

# Freedom's Just Another Word for Chan Marshall's Blues

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Chan Marshall, alias Cat Power, has become famous for penning plaintive, gorgeously personal songs that delicately unravel the threads of the human psyche, both her own and those of the characters who populate her songs. They originate, she says, with a kind of "temperature taking" by way of picking up a guitar or sitting down at the piano and reading a "social temperature, an emotional temperature, a vibration of your mind or the world, gravitating you to want to play music."

The underlying vibration of *You Are Free*, Marshall's first collection of original material since 1998's *Moon Pix* (she also recorded *The Covers Record* in 2000), is a yen for the freedom of the album's title. Marshall refers to *You Are Free*, not unhappily, as "a bunch of puzzle pieces that don't fit together," but many of the songs, explicitly or not, share a concern with people seeking to liberate themselves from their own demons, and from those imposed by lovers, friends or society.

Aiding her in the assembly of these oddly complementary puzzle pieces was Adam Kasper (Foo Fighters, Pearl Jam), who got in touch to offer his services gratis. After Marshall explained that she didn't want a producer, Kasper agreed to come on board solely as an engineer, bringing with him fellow Cat Power fans Dave Grohl and Eddie Vedder, who make several guest appearances on drums and backing vocals. Joining Vedder for backup on the dreamy country blues

tune "Good Woman" are a pair of precocious 10-year-old girls, one of whom Marshall met in line at a Paul Westerberg in-store appearance at a Seattle record shop. Marshall and Kasper clashed occasionally during the recording process – "He'd say something had to be purple and I'd say, no, it's green" – but with his technical assistance, Marshall was able to create a strikingly original record of idiosyncratic midtempo indie rock arrangements and pensive modern folk laments.

While shot through with yearning, *You Are Free* also celebrates the weird, wonderful redemptive power of music. "Just fall in love when you sing your song," Marshall sings on the anthemic second track, "Free." That act of temperature taking, of picking up a color or a vibration and turning it into a melody, provides a measure of freedom to both the singer and her audience. "Everybody loves music," Marshall says. "Even dogs get together and howl at the moon."

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• Jesse Ashlock

