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Bitch is back:

An Interview with Musician Bitch

By Gregg Shapiro

When out performer Bitch sings, "Dare me to rise/and I'll rise," in the song "Rise," on her first solo album, *Make This Break This* (Kill Rock Stars), you believe that she means business. The song, which delivers a set of blows to the Bush dynasty and the war in Iraq, is the political centerpiece of this powerful set of songs. Bitch, who can add actress to her long list of accomplishments with her appearance in the movie "Shortbus," took some time to talk about her career.

Gregg Shapiro: First of all, I have to tell you that there are people still talking about the time, a few years ago, when you joined Ferron onstage at the Queer Is Folk Festival in Chicago. It was this meeting of two different generations of women's music pioneers and it felt historical. Did it have special meaning to you as well?

Bitch: Oh, completely. I think that was the first time I ever joined her on stage. And we have since toured together. That was an incredible time. I always look back to that time, too. It just felt like exactly what you said, a meeting of two generations. I am so inspired by her and her music. I think I finally convinced her to let me produce a record for her.

GS: That would be so cool! I also want to congratulate you on your appearance in John Cameron Mitchell's *Shortbus*. What was the experience like for you?

Bitch: It was definitely more than just filming something. For a couple of years there we were all getting together and having these kinds of salons. We would get together and play games, or have dinners and stuff like that, so it was a real feeling of community building, which was so great. That's something that seems so hard to find in New York., I mean it always has been for me in some ways. I feel like I kind of became part of a new family in a sort of way. It was super inspiring.

GS: Plus, you got to play music in it, too.

Bitch: Yeah, yeah. John was a real leader in that way. I feel like he was really good at figuring out people's strengths. The whole movie was about that, he was working with these actors who he wanted to work with, but didn't necessarily know where it was going, that kind of thing. As we would all get to know each other, it became clear as far as who should be doing what kind of thing.

GS: You also appeared in John's video for Bright Eyes' "First Day of My Life." Is there any chance that he will be directing a music video for you someday?

Bitch: Oh God, I hope so (laughs)! I know, right! That seems like it should be the next thing down the line.

GS: When I saw you open for Amy Ray in Chicago, you were going by Capital b. Were you having an artist formerly known as Bitch moment?

Bitch: Yeah! (laughs). (Sings) Identity crisis. Now I'm back full circle. I was starting to tread in these other worlds. First of all, I was having this issue as far as, for example, the Associated Press interviewed me about *Shortbus*, but they absolutely wouldn't let me be interviewed if I insisted on being called Bitch. This kind of stuff, so my friends have been

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calling me Capital b. for a long time. In a way it kind of developed out of necessity. Many people have two different names they go by. I do kind of like having two different names. Ferron was calling me Capital b on this last tour, which I thought was so cute. To me, it feels, not riskier, but something hipper. Hearing that come out of her voice was so sweet. But I think I was just trying something new to see how it felt, and I liked it. But there are definitely going to be times where you see me appearing as Capital b, but you know I think my main thing is always going to be Bitch.

GS: Your new disc *Make This, Break This* was produced June Millington, who like Ferron, is a legendary figure, particularly in the women's music world. She also produced the *Bitch & Animal Sour Juice and Rhyme* disc. What makes your working relationship with June such a good one?

Bitch: I think June is so talented. I've noticed myself that I definitely gravitate to people who weren't. I feel like a lot of my working relationships are with people who weren't necessarily raised in this culture. I don't know what it is. There is something about June; she is so not American in a certain way, like she is not your "typical" girl. That's a horrible thing to say, "typical girl." But she is very empowered in her opinions and she was very determined about certain sides of me that she wanted to see come out on this record that she'd never seen before. And she is very focused on her goals, as far as how to get there, even though when you're making a record you can get so caught up in the minutiae and that was really good for me. Because at the time, I was in a bit of a huge change in my life and it was hard for me to stay focused on "what is the ultimate thing." My whole thing was like, "I just want to make a record. Okay let's put this down, let's put that down." I mean we probably put twenty songs down and we ended up using thirteen of them. I feel like I was the wild horse and she was harnessing it.

GS" Since this is a solo disc, what would you say were some of the things you did on it that makes it distinctive from a Bitch and Animal album?

Bitch: Definitely there is an element of a journal on this record that I feel like is less present in my work with Animal. Because I think I took the risk of doing things that weren't fully crafted yet. I risked recording songs that I've never played live, for example. I think there is a personal element that comes out, that's a little more raw than what I've done in the past. It's definitely an example of what two Aries can do, when they're up all night together (laughs) during eight months together. June and I were incredibly focused together and we could spend really long hours in the studio. I think it comes out, there's a bit of a fuller sound happening on the record. There is something that sounds more backed up to me. Whereas when Animal and I are in the studio there is an element of - "Let's just look at each other and let it spill out" kind of thing. Whereas this was a more methodical, longer meditation, is what it felt like.

GS: The disc was mixed by Roma Baran who is known for her work with Laurie Anderson. I started thinking about all of these parallels: you play violin (as does Anderson), and the epic closing track "The Most Powerful Thing That Ever Happened In the Entire World" has a Laurie Anderson quality to it. How much of an influence would you say Laurie Anderson had on you?

Bitch: Laurie Anderson was always a huge figure in my life, as far as knowing that she plays violin, knowing that she was "out there" and still having commercial success. She was following a clearly different muse than most people in the musical landscape of her times. It's funny, too, I remember in some of our old Bitch and Animal press releases, in one of our old bios we said we were "like Laurie Anderson making out with They Might Be Giants." Apparently she's been very lodged in my subconscious (laughs).

Does it feel good to you now to use Logo as a tool of visibility? Do you think Logo is that for you and for other queer artists?

Bitch: