

Elena Loper

Weathervane Whale

Pacific Northwest artist Elena Loper is possessed of a rare gift: a resonant voice that time travels through stories of the soul, with a delicate dance between enchanting melodies and glistening guitar arrangements. Her voice radiates a warming inner strength that glows from within its haunting tone. It is at turns resplendent and silken; a pure and soaring sound that echoes through a dusky autumn forest, yet also the voice of a soulmate whispering tiny predawn secrets a hair's breadth away. Her music, captivating, bewitching, radiates a mysterious warmth that invites you in from a cold winter night, while cutting right to the core of a lamenting heart yearning to remain hopeful. Blessed with a voice that echoes in your bones long after the notes have faded into the unknown, Loper's songs share a window into her most vulnerable places; a gift that feels sacred to witness.

In *Weathervane Whale*, we find a composer, arranger, and an instrumentalist who builds instrumental frameworks around her painterly lyrics and mesmerizing vocal melodies with a deft touch. Whether paired with minimalist fingerpicking guitar and piano or full band, Loper pulls from her sonic palate with graceful intuition.

In 2019, Loper released an album with her project Dravus House and toured the Pacific Northwest and California. Loper sang, wrote, and played acoustic guitar, and her bandmate Cooper Stoullil accompanied on electric guitar. In the winter of 2020, she took time away from the road to spend with her grandmother. They spent the final days of her life talking, looking through photos and letters, and singing. The night before she passed, Loper wrote a song about her, which she played for her as she was slipping away into the next realm. This was the first of many songs Loper would write about her grandmother.

As the pandemic rolled unstoppable across the world, Loper found silver linings in being able to truly rest; finding new ways to love being alone with herself and enjoy her own company after a period of loss on multiple levels. Loper found playing music one of the most healing, centering, and soothing activities during this time of uncertainty and collective fear, illness, and loss.

Loper's house in the Ballard neighborhood of Seattle faces west, towards the expanse of Elliott Bay and the Olympic Mountains. Favoring an old three-quarter scale classical guitar, she would play and write at mid-morning and at sunset. "I would sit at a desk facing the window, listen to the birds, and watch the changing of the seasons and sit in stillness. I would go out to the yard and sing to the mountains and all of the colors - golds, purples, and blues" tells Loper. "With this stillness, I found it easier to listen to my inner voice, and to those mystical, inexplicable waves of words, sounds, and melodies that seem to flow through time and space, and out of my mouth and fingers."

Weathervane Whale is a collection of earnest poetry set to music, vignettes that snapshot experiences, moments, memories, the beautiful and tragic periods of life. "Trying to fully capture an entire event in song felt both too overwhelming and too clunky," explains Loper. Her lyrics eloquently intertwine heartfelt sentiment and nuanced sensory descriptions of her reality at a given moment. "Setting the scene helps me remember both euphoric and heartbreaking moments of my life," says Loper. "A lot of these songs are centered around moving through

feelings of deep grief, fear, and loss, as well as remembering and cherishing the joyful times in my life.”

Loper began recording her music with Johnny Bregar at The Brick Yard Studio on Bainbridge Island, WA. Having worked with Bregar on the Dravus House record, she found comfort in their easy familiarity. After quarantine and testing, Loper would ride the ferry from Seattle across the sound, then drive through the forest to the studio, a barn next to a beautiful yellow house in a wooded field.

As the pandemic raged on in late summer, it became clear that recording with Bregar was no longer tenable. Loper found another kindred spirit in David Salonen, and a new creative base at his Seattle studio The Salon. “David is the most incredible engineer,” says Loper. “Such a kind and gentle spirit, one of the few people I know who always seem to be in a genuine, authentic space of optimism and peace.” In addition to engineering, mixing, and assisting in arranging the record, Salonen contributes baritone guitar, violin, glockenspiel, and percussion. In addition to Loper (vocals, guitar, banjo, piano) and Salonen, *Weathervane Whale* features performances from Austin Dean (piano), Jon Berry (violin), Mike Sampson (vocals), and Tai Taitano (percussion).

What this fierce talent crafted in the midst of chaos and uncertainty is a much-needed melodic balm for the spirit and soul. A meditation on finding joy, peace, and stillness through loss, *Weathervane Whale* is both achingly personal and universally relatable. It is a treatise on how to see nuance in a world that favors stark contrast. It is a plea for self-care and self-soothing in the midst of doubt and uncertainty, a testament to coming home to yourself and finding joy in difficult moments. *Weathervane Whale* is art born of its time, yet it is timeless, deeply moving, and utterly beautiful.