

"She was a willowy beauty with charming shyness and a slightly tragic air." So says Brett Milano, of **Juliana Hatfield** in her starting-out days, in his recent book *The Sound Of Our Town: A History Of Boston Rock+Roll*.

**Juliana Hatfield** - no less an intriguing, compelling character today - has been working as a recording artist for twenty years. With the release of ***How To Walk Away***, her 10<sup>th</sup> solo album, she again proves herself to be an uncompromising artist with impeccable pop instincts, a disdain for artifice, a completely original voice, and a contrarian streak.

Starting in her teens, with her first band, critically-acclaimed, Boston-based indie rock outfit the Blake Babies (who self-released their first album before moving on to the North Carolina-based independent Mammoth Records), **Hatfield** has paved her own unique way, evolving with each subsequent record. She signed to Atlantic Records as a solo artist and racked up a string of mid-nineties modern-rock hits ("**My Sister**," "**Spin The Bottle**," "**Universal Heartbeat**") before leaving the label in 1998. **Hatfield** was then the first signing to Zoe Records, a Rounder Records imprint. Zoe's fourth and final **Hatfield** release was 2004's *In Exile Deo*, named one of that year's 10 best albums by Jon Pareles in *The New York Times*.

In 2005 **Hatfield** came full circle, back to full DIY independence, starting her own label (Ye Olde Records) and releasing the catchy but somewhat abrasive *Made In China* ("her most urgent, refreshingly unpolished output in years," said *Time Out New York*).

***How To Walk Away***, also on Ye Olde Records, finds **Hatfield** singing in top form. "Finally," she says, "I feel like my voice has grown into itself and I'm not struggling so much against its little-girl-ness."

The album features guest appearances by two other distinctive vocalists: Psychedelic Furs' Richard Butler on "This Lonely Love" and Nada Surf's Matthew Caws on "Such A Beautiful Girl." Other featured guest musicians were Fountains Of Wayne guitarist Jody Porter (some lead guitar); Jeff Hill, of Rufus Wainwright's band, on bass; and Ethan Eubanks of the Grey Race on drums. Tracy Bonham guested on violin, and Jason Hatfield, Juliana's brother, played piano

on two songs, which he co-wrote ("**Remember November**" and "**Such A Beautiful Girl**").

**How To Walk Away** was recorded at Stratosphere Sound, the NYC studio co-owned by Adam Schlesinger (Fountains Of Wayne), James Iha (formerly of Smashing Pumpkins), and Andy Chase (of revered alt-rock/pop band Ivy), who produced the album. **How To Walk Away** is evocative, layered, and unhurried yet Chase has managed to retain **Hatfield's** essential rawness of spirit, smoothing out some rough edges but not all. Witness, for example, the loose, danceable "**Now I'm Gone**," sung (and played) by **Hatfield** in one inspired improvisational take. And while she has frequently drawn from personal experience in the past, these songs are some of her most candid ever.

"The songs are very autobiographical," says **Hatfield**, "although I do recognize that whenever I'm writing about myself I am, in a sense, writing about - or for - everyone else; I know that other people out there are just like me."

Walking away - and the loneliness that sometimes results - is a recurring theme. But rather than agonizing over a sad state of affairs, **How To Walk Away** takes a fatalistic attitude toward relationships. It is set in a vaguely purgatorial post-relationship - or maybe *pre*-relationship - landscape. The songs' protagonists don't expect to find wisdom, serenity and forgiveness (there are no Hollywood happy endings here) but at the same time they know that understanding and self-awareness *may* come.

Fatalism's flip side is faith, and even in an outwardly sad song like "**Such A Beautiful Girl**" ("She's such a beautiful girl/but she lives in an ugly world"), hope is not dead; the girl of the title waits patiently for a future that she knows - odds are - will be better than where she finds herself now.

**Hatfield's** biting sense of humor comes out in "**Just Lust**," a post-feminist anthem that turns the idea of women as the emotional, needy sex on its head, addressing an emotional, needy *male*.

The bittersweet yet life-affirming "**Shining On**" - mixed by veteran hit-making producer David Kahne - exhibits a hard-won resilience in the face of disappointment and betrayal. If there *is* still a slightly tragic air about **Hatfield**, it is balanced by this sensibility.

"I feel really lucky to have made a living at this for so long," she says. "I love what I do; making my music brings me joy and fulfillment, over and over again. And I'll continue to do it until I don't love it anymore."

**Hatfield's** artistic growth has been paralleled in other realms as well. An esteemed lyricist, she segues to prose with her upcoming autobiography, which will be published by Wiley and Sons in 2009. And she continues to expand her label, which released Frank Smith's *Heavy Handed Peace and Love* in 2007 as well as her collaboration with the band, *Sittin' in a Tree*, a six-song EP.

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**JULIANA HATFIELD**

**HOW TO WALK AWAY**

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 **ye olde records**