



[Having a Beer with](#)

Fleet Foxes' Robin Pecknold Gave Us the Perfect Music for This Moment

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By [Jessica Mlinaric](#), November 18, 2020

Despite everything, there's been at least one welcome surprise in 2020. Fleet Foxes dropped a new album on September 22, the autumnal equinox, with [little notice](#).

The band's fourth album, [Shore](#), delivers frontman Robin Pecknold's signature atmospheric indie folk with buoyant confidence. Perhaps signaling a change in the seasons, the album opens not with Pecknold's familiar tenor but the voice of 21-year-old Uwade Akhere. The 15 tracks unfold with the warmth of fleeting daylight and the long shadows of layered harmonies.

Shore's music was mostly composed and recorded ahead of the pandemic, but its lyrics were written during this summer. Pecknold ultimately distilled the collective experiences of the global pandemic and reckoning with systemic injustice into gratitude.

Pecknold and I discussed the new record as we shared a beer over the phone. He sipped on a [Woods and Waters IPA](#) and I drank a [Crypt Keeper Pumpkin Porter](#) in a [Bad Tom Smith Brewing](#) glass.

Do you have any early memories of beer?

I remember that my dad drank beer, but not to excess. It always seemed pretty disgusting. He would get these Sierra Nevada beers, and I think that was the closest thing they had to a nice beer back then. I would definitely sneak sips here and there.

This is actually a weird story that I am only now remembering for the first time. Sometimes I would steal the caps and suck on them. I liked that it kind of tasted like beer but that it also tasted like metal. I used to suck on

pennies too when I was like six or seven. So, my first memory of beer was sucking on and saving the caps, which is kind of gross.

Have you been drinking anything different to get you through quarantine?

I was actually not drinking at all before the quarantine hit. I had been sober, for lack of a better word, for about a year or so. I started drinking a little bit during recording just as a way to blow off steam at the end of the day with the people in the studio. We would get a [Montauk](#) Watermelon Session Ale that they have at the bodega downstairs. It was really light and refreshing, almost like juice or something.

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You've been writing and recording this album for a while, but you completed it pretty quickly this summer. What was it like to put out a record without waiting for a physical release, lining up a tour, or other normal parts of the process?

Honestly, for me this is the ideal situation. I'm just incredibly lucky that things worked out that in the current climate that wouldn't be the weirdest thing to do. There's a lot of other important stuff to be paying attention to besides weekly song drops trying to garner attention for an album.

Everyone hates waiting four months finishing a record after spending years on it to share it. I'm just grateful that this way of doing it actually kind of made sense right now. It's been very surreal watching feedback roll in but having none of it be in person and having it all be stuff I'm searching for on my phone and not having a show to celebrate the release, but that's ok. In the grand scheme of things, if it could be released like this every time, that would be my dream.

It's such a gorgeous album at a time when we all need some beauty, and the way that you dropped it quickly felt like a gift. You timed the album release with the autumnal equinox. What was significant about that to you?

One thing is it was a Tuesday. As an older guy, I remember albums coming out on Tuesday and that kept me going through the whole week, listening to those new albums. I don't know who wants to listen to new music on a Friday, but I guess that's how we have to do it now.

To be honest, it was a little bit "woo woo" where I was like, "The equinox is on the twenty-second, and two plus two is four, and this is the fourth album. The equinox lands at 13:31 Universal Time and one plus three is four." There was a little bit of a maniac-like meme. You know, like the guy at the board full of cutouts or the woman with trigonometry surrounding her. There was a little bit of that. Plenty of events get tied into those markers of time and it seemed cool to associate it with that rather than "New Music Friday" necessarily.

You said in a statement, "We don't need music to live but I can't imagine life without it." What music have you been turning to this year?

I've been listening to the radio a lot, either classical radio or the Columbia University radio station. There's been something nice about having a DJ come on every once in a while, not picking the music but being into whatever is coming on. I've been alone for this in my apartment, so it's been nice to have another voice.

If I'm putting an album on to listen to, I guess I'd put on this Luiz Bonfá album called Introspection of really beautiful guitar instrumentals. It's kind of Brazilian but with Western classical influences too and a lot of crazy techniques. I've been listening to Jessica Pratt a lot, and I'm glad the weather is getting cool again, because that always feels good when it's cold out. Just kind of relaxing music for the most part. I would love to see a Rage Against the Machine show whenever that can happen again.

You speak of the loss of artists and friends that you loved on this record. It resonates because everyone has experienced some kind of loss this year. But your record ultimately feels hopeful. What is giving you hope these days?

When I was finishing the album in July and August, I was just so full of joy being back at work. Earlier, you mentioned that the album felt like a bit of a gift and that's awesome. It felt like making one too. I was like, "Oh cool, I'm not going to put this out and then go on tour for two years and make a ton of money," to be crass. Since some of the external considerations were so much smaller it felt more wholesome.

I was struck by how much fun it was to work on the music and how the music itself felt like it was giving back to me. For me, that's a source of hope—people can continue making art and continue connecting with it. I think that it's in the darkest time when we kind of need healing music the most. Sometimes, when times are good then you pull out the dark albums. There's a backwards relationship to me sometimes.

I think the world is getting reorganized. I was having trouble keeping up in 2019 a little bit just mentally with how fast things seemed to be going. Obviously, it's not worth having this economic collapse or anything, but there's no better time than a crisis to address some of these things finally.

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I know you had some fun new collaborations on this record. What was it like to work with this group of musicians and the features?

Man, it was incredible. That was my favorite part. This was the most people I've ever been able to work with on an album. Everyone was just such a master at what they were doing. It wasn't just session musicians. They were people that I knew or that I was a big fan of or a new fan of.

I loved being the producer. I guess working on the fourth album now I've had plenty of opportunities to record a ton of guitars and vocals on something. That needs to get done at some point obviously, but that's not like the funnest thing for me to do at this point. Being able to have someone like [Chris Bear](#), Homer Steinweiss, or Uwade Akhere at the drum kit or at the microphone or whatever it was, and I'm helping them however I could to get a good take even though they didn't need much help.

Being in the producer's seat just felt really good, and I think that was my favorite part of the whole recording process. I wanted to come prepared with a bunch of songs that I thought were worth their time, and make sure to ask in the right way, and treat the well during the session. It was a great learning experience for me and a great realization of, "Oh yeah, I could do this any day of the week, even if I don't have a song ready to record. This can be so fun and a better mindset for me to be in than that artist mindset, which is a different set of concerns."

It's cool that music has been a part of your life for so long and you're still discovering new ways to commune with it and different aspects that are exciting to you.

One thing that I love about making music is that you need to be good at so many different things. There are so many aspects of making music that you can improve at that keeps it challenging and fascinating.

You have to be able to put a coherent lyric together, perform and sing well, have a creative idea that's exciting, play instruments well, work with people well, eventually be able to talk about it, perform, and travel. There's so many challenges that it puts in front of you—it's just constant learning and growth.

For anybody sitting down to listen to *Shore*, is there a certain drink that you would pair with the album?

I really like low alcohol, colder climate, natural red wine. Maybe like a low intervention Anders Frederik Steen something or other. One of his weird wines with the weird names like Please Don't Throw Trash in the Ocean or one of those.

Anything else you would like to share?

Since you're in Chicago, I would like to shout out [Marz Brewing](#). Those dudes are amazing. They are friends with my brother and sister-in-law and they made this great special beer for their wedding. There was something weird about the beer, but it was really, really good.

Photo by Emily Johnston