

***Lighteater*: caitlin c. harvey on Circle One**

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The music starts when we choose to listen. It's up to each of us to decide what constitutes the signal among all of the noise. caitlin c. harvey has spent years studying the beauty hidden in the sounds that constitute our existence: our environment, our conversations, the endless drone of a mechanized world. Her debut album *Lighteater* arrives this week on the new Detroit-based label Circle One. I met up with caitlin at 27th Letter Books in Southwest Detroit for a conversation about perseverance, her esteemed mentors, and capturing elusive magic in the mundane.



Hi, caitlin. Please introduce yourself to the *Runner* faithful.

I'm caitlin c. harvey. I'm a sound artist living in Detroit. I use a lot of field recordings in my work. I mix a lot of organic and inorganic sounds together, and take lots of textures and conceptual ideas and meld them into music. Sometimes danceable, sometimes meditative.

You have a new album coming out this month. How would you describe your music, especially the music on the new album?

Cyborganics is a new way to sum up what I do. Or mech-ambient: mechanical and post-industrial Detroit inspirations with organic material.

What does the name *Lightheater* mean?

It means consuming what could have destroyed you - conquering it and then having that power within you. I would say the theme of the album is metamorphosis.

What makes 'metamorphosis' such a profound concept for you?

Conflict is everywhere - both within yourself and between other people. During the creation of the album I experienced losing my dad, and, as a result, also experienced other relationships weaving in and out of my life. It's been very painful, but I'm also giving myself the space to feel everything and trying to understand as much as I can. I'm able to reflect on all the good things my dad brought into my life early on that set me up to be who I am as an adult. And the ways that he failed as well, being honest about them and resisting shame and moving forward.

I'm making an effort to be vocal about what I'm going through, without needing people to fix it. Being honest by not simply saying "I'm fine," but instead saying "I'm dealing with some heavy things, but it will be okay." Change will come.

You use a lot of recordings of sounds from everyday life. How did that come about?

It started a long time ago. I didn't really realize that it would become such a big part of my life. I love to use overheard conversation because it feels so natural yet so profound. People say amazingly poetic things without knowing it. I find a lot of inspiration in it; it's almost like found poetry. Finding sounds, being aware of them, but then also listening back to them and having direct memory triggers. It's been a fun process. I like the hidden and the precious and the personal things.

What do you look for in a recording that you might want to use in your music?

I look for textures that I haven't heard before and isolated sounds without background noise. There was one field recording that I missed two years ago, and I was so upset. It was the sound of snow melting on my neighbor's house and dripping down the gutters. I was running out the door and I thought, "Oh, this probably happens all the time, I'll just get it next time." It wasn't until two years later that I heard the snow melting and I realized it was happening again. I was about to get in the car with somebody and I was like, "can you hold on just two minutes? I just need to get this sound." My neighbor plays djembe, and the water that was dripping off of his house sounded like him playing. It was such a special moment because it was a very familiar sound, like the water knew whose house it was falling off of.

So I look for things like that. Sometimes it doesn't occur to me how special something is until after I record it. It's just a moment in time where I think, "This sounds good. This texture is good." Or sometimes I just hit "record" and hope that something good comes out of it or someone says something interesting. I have to be really organized when I upload the recordings onto my computer. It's maddening actually.

What was your introduction to electronic music? How did you wind up here?

I'll always be a vocalist first. I've been singing since I was very young, which led to piano lessons, then guitar, and then electronic music. I had the opportunity to do an apprenticeship with Nelly Kate Anderson, an incredible multimedia artist who lives in Boston now. She taught me the basics of field recording, production, using a DAW, and processing the clips. I think she saw a lot of her own inspirations in me and wanted to encourage those things. I cannot thank her enough for seeing potential in me. The piece "Everybody's Trying to Get Somewhere" was one of the pieces I made during our apprenticeship, and that's the one Mike Banks ended up hearing. He invited me into Submerge to have a studio space there for a couple years. Those were my first two years of officially making electronic music, and it was like drinking from a fire hose. But it changed my life forever.

I was so overwhelmed but also so excited and so honored that Mike heard something that he liked in what I made when I was just a beginner. That was my introduction to electronic music specifically from Detroit. I had imposter syndrome like crazy the first year I was at Submerge because I kept comparing my beginner work to people that have been doing it for twenty or thirty years. People who created the techno genre. I don't necessarily make techno but I am definitely influenced by it. There's no way I can't be.

So it's a relationship that has changed the entire trajectory of my art and given me so many resources. It's taught me so much about life and about music, producing, being consistent, and being a musician who makes tools as well as art. I am very honored and I hope that I continue to cultivate safety and trust and respect because they deserve all of it.

What are some of your favorite moments from the album?

In the song “Womb,” I used a recording of my mom in her 20s talking to my dad. They would send cassettes back and forth so I pulled the recording from one of those cassettes. She talks about her day, how she misses him, about one of her best friends and how she doesn’t talk to her anymore - just things that young people go through. I love the fact that it’s intended for my dad and comes from a time before I was even born. Now he’s passed and we still have this very beautiful archive of one-sided conversations with him. That’s all we get to do with him now, too. I made the song as a celebration of my mom, but it hits a lot harder now that he’s gone. It still is a celebration of her and our relationship, it just means something different now.

Does music play a role in your grieving process?

Absolutely. Grief is so layered and complex. Some days I feel completely fine and other days I feel like he’s almost in the room with me because of how strong the memory is. It happens a lot with music, when I listen to something that I listened to with him. He loved music so much. I can see him doing certain things at certain parts of the song that he would always do, like when his favorite part of the song came on he would play air guitar or something. I can see it so vividly because it’s a memory we made together. And then it really messes me up for the whole day, but in a good way because he deserves it. I know not everybody has that relationship with their father, but I’m not going to hide how close I was with him. We were so similar, and we were just buddies. We would acknowledge how important we were to each other, and I’m not afraid to share that with the world and be vulnerable and be sad about it. Grief is very isolating, but I think it’s also a chance for me to refuse to be isolated, to refuse to accept the isolation by sharing my experience.

How do you feel that the city of Detroit has influenced you?

It has 100% changed who I am as a person. Not just my music but also the way that I look at the world and the way that I look at myself. Growing up in the suburbs, every time I went to Detroit it always felt very powerful. It has a sort of magic to it. It has a weight that you don’t forget, and a respect and a resilience that I think it instills in everybody that comes through. It has colored the lenses of everything that I look at.

Moving to Detroit has been incredibly healing for me. Meeting the people I have and being able to have a music community that appreciates what I make is also very healing. Pain and healing are always there at the same time, you just have to focus on which one you want to focus on.

[To access caitlin c. harvey’s album *Lightheater*, click here!](#)

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