. I mean, it's dripping.

JC: That's the beauty of communication. You can fuck someone with a look.

JGT: You fuck an entire room with a look. (laughter)

JC: It feels good. I want everyone to feel important and sexy and beautiful

and free.

JGT: How did you master the mystery of understatement? Did you start with overstatement and work your way back? Practice in front of a mirror?

JC: (laughter) It's just natural. I think you can tell when something's contrived.

JGT: There's a lot of sadness and introspection in there. Is that cathartic? Therapeutic?

JC: Absolutely. To express your vulnerability is very liberating.

JGT: Does it shed demons for you?

JC: I don't know if it completely exorcises them. It gives them a chance to come out and breathe, a forum. I think that's why people have idols, so that they can identify with that liberation.

JGT: Do you think you're an idol?

JC: I don't see myself that way.

JGT: Everyone else thinks you are. How do you deal with all of that scrutiny?

JC: I really can't think of the result. I

just hope it touches someone, makes them feel good.

JGT: "Mermaid" is a very personal song. What was your muse for that?

JC: They're just feelings of openness, loss....

JGT: But you're the manipulator in that song. You're luring the sailors onto the rocks, saying, "As soon as you see me I'm gone." You're in control.

JC: To an extent. But there's the feeling of being incomplete.

JGT: The mermaid is incomplete?

JC: Definitely. Because she sacrifices love for the sea. She can't betray herself in the end.

JGT: Why?

JC: It's just her destiny. She's resigned to it.

JGT: How analogous is that to your life?

JC: I think everyone has moments of that.

JGT: What are your taboos? Where do you draw the line artistically? Socially?

JC: I just do what I do. I don't stand in judgment of other people.

JGT: What about pig fucking?

JC: If it works for you, go with it.

JGT: So all right, how many lovers have you had?

JC: (pause) I've always gotten what I wanted.

JGT: But, inquiring minds want to know!

JC: I think the title of "Bad Girl" is something society brands on powerful women,



JGT: Absolutely. I'm a big believer in female power. All of my best friends are women. What did you listen to growing up?

JC: My mother was a torch singer and my father was a jazz DJ, so there was always music around me. We listened to everything.

JGT: Do you want to blow up the world, blow off the world, blow off some steam, blow in the wind, or blow a chasm in the base of Mt. Ignorance, where you can plant a fungus of Jennifer Charles and Elysian Fields and have it fester and blossom?

JC: All of the above.

JGT: Are you conscious of the fact that you're going to change the world?

JC: No.

JGT: Well, maybe it's better you aren't aware of it.

JC: Women who change things inspire me a lot. Gertrude Stein, Frida Kahlo, Mae West, Bessie Smith. They broke barriers, and people called them "bad girls."

JGT: Billie?

JC: Yeah. I dig Susan Faludi, too. "The undeclared war against American women," you know?

JGT: I was totally behind the Women's Conference in Beijing. I've got a great affinity for women. Behind every foetus, there's a woman.



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