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“ Music itself can cut through personal things and be its own thing, be a growing and learning experience that can unify you.

**BY JESSICA MLINARIC**

Most marriages — not to mention musical collaborations — can be counted in years, not decades. Yet the husband-and-wife musical duo of Mimi Parker and Alan Sparhawk, two-thirds of Low, have been collaborating in life and art together for over two decades. The Duluth-based band celebrates its twentieth anniversary this year with the release of its tenth album, *The Invisible Way*. While their lingering minimalist arrangements have continually strapped Low with the “slowcore” label, the trio’s continued success is built upon their strikingly heartfelt vocal harmonies, slow tempos, and quietly burning instrumentation.

At home in Minnesota, Parker took time to speak with *Chicago INNERVIEW* about recording with Jeff Tweedy, performing in cathedrals, and what she’s learned after 20 years in Low.

**Chicago Innerview: What do you still love about being part of Low after 20 years?**

Mimi Parker: Being able to still write songs, record them, and see how they turn into something you create — though you're not sure what it's going to be. That process is still pretty exciting. It's always great to play live, even though touring itself can be kind of grueling.

**Chicago Innerview: What is that experience like of creating something very personal or introspective and seeing how fans interpret it for themselves?**

Mimi Parker: Some songs I write do have specific stories that they're from, but some of them don't. They're just kind of vague moments. It's really interesting to hear another person's interpretation of it. Then you actually go back and think, 'Wow, maybe that's what I was talking about.'

**CI: As a body of work, your music doesn't radically veer stylistically but it has evolved over the years. Low's had different members, but over time what have you guys learned together as a band?**

MP: I guess I've learned that the music itself can transform things. A lot of times we've worked with different people, and when you're working with others there are personal issues. I've learned that music itself can cut through personal things and be its own thing, be a growing and learning experience that can unify you. When you're playing live there's a moment when you're unified and you're all working together. I've learned how interesting it is that music is really beautiful and amazing in how it changes people momentarily. I've learned that I can actually still do this, still write songs and be creative. We did our first record 20 years ago and after the first few songs I thought, 'Wow how are we going to be able to make this work again? How am I going to write new songs?' The more you do it you realize, 'Alright I still have it.' It can still be a rewarding, interesting lifestyle and career choice.

**CI: It seems like it's something that would take so much out of you, but that you couldn't really choose to not do.**

MP: Yeah, I think Alan [feels that way] especially. I would say it's part of his soul and his existence. I don't think he could survive without it.

**CI: For the new album, how did working with [producer] Jeff Tweedy influence the material on *The Invisible Way*?**

MP: We pretty much had the songs written when we went [into the studio]. We're very organized usually and we get a good idea of how we want to record, but we knew that Jeff would have some beneficial insight and ideas. It was casual and comfortable. He would just interject here and there, and we never felt that he was pushy. It was a really fun relationship and the studio was great. The engineer we worked with, Tom Schick, has a really amazing ear and touch. It ended up being pretty easy and a really good experience.

**CI: People always talk about the various kinds of venues Low has played and unique things that have happened at your live shows. What is the perfect setting to perform your music live?**

MP: I think it varies. At this point most people that come to our shows are familiar with the kind of music we play and atmosphere we're trying to create. If people are listening and engaged it's perfect, and that can be anywhere. We've played at beautiful cathedrals across the world and when you put together the history of a space and the moment of the audience engaged all in the same thing, it can be pretty intense. At the same time, just a small club with people at the bar chatting and 90 percent of the people there to see the show right up front — those shows are really intense too.

**LOW**  
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