

Phoebe Hunt Bio

On the seventh day of a ten-day retreat at a Vipassana meditation center outside the historic Indian city of Kolhapur, Phoebe Hunt intrinsically felt the life leave her namesake's body on the other side of the world.

The story of how she came to be known as Phoebe — a tale woven subtly into the whimsical threads and spiritual contradictions of *Shanti's Shadow*, her new record — has the humor and richness of a Vedic myth. Her parents met at a yoga ashram in the Lower West Side of Manhattan in the Seventies, where they spent seven years as disciples of Guru Swami Satchidananda, famous in America for having been the opening speaker at the 1969 Woodstock Festival. Years later, near the end of her pregnancy with Phoebe, her mother felt a strong compulsion to name her child *Shanti*, a Hindi word meaning peace. There was only one minor complication — she had already promised the child's paternal grandmother, Phoebe, that she would be named after her. In a compromise, Hunt's parents named their child Shanti Phoebe Hunt, but out of deference to the grandmother, she would grow up being called Phoebe.

Years later, on the 2016 trip that would inspire the creation of *Shanti's Shadow*, Hunt and her husband (and mandolin-playing bandmate) Dominick Leslie entered the meditation retreat in India, surrendered their possessions, and, with only a wool blanket given to them upon arrival, committed to a sequestered ten-day vow of silence. It was during that stint at the retreat that Grandma Phoebe passed away. Hunt remained in India with Leslie and a team of musicians who had joined the couple to study with master violinist and vocalist Kala Ramnath at an ashram outside the city of Pune. While there they found themselves spending as many as ten hours a day honing *ragas*, melodic structures that, in the Indian classical tradition, are believed to have the capacity to color the mind of an audience. The entire experience, ripe with creative

efflorescence, formed the core of a bittersweet irony for Hunt. While in pursuit of her spiritual namesake — the *shanti* of peace, tranquility, creativity, and bliss — her familial namesake passed away.

The generative idea at the heart of *Shanti's Shadow* lies in the double sense of its title — it refers, on the one hand, to the obverse of peace and tranquility, to the entangled ego at play in a world of knotty contradictions and selfish desires. In that sense, *Shanti's Shadow* refers quite literally to the ego and the inescapable necessity of confronting it and claiming it as one's own. It is also, in a literal sense, a reference to Shanti Phoebe Hunt the artist, to her music's quest to transcend creative limitations and give flight to her innermost voice.

“Each of us, no matter who we are, has a shadow side, a realm of our being associated in many traditions with the ego or the self,” Phoebe says. “Though what I create may have its roots in my soul, it first has to pass through the filter of my body and ego before it finds a place in the world. Knowing that, my goal for this album was to be as vulnerable and raw as possible in order to share my shadow.”

That vulnerability is apparent throughout the record on tracks like “Pink and Blue,” a song Hunt wrote while traveling through India. During the daily ten-hour meditations at the Vipassana center outside Kolhapur, the song's mystical celestial images and lyrics continually sought refuge in her mind, when she was supposed to be clearing it of all thoughts. At the end of the retreat, after meeting up with her friends and fellow musicians to learn about Indian classical music under the tutelage of Kala Ramnath, she wrote the instrumental part of the song and incorporated her lyrics with the rhythmic and melodic concepts she was studying. “I like to pick at my wounds until they bleed / Take in the moon on a bended knee” she sings in the song's

opening verse, a tender declaration of purpose for the album. On “Just for Tonight,” an elegiac waltz about the nature of forgiveness, Hunt’s luminous vocals melt away the song’s carapace of doubt and regret: “Let the stillness in you / Clear the shadows in me / Let me look through your eyes / And see nothing but peace.” Written beside a river at RockyGrass Festival in Lyons, CO the song sprang from a painful personal experience, a wound that the song’s creation helped to heal.

On “Frolic of the Bees,” the album’s shimmering lead track, the notion of vulnerability is reimagined as a blissed-out invitation to community. The song begins with the hypnotically enticing mandolin of Dominick Leslie, followed by Hunt’s crystalline call to whomever has ears to hear: “Come, all the wild ones / Come, all the thieves / Come, all you furry feathered friends / Where we are headed, no one can harm you / Anyone can stay until the end.” Depicting an ethereal gathering in the woods where all are welcome, the song is an uncanny love letter to inclusion and openness, to the wonder and spontaneous joy that are possible when we allow ourselves to encounter each other lovingly, free from shame or judgment. “To me,” Hunt says of the song, “it’s an expression of transformation and dynamic change, a kind of ceremony or transcendent event that’s only possible when people are free to be together authentically.” Hunt’s gorgeous fiddling entwines itself with Leslie’s virtuosic mandolin in a sublime encounter that amplifies the song’s central premise of communion. “You in the flames there / Burn through the night now,” Hunt sings, sounding out a shamanic command to the music, imploring it to sustain the joy.

On an album that opens with the joyous incantation of “Frolic of the Bees,” it’s only fitting that the final track is a kind of quiet exhalation and reflective summation of the record’s major ideas. “I Really Love” opens with just that – Hunt’s soft exhalation – and proceeds as a

slow recitation of a few concrete joys that make life worth living: “I really love putting the phone down and spacing out for an hour / Feeling the water touching my brow in the shower / Hearing the sound of piano downstairs / Watching the smoke disappear into the air / And singing...” The song is heartbreakingly beautiful in its specificity, and, rather than coming off like a hyper-personalized update of “My Favorite Things”, “I Really Love” sounds like a confession of the most profound sort. The song is so evocative because of the pathos inherent in Hunt’s voice, which she uses to sublimate the most everyday experiences into deeply personal, spiritual rites. That process, the sanctification of Hunt’s most private self, is what *Shanti’s Shadow* seeks to articulate.