

Another 20 Questions with Juliana Hatfield

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Just as this year's PledgeMusic drive to fund the covers album followed last year's to fund *There's Always Another Girl*, here's another set of questions and answers with Juliana Hatfield. Following an additional exchange, she expressly approved my sharing them. The previous questions and answers are (as of July 2012, anyway) available on the Yahoo! ThisIsTheSound group and at <http://liveontomorrow.co.uk/storage/news/2011/Hatfield20QandAApril2011.pdf>. So here they are, very lightly edited:

1. Your movie tastes—the movies you list on your blog are almost all obscure and/or highbrow. Do you enjoy any relatively mainstream movies, or is it just that you only choose to promote ones that tend to get overlooked?

A: I like all kinds of movies that are good. I think I have an interest in both high and low (and medium) arts of all kinds. I'm really not a snob at all. Like, I don't dislike the Farrelly brothers' movies because they are commercial; I dislike them because I think they are trying to be funny but they are not funny. *This is Spinal Tap* is funny. It doesn't come across as mean-spirited or desperate in the way that the Farrelly brothers movies do, somehow. *Grease* was one of my favorite movies of all time. I just watched *Love in the Afternoon* (Gary Cooper and Audrey Hepburn) and I liked it a lot. Mostly because I love Gary Cooper. He was a pretty mainstream star, but with an appeal that I think transcended a lot of criticism or rational thought. I admit I do like long, slow movies with no added soundtrack—movies in which not a lot happens; this kind of thing is much more interesting to me than movies that push obvious buttons—like with music timed and placed to tell you how you are supposed to feel at a certain moment, as if we, the audience, are unable to think and feel for ourselves. I don't like movies that follow the

blueprint of the traditional arc because that's boring. It's entertaining to be surprised by the unexpected or by stillness or real emotion that isn't 'acted' or mimed. I like things that are representative of real life's weirdness and tedium and confusion and sadness and sloppiness. Life isn't tidy and not every life has a happy ending. Not every story has a happy ending and so why should every movie be tidied up and simplified and with a happy ending?

2. Related to that, recently you expressed frustration with people who get the lyrics wrong. I couldn't help thinking of Crash Davis in *Bull Durham* (which I love), correcting Nuke LaLoosh's singing, that women don't get woolly, they get weary! Do you think a lot of musicians almost get off on making their songs very difficult to decipher?

A: Some do, probably. I think early R.E.M. was definitely not enunciated very well, seemingly on purpose, but that was a big part of its appeal, wasn't it? Part of what made it unique and exciting and new. Sometimes I will mumble or slur a word or words if the words are embarrassing or not very goo, but in general I don't really love it when people get words wrong because it seems lazy to me or like the listener doesn't really care. With the Internets and music listening technology and info everywhere, it's not that hard to find the correct lyrics, if you want them. What bugs me the most is when a music reviewer prints the wrong words—that is sort of unforgivable. People reprinting lyrics—or any kind of information—in reviews need to fact-check because it's part of the job.

3. Sometimes I can't resist arm-chair producing (and sometimes it even 'works', like the edited version of "Won't Get Fooled Again" that my brother assembled from my instructions). How about the "Candy Wrappers" tempo, but more guitar-based like "And Again"?

A: I'm confused by this question—oh, are you saying to try playing the fast version with just guitars instead of with synths? I think I've done this, live in concert.

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5. Among your songs and/or albums, which if any are your favorites, and/or the ones of which you're most proud?

A: I like songs off all of the albums. I think all of the albums have flaws. None is wonderful all the way through. But I am proud of moments on each one. Is that a non-answer? It's hard whenever anyone asks me for favorites because there are so many. Plus, I never go back and listen to stuff that is more than a few years old, so some of that stuff is so hazy in my mind and memory that I can't even remember the songs or the words or anything. I will say that from the last album [*There's Always Another Girl*] I am really proud of the song "Wasting Time". I think it might be the saddest song I've ever written but it's so pretty and so grown-up. It's subtle and toward the end of the album so I think it was overlooked by lot of people.

6. Have you ever thought of using a PledgeMusic drive to try to ransom and release *God's Foot*? I realize you'd probably need to work out a sale price in advance with Atlantic / Warner.

A: I can't get the rights so I can't release it. I don't own it; don't own the masters. And it has gone through various companies' ownership and it's complicated to even know who to go to now at this point to try and reach, if I even wanted to try and negotiate the price down. And I think there is no way I could make enough at pledge music to buy it back. And ... I'm over it. I am past it. It is in the past. It is The Unreleased Album.

