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Robin Pecknold talks about the new album:

Hey, my name's Robin and I'm a singer in and songwriter for Fleet Foxes, here to write the promotional biography meant to accompany and explain *Helplessness Blues*. I'm just going to write down some thoughts I have about the album and give you some context. Let's do this.

So, for a bit of background: we're from Seattle, and the members of the band are me, Skye Skjelset, Josh Tillman, Casey Wescott, Christian Wargo, and now our buddy Morgan Henderson, who helped out on the album and will join the band on tour. The band began as just me and Skye in Junior High, playing songs in his bedroom, until we moved to Seattle, settled on a name, and began meeting other musicians and playing with different people until we met all the guys currently on board. Casey joined in 2005, Christian in 2007, and Josh joined shortly before our first album was released, but after we'd recorded it. So, that's some background information. Good luck working that into something intriguing. We released our first album in 2008, had a lot of unexpected support from people and the press and we ended up on tour until October of 2009 (we'd expected to do one or two U.S. tours and hoped to start our next album in the Fall of 2008!)

Recording started with demos at a building in Seattle that's been multiple recording studios since the '70s, from Triangle, to Jon & Stu's, to Reciprocal Recording, to the Hall of Justice. A number of incredible albums have been made in that building over the years, including *Bleach* by Nirvana. So we were lucky enough to take over the lease when Death Cab for Cutie moved out in October 2009, and I started writing songs more seriously again. A couple months later, Joanna Newsom asked me if I would open some shows for her. As a huge fan of hers, I was completely honored and flattered that she'd want me to open her shows, and I felt like I needed some new songs that I could play alone. So, a number of the songs that ended up on this album came from the writing that preceded those tours. Having to play the songs alone meant I was really focusing on having a clear lyric and a strong melody, which ended up being a great change of focus for me as a writer because I'd spent a lot of 2009 messing around with non-songwriter type music and not always finding it satisfying.

After the first Newsom tour, we all went up to Woodstock, New York, to record at Dreamland Recording, where our friends in Beach House had had a good experience recording their last album *Teen Dream*. We were there for twelve days recording the drums and acoustic guitars. As an aside, I think Josh did an incredible job on the drums on this record, writing really inventive parts without a lot of instruction, and having such good tempo and "feel" that we were able to record all but one song on the album without a click track.

From there began a long stretch of recording in Seattle, from May of 2010 to November of 2010, where a ton of shit happened at numerous studios including Reciprocal, Bear Creek, and Avast. I could get into it, but basically it took a long time due to illness, scheduling, creative doubt, reassessment, rewriting, new songs being written, etc., etc., etc. It was at times difficult to make this record. We ended up mixing at Avast in Seattle in December of 2010, with the record finally finished, even though we were recording vocals and guitar and rewriting lyrics up to the 11th hour. Not even the 11th, more like the 13th. So here we are, almost three years after the first album, finally done with the second one. Now I'll talk about the actual music a little bit.

I think this music draws influence and inspiration from popular music and folk rock of the mid '60s to the early '70s, folks like Peter Paul & Mary, John Jacob Niles, Bob Dylan, The Byrds, Neil Young, CSN, Judee Sill, Ennio Morricone, West Coast Pop Art Experimental Band, The Zombies, *SMiLE*-era Brian Wilson, Roy Harper, Van Morrison, John Fahey, Robbie Basho, The Trees Community, Duncan Browne, the Electric Prunes, Trees, Pete Seeger, and Sagittarius, among many others. I'd say it's a synthesis of folk rock, traditional folk, & psychedelic pop, with an emphasis on group vocal harmonies. *Astral Weeks* was a big inspiration on this album, if not always in sound then in approach. The raw emotion in Van Morrison's vocals and the trance-like nature of the arrangements were very inspiring for this album!

Musically it leans on country music a little bit more, in the slide guitar of songs like "Grown Ocean" and

“Bedouin Dress” or “Helplessness Blues.” We used a number of new instruments including the 12-string guitar, the hammered dulcimer, zither, upright bass, wood flute, tympani, Moog synthesizer, the tamboura, the fiddle, the marxophone, clarinet, the music box, pedal steel guitar, lap steel guitar, Tibetan singing bowls, vibraphone, along with more traditional band instrumentation.

OK! I think that covers most of it. The last thing I'll talk about is the title. It's called *Helplessness Blues* for a number of reasons. One, it's kind of a funny title. Secondly, one of the prevailing themes of the album is the struggle between who you are and who you want to be or who you want to end up being, and how sometimes you are the only thing getting in the way of that. That idea shows up in a number of the songs.

Thanks for reading and I hope you enjoy the record!
Robin