

# Freakwater

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Freakwater's Janet Bean and Catherine Irwin first put their distinctive harmonies to tape under a swinging Kentucky country ham in Janet's parent's basement. That was 1985. Cassette tapes sometimes have a way of landing in the right hands.

*Hog Butcher To The World*, a 1987 WNUR compilation contains a dulcimer-driven punk rock cover of Woody Guthrie's *Little Black Train* from this original 4-track recording. The band appears under the name Mojo Wishbean and Trippy Squashblossom. Inside the record cover they transcribe Big Black's required artist's statement, replacing Steve Albini and Santiago Durango's names with their own, hence: "Trippy -- throbbing muscle of love dulcimer..." and "Mojo -- electrodes to the gonads vocals". This is described by Janet as "establishing our early desire to do the wrong thing."

Amoeba Records in Los Angeles released the first LP by Janet's other band Eleventh Dream Day. The label's owner and sole employee was a huge Carter Family freak from Eastern Kentucky. He was so stoked about what he heard on the "Swinging Ham Sessions" tape that he agreed to pay for recording at Chicago's famous James Bond studio.

Probably the biggest thing to result from Freakwater's first record (*Freak Water*, 1989) was meeting their future and all-time bass player, Dave Gay. Janet and Catherine and Dave have been the steely heart of the band ever since. Freakwater's darkly beautiful songs have been compared (mostly favorably) to practically anyone from the world of "outsider country" or "Americana" one might feel unworthy of being compared to.

They played their first show together at a Louisville strip club/punk rock open-mic night. After 30 years together, Catherine and Janet's unflinching lyrics and compelling vocal harmonies can stab you in the heart from a mile away. There is a powerful continuity to their work but the band has never been constrained by any musical category. There is no band like Freakwater but Freakwater.

The band has released seven highly acclaimed studio albums, although their rate of production has been wildly sporadic. Freakwater's lack of any normal human ambition and complete inability to capitalize on the brightest moments of critical acclaim have endeared them to their most loyal fans – while their dense shroud of mystery continues to lure the young and vulnerable. It has been almost nine years since the release of their last record, *Thinking Of You* (Thrill Jockey).

Like a stream breaking through a busted dam, Freakwater carves its own path. Maybe they just don't know how to follow rules. Maybe they never knew there were any rules.