

Music

Edited by Steve Smith • musiclistings@timeoutny.com

Feist

The lo-fi singer-songwriter makes a quietly triumphant return. By Sharon Steel

Leslie Feist spent a year in Toronto toying with the idea of quitting her career as a singer-songwriter. She had been on the road for seven years, most recently in support of her Grammy-nominated breakout, *The Reminder*. The collection of noodly ballads and swinging girl-group pop songs earned the Canadian artist—who records under the tough-chick moniker Feist—the unofficial title of Queen of iRock. She won that somewhat dubious honor when Apple featured her single “1234” in an iPod nano commercial. “A real break is one where you imagine you might never go back,” says Feist by phone from London, a few days before she kicks off the European leg of her current tour. “I knew in my bones that I was going to go back, but I didn’t want to feel like I had to. I wanted to go back only if I was motivated from the right place, and my own curiosity.” She compares touring for so long to forcing a kid who snuck one cigarette to smoke the entire pack: “You don’t want to smoke another cigarette for a couple of decades after that.”

Earlier this month the singer and guitarist celebrated the release of her fourth album, *Metals*, with a last-minute show in the crypt of Harlem’s Church of the Ascension. Music blogs directed fans to buy the record at Sound Fix, then trek far uptown to see her perform songs from the album, backed by a band some 10 players strong. “For my 75-year-old self, I wanted to be able to remember what happened the day that *Metals* came out,” she says. “For all of my scrooging about social media stuff, it was the most surreal thing to have so many people go to Brooklyn, then Harlem, within a few hours’ notice. I thought that was a sign that I maybe need to learn about the times.”

Feist wrote the songs for *Metals* last fall in a garage behind her house, then built a temporary studio in Big Sur, California,



PERFECT BANGS, PRETTY MELODIES
Leslie Feist is not a quitter.

to record it in just under three weeks. “I got into this idea of claiming normalcy,” she says. “I think it’s the Auto-Tune, pitch-tuning generation of perfection-pop music that I feel absolutely no kinship with.” All of the tracks were recorded live, although Feist occasionally had to duck into a makeshift room downstairs so she could sing without being overpowered by the drums.

“Caught a Long Wind,” a sparse song that gives itself over to her creeping-ivy vocals, punctuated with xylophone trills, was the first cut Feist and her band played to tune the room. “It was sort of like when a sailor licks his finger and holds it up to see which direction the storm is coming from,” she recalls. “It’s sort of the heart, it’s at the core of things, for me.”

Feist’s catalog has always been punctuated by slow-burning, melancholic musings, but *Metals* is devoid of upbeat jams, with the exception of “A Commotion,” defined by a tense, galloping chorus. Her minimalist harmonies and tender vocal catches on standouts “Get It Wrong, Get It Right” and “The Circle Married the Line” are more sure-footed and emphatic than ever. And she rejects the

suggestion that her music has bloomed into something gloomier, despite the fact that death is a prominent theme, prompted by her own suffering from grief this past year (she claims that people close to her passed away, but declines to elaborate). “I didn’t feel sad in making this record at all,” she says. “It was a crystal clear and poignantly joyful experience. I just took the same experiences that my family had, and put them into this form that, for me at least, gives me some more basis for understanding what it is.”

When pressed about whether, in hindsight, she’s come to different conclusions about her choice to license her songs to a corporation while still very much championing the storytelling and artistry of songwriting, Feist doesn’t even take a beat to respond. “I feel like my job as an album maker might be to protect songs from getting a rocket strapped to them that way,” she says quickly. “The new album, I wouldn’t be so quick to connect a song on it with a possible rocket. It changes things. I have no regrets about the past. But it’s not something that I would repeat.”

“It’s the Auto-Tune generation of perfection-pop music that I feel absolutely no kinship with.”

BAM Howard Gilman Opera House; Wed 2, Nov 3

Danzig Legacy

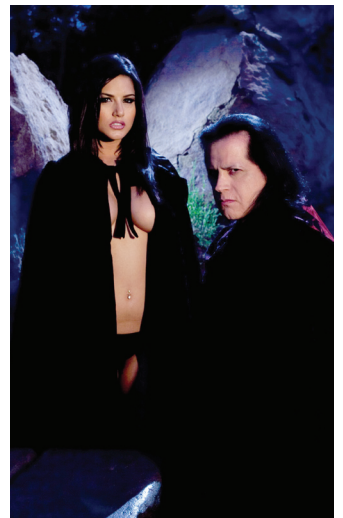
Hammerstein Ballroom (at the Manhattan Center); Sat 29

Okay, we get it—Glenn Danzig is a punch line. By now, you’ve likely seen the photo of the muscle-bound howler toting kitty litter through a supermarket parking lot, the video of him getting decked backstage by an angry hanger-on, and the comic that posits a gay affair between him and Henry Rollins. But let’s cut the snark and look at the facts: Danzig is one of the most brilliant singer-songwriters of his

generation, a master of wedding occult preoccupations to fiendishly hooky, emotionally weighty rock & roll. Need proof? Ask Metallica or Will Oldham, just two of the prominent artists to cover his work. (Did we mention that Johnny Cash and Roy Orbison are also on the list?)

Danzig Legacy, the first explicit retrospective the New Jerseyan has presented, surveys the full scope of the former Glenn Anzalone’s 30-year-strong oeuvre. You’ll sample the Misfits’ B-movie-fueled bubblegum anthems, simultaneously the catchiest and vilest works in the American punk canon (and in case you’re wondering, the Danzig-less Misfits playing B.B. King’s on Halloween are *not* an acceptable substitute); the creeped-out postpunk of the sorely underrated Samhain (1986’s *Samhain III: November-Coming-Fire* still provides reliable chills); and the deliciously dark rock of Danzig’s eponymous band, currently thriving in the wake of 2010’s impressive *Deth Red Sabaoth*. If all you know of Danzig is the *Beavis and Butt-head* chestnut “Mother” or the aforementioned silly memes, prepare to get schooled by a misunderstood genius.

—Hank Shteamer



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