

Freakwater invariably make records easily distinguishable from one another while maintaining their signature sound and their own uniquely skewed take on honky-tonk, bluegrass, or country-politan,. On Thinking of You they join together with Thrill Jockey label mates Califone, creating an album both modern and timeless in its instrumentation and sentiment. Recorded with engineer Graeme Gibson and produced by Califone wizard Tim Rutili at Clava Studios in Chicago, Freakwater used their core set up of Irwin and Bean on vocals and guitar, David Gay on bass and Jon Spiegel on pedal steel. They are joined on all songs by varying combinations of Califone members: Joe Adamik (piano, horns), Tim Rutili (guitars ? electric and otherwise, pump organ, vocals), Ben Massarella (percussion, drums), and Jim Becker (fiddle, string arrangements, piano, vocals, organ, electric guitar). With additional help from Graeme Gibson (organ), Evelyn Weston (saw), Jacob Smith (piano) and James Elkington (electric guitar), Freakwater seem to be at home and stronger than ever in the company of these musicians.

Freakwater's self-proclaimed "neurotic manner" combined with Califone's laid back, effortless style created an ideal setting for the making of this album. Califone's cast of talented multi-instrumentalists provided Freakwater with their broadest, most nuanced sonic pallet to date. The outcome is a complex, yet fluid album. Each listen brings new sounds to the listener's ear. On the album's second track, "Cricket Versus Ant", one can hear strings by Becker and the wheezing of pump organ played by Rutili. "Cathy Ann", a song about the tragic death of one of Woody Guthrie's daughters originally intended to appear on their last album, is finally revealed more beautiful than ever. For "Double Clutch" Bean summoned the help of Jim Elkington (singer/guitarist of The Zincs) to add his literate lyrical touch and chiming guitar work. "Hi Ho Silver", the final song on the album, is a hook-driven drug anthem replete with a giant chorus and a "lighters-in-the-air horn section fade out."

Lyricaly, Freakwater continue to write about heartache and sadness, yet also touch on subjects not often broached in traditional country music. Dylan once said, "She knows there's no success like failure, and that failure's no success at all," a phrase that aptly describes the Freakwater perspective. Sadness prevails in a song such as "Sap", where some of Irwin's finest lyrical work is on display. "I fell like a thing that falls / I crashed like a thing that crashes / I burned up like the kind of thing that burns down to the ground" illustrates Freakwater's existential exploration of classic country themes and their distillation of traditional country music metaphors. While "So Strange", a song inspired by the giddy exuberance of Elvis film soundtracks, hints at Freakwater's trademark sarcasm, "I did what I could to get rid of your good time / the fender was bent when the grim malcontent dropped a dime / I did what I could and I meant to put a dent in your good time / I defiled your cake / And I drank up the end of your wine".

Six years have passed since the release of Freakwater's last album, End Time. During that time, their longest break since their 1989 debut, Catherine Irwin and Janet Beveridge Bean released solo records; Irwin's achingly sincere Cut Yourself a Switch, and Bean's lush, heartbreaking Dragging Wonder Lake. While these records can be considered stylistically oppositional, Irwin and Bean see each of them as natural marks on the Freakwater continuum. The artistic separation of these two, a result more of circumstance than design, could not last, and plans to create a new Freakwater album started to evolve. Irwin moved from Louisville to join Bean in Chicago, allowing the band more freedom in preparing for the album and recording in the studio. The product of Bean and Irwin's reunion is Freakwater's dynamic and powerful seventh album, Thinking Of You.

A phrase not usually weighted with menace, Thinking Of You takes on an increasingly ominous, compelling tone

with each new listen. Like the album cover's warped image of a burning bouquet, the music itself represents an exquisite blend of beauty, horror, and inexplicable optimism. If the past is any indication, Freakwater will continue their long, lonely journey until the end of time. "I love singing with Catherine, and I miss it. I sort of view it like tennis: you can play it into your 80's; you just play it a little slower. I don't want it to go away", Bean says. Catherine complements Bean's thoughts with, "The sound of two voices singing at the same time is a beautiful thing ? everything else is a chore."

With each record of their twelve year partnership, Catherine and Janet have written a larger number of the recorded songs. End Time finds the pair sharing all credits with six songs each. In fact the group recorded several more songs than were placed on the record. From the stark beauty of "Sick Sick Sick", and "All Life Long" to the Honky Tonk swing of "Cheap Watch", Freakwater's lyrics and harmonies have few equals. From the darkness of "Cloak of Frogs" to the grandeur of "When The leaves Begin to Fall", Freakwater's depth goes beyond category. Freakwater are a remarkable band. End Time is their finest record to date.