7. The pictures of you you've used recently, both with *TAAG* and just generally on your website, live up to the photographer's name: they're quite stark, with high contrast, etc. (Indeed, the *TAAG* cover shot reminds me of Prometheus, punished by being bound to the rock, waiting for the eagle to rip out and eat

his liver—or maybe Isaac, bound to the altar waiting to be sacrificed—maybe that's what happens to the sequence of '[]other girl[s]', being left out exposed on a rock, for punishment or sacrifice.) Is that a deliberate aesthetic choice for some reason, something particular you're trying to convey, just what you liked, what you thought most suitable for the material, or what?

A: When I turned 40 I wanted someone to shoot some nudes of me for personal posterity (for myself, for my own archives; not for the public), while I still looked pretty good. Really it was a kind of a vain thing to do. Really just to have some documentation that I looked like I do/did. I had never been photographed nude before, as far as I can remember, and I am not comfortable being nude outside of, like, the shower. But I gritted my teeth and grinned (well, didn't grin, actually) and bared it for my friend the photographer, for the end result. It wasn't fun, being nude like that, but I suffered for my art—for my own personal art prints that I ended up being very pleased to have in my home. So it was never my intention to use any of the photos as an album cover. And I didn't have a concept while shooting except to just be real and not pretend anything, and to mostly not show my face to the camera. I wanted to use my body as a pleasing object, in the tradition, I guess, of art photography and painting as far back as the nude goes as a pleasing subject, in history—to capture its form in interesting shapes and ways. There was a stone wall where we were shooting (in and on the grounds of a private home) and so I lay down on it. I loved this photo and a few years later when I needed an album cover I thought the photo would work sort of perfectly for/as *There's Always Another Girl*, regardless of whether or not it was me in the photo—it was just a cool-looking image that made sense with the album title and idea. A woman's body without a face—kind of de- or impersonalizing it and further de-personalizing it with the bar over the nipple—like the black bars over the eyes of people whose identities cannot be

revealed on film or video. I sort of made myself or my body into one of the many girls—literally, on the back cover.

8. You seem to have, um, complicated feelings about your own appearance, or maybe more accurately how others react to it. Sometimes you seem defiantly proud of it (the story in your book about the Sassy photo shoot, and “You Are the Camera”), sometimes you seem to try to deemphasize it (typical stage attire), and sometimes you seem to seem to be trying to make a multi-layered statement (the Made in China artwork). Do your feelings change a lot over time, or is it just that what the fanbase at large sees is a (deliberately or necessarily) limited, simplified, and/or artificially-constructed slice of a rich and nuanced part of yourself?

A: (I don’t think “You are the Camera” is defiantly proud. I think it’s the opposite. I think that it is confusion and discomfort.) I’ve experienced a lot of ongoing conflict surrounding body image and image in general, and femininity, and the male gaze, and how women are presented, and present themselves, to the world. I guess that this—my conflicting, confused feelings—is pretty clear at this point, when you go back and look over my career and images of me and my albums. I don’t expect anyone to be able to make sense of what I can’t make sense of myself. When I am old my career will be a record of my development as a person (and an object). I might be able to make sense of it in the future. Having to present myself to the world as an image is very uncomfortable for me. I don’t think people can expect to know who I am by looking at images of me. I am not my image. Or I am more than my physical form. That might be what I’ve been trying to say, with my non-image.

9. Recently there was some speculation (on the ThisIsTheSound Yahoo! group) about some rude comments having prompted removal of a snippet of “Ready for Love” from the PledgeMusic site, and some time back there was speculation about the reason you previously deleted the content from (or

canceled) your Twitter account. Do / can strangers’ / your fans’ comments really get to you, either just generally, or compared to your perception of how other musicians / performance artists react to such comments?

A: I am very sensitive sometimes and things can hit a nerve and upset me. I would be lying if I said that negative comments about me and/or my work don’t affect me. I have feelings. My feelings are hurt sometimes. And some of the things people say make me question myself and my music and my actions and words. I haven’t got everything figured out so I am sensitive to people’s reactions to what I do—sometimes people make me think that I am doing things wrong. And this is a terrible feeling. So I need to shut out the world sometimes, disable comments, if I can, etc. An artist or creative thinker has to work sometimes in isolation, in order to be really honest in the work. To be unaffected by other people’s opinions. Otherwise the work wouldn’t get done. It would be too crippling to try and make art with people looking over your shoulder, and commenting. You have to be brave to make art. But then maybe you are not brave in public, social life, so when you put the art out into the world of people, you crumble, sometimes. This is part of what I mean when I say artists have to be brave—they have to risk, over and over again, public ridicule and criticism and misunderstanding and hatred and brushoffs. They do their thing with love and devotion and patience and faith and sometimes all of their money—and then they throw it to the wolves.

