

The Fervor

Natalie Felker looks the listener straight in the eye, via her piano and supple voice, and talks you into accepting the dagger...because you know full well that it's two-sided, and that she'll accept the other blade. They'll never take us alive, she says. But, as husband Ben's guitars start up a sharp squall, you hear why it's worth the cost: *With every new beginning comes the end/We're born again.* And one listen to the bright voices coming in all around to surround you in a reassuring embrace and you're ready to pick up the dare, the challenge, in the song's title — "Let's Fight!"

Louisville's The Fervor has formed around this pair — her voice and keys, his guitar and harmony. In 2005, not long after they started, The Fervor issued a self-titled EP. Right from the start, Natalie was capable of facing up to piano-based alternative divas such as Fiona Apple — but with the skill and resolve to wrest the inspiration from the affectation. Natalie could be the flirt who always said upfront something more honest than your carefully crafted thoughts ("Boyfriend"). Or she could drop her voice low and quiet, be your confidant and your gospel-chord-pounding witness to raw self-confrontation ("Overexposure").

Their studio drummer (Kevin Ratterman, who'd also recorded their tracks—in the back room of a funeral home) gave way to the live-onstage presence of Mat Herron, and the group pulled in a bassist and brought out their songs in clubs and as opener for the likes of The Winterpill. Now, with their onetime studio drummer handling the engineering, comes Bleeder, The Fervor's full-length debut. The 10 tracks include re-recordings of



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some tunes from the EP, along with strong new songs from a band that keeps writing and musically exploring to this day.

The accumulating thunderhead of "Moment of Truth" and the sly, snapping shifts in "The Void" move forward toward bringing light to mysteries of personality and intimacy — but without any pretense of a definitive answer, and far removed from any calming platitudes. A band that writes these sorts of songs together surely must benefit from two bandmates living together, and Natalie agrees: "Playing and creating together is more accessible. You aren't waiting for a scheduled rehearsal to work it out. You're in your PJs, having coffee, with only 20 minutes to spare ..." She continues, "As the band has progressed, the collaborative process has begun earlier in the life of a song than it did when we first started playing together."

Mat Herron confirms his role in assembling the songs — helping on some choices ("Ben'll get to a particular guitar lick and I'll say, "Oh...OH! Keep it!") but mainly expanding on what the couple has

written: "I added the vocal line I sing on 'Brushfire', but it couldn't have been if that melody wasn't there in the first place." The value of Mat providing the foundation is clear to Natalie, who recounts the *Bleeder* recording process as starting with live takes from which the drums were retained while everything else took further reworking to craft what ended up on *Bleeder*.

Among The Fervor's songs can be found an honesty not unlike PJ Harvey's — gut-punching in impact, but life-affirming in its lasting spark and hopeful mysteries. Here, coming out of the indie stronghold of Louisville, it's filled out by a harmonious but restless band standing with their singer who's not afraid to open up that she wants *"to party with the people I know can feed my hungry, sex-crazed mind and make me fill my lungs up like I was really breathing/like I was holding my breath all this wasted time/I'm ready to start livin'..."* And The Fervor are ready to share the new life they are finding — here and now.

— T.E. Lyons
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