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11. You recently took a roughly-year-long painting course. Besides painting and music, do you really enjoy practicing any other artistic outlets?

A: I like drawing. And I think skiing is creative. Downhill skiing—I like to do it when I can, which isn’t much. I like to stick exclusively to the mogul runs—and the way it works for me is I stand at the top of the trail for a second and then before I start skiing

down I visualize a path between the field of snow-covered bumps in front of me, and then I proceed to ski that path that I can see in front of me, in my mind. I go in between the bumps so my experience isn't all that bumpy even though the moguls are often big—I am in the ruts, making little turns to avoid going up to the tops of the bumps and down and up and down, which would be really tiring and is more dangerous. And I keep visualizing the path all the way down. I map out where I am going, step by step, so to speak—this is creative, for me. It is improvisation. I create a visual path of a safe way through all the big moguls—it's like carving, or whittling, I guess it might be like rock-climbing or something like that—you make your way, foot by foot, yard by yard, as you go, with no road map except the one in your head that you are creating as you go.

12. In an interview you gave to the PledgeMusic crew, you said, "I think I have a personal rapport with my people—I talk to them like friends ... and some of the things I've offered have reflected this friend feeling—writing letters to them, phone calls, etc." I'm going to ask to peel back the veneer a bit, to look inside—I hope that's okay—but do you really feel that way, or is it more your rational side prodding you to see things and/or act that way?

A: I agreed to do that little Q&A thing for the pledge music and I needed an answer to this question they gave me, and to be honest, I was not really being 100% honest—I just didn't have any other way to answer. I try to be honest with people I don't know (fans, etc.), and I am (honest), generally, but I keep a lot to myself. And I understand that one has to have a sort of dialog with fans in order to raise the money the modern way (the fan-funding way). But I am not a social person and I like to be alone and to not talk much and so if I had quillions of dollars, would I be so accessible? I don't think so. I would be a happy hermit. If I could be an independently wealthy, art-making hermit, I probably would be. Which is not to say that I am not really happy and

gratified and extremely grateful all the time that people support what I do and encourage me to keep doing it. this is true. I count my blessings every day. But if I suddenly came into quazillions of dollars, I might disappear; I might quit talking. This life is a give and take.

13. From your book and elsewhere, one might get the impression that, historically at least, you largely disliked interaction with fans. However, one might suppose that the (observed by you, at least) quality or maturity of your fans increased; or your appreciation of them has; or maybe an element of unknown becoming more known has given you a more positive view; or it's the difference between interaction while you're touring / after a concert, versus the more relaxed format and when-you-feel-like-it timing; or the economic value or necessity has prodded you to. So why / to what extent have your views / preferences / practices changed?

A: See above (answer #12). And also yes you are right that the quality of a lot of my followers is high. So I appreciate that. I can say that I have made friends with some of my fans. And yes my general appreciation of my fans is probably at an all-time high; I am very aware of the fact that they are supporting my lifestyle—I mean my work, the lifestyle of making (writing, recording) music as a job—a very loved job. And to feel the loyalty and generosity—emotional and otherwise—of these people, after all this time, is very humbling and fulfilling, truly. I mean it.

14. You offered the twenty questions in connection with *TAAG*. Now you've not only offered it again, but offered more of them, and added more phone calls. And really, the money seems like a comparative bargain. Did you find that the questions and/or discussions were actually good for you, or in some way cathartic or revelatory, or something?

A: This can be a way for me to think about things out loud and to figure things out, or to just explore ideas and look back at some of the things I've done and try to analyze them and understand them when maybe I didn't

understand what I was doing when I was doing it. And also it feels good to make people feel good when it makes them feel good to have a dialog with me—to have their questions answered. It would've been so cool if I had been able to ask 20 questions of some of the musicians I admired, when I had no other access to them.

15. On the other hand, recently it made headlines that Charlize Theron donated to a charity for auctioning off a 'date' with her, and apparently the guy who won the auction and/or the general situation really creeped her out. Obviously that's a more extreme way of putting oneself out there. But from the Pledge-Music stuff so far, have you had any truly bad experiences—was the switch from Skype to phone calls the result of someone creeping you out on video—or has everyone really behaved?

A: Leaving out Skype was partly because I thought phone calls would be easier, less hassle, and they were. I didn't have to worry about what I looked like, but more importantly Skype frequently crapped out or cut me off or cut the other person off and it didn't go really smoothly every time. I felt a little more protected and less exposed—literally—on the phone than I did on the Skype. But I was really pleased with how the Skypes went—everyone was really cool, really low-key, not weird or threatening or creepy, really nice.

16. Related to the past several questions, I kind of wonder about the nature of friends and friendship, and what it really means. We as a society may be losing our sense of that. (I love the Toyota Venza commercial where the daughter is worried about her parents, who have only sixteen Facebook friends, while she has six hundred—and her parents are actually out in the world doing stuff while she sits home alone.) In your view, can Internet-type 'friends' be 'real' friends, or can true friendship only arise with face time, personal interaction, conversation unimpeded by a 'device', shared meals, etc.?

A: I kind of think that Internet friends are not real. It's not a real relationship until

you are together for periods of time and negotiating that (real) space over time—and learning the facial expressions and the body language and the actual reactions and the uncontrollable moods and habits and real-life, everyday likes and dislikes of each other—stated and unstated—and all the other non-verbal communication that goes on between people. There are people that I have "known" only through email—multiple emails—email relationships—feeling that we were getting to know each other. And we were, sort of, in a way, but it's not a real knowing knowing. You can get a sense of a person through Internets and typing, but you are not getting to know the whole real person. A lot of this Internetting / typing / posting / blah-blah is jive. Constructing or presenting a personality. Or part(s) of one. It's not really real.

17. I really like "Tourist", and wonder to what extent it is autobiographical. Especially in light of the *Interview* interview, "But everybody lies / You're not the only one / And it's not her first time," makes me think maybe you had some unpleasant experiences attracting men who were drawn to an incomplete, incorrect, and/or distorted image of you that they drew for themselves out of one or two true details. I won't pry. Nevertheless, "She turns into a ghost / Of someone that you think you know / But you don't," maybe suggests more generally that you think that often people have a fairly distorted image of you, of what sort of person you really are. To what extent is that true?

A: Yeah—I think I was thinking about people who think they know me through some public image of me that wasn't even constructed by me. It made me uncomfortable when people would assume they knew things about me when they really didn't. In a way I was also trying to say something about the mystery of women in general. And the wonderful, self-empowering / self-regenerating unknowability of people (we keep things for ourselves that no one else can have, we hold on to parts of ourselves and never give them away even

when people/men think they are possessing/owning us completely). The line about “it’s not her first time” was referring to interviews—people who are interviewed give answers to questions that are posed by the interviewers. But the answers aren’t necessarily true, or completely true, so at the time I meant: I’ve done lots of interviews, I know how this works, so don’t think you can know who I am by reading one interview. Maybe I knew exactly what I was doing when I said I was a virgin. Maybe I planned on saying it, when I said it. Maybe it was true. Maybe it wasn’t. So don’t patronize me. I was always trying to protect myself from the prying and intrusions of people who didn’t know me / I didn’t know. I never liked being a public figure. It freaked me out. Strangers saying my name. Weird and unsettling. I really didn’t like being semi-famous.

18. What is it that, more than anything else, people in general and/or your fans in particular don’t ‘get’ / see / understand / realize about you?

A: My sense of humor—see, this is one of those things that doesn’t translate over the Internets... laughter just doesn’t come through the Internets. And I am always laughing.

19. In the process of selecting songs for the covers album, you might have chosen songs you like, songs to which you think you can add a worthwhile gloss, songs that you think are under-appreciated, songs you think your fans would like to hear you cover, songs that you think challenge you, and probably other songs that have other bases for inclusion. To what extent did various factors influence your song choices?

A: The choices were pretty random—not a lot of thought or planning went into any of it. Some were songs I’d been playing live for a few years and always liked and wanted to record, but never had. Some just popped into my head and seemed like good ideas at the time. Some were suggested by other people, some were new discoveries, some were songs that I thought I could do better than the original

versions—I felt that one of the songs was not given a proper treatment by the original band that had written and recorded it, and so I wanted to do it right (the way that I thought was right). I couldn’t record my all-time favorite songs because they were too sacred—I couldn’t do any Replacements. It would be too risky to mess with stuff that is so deep in my heart. And some bands, like X, are too idiosyncratic to cover—they are too much themselves and there is nothing I could add to an X song. X is X. No one else can do X.

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[The three omitted questions and answers cover matters not of general interest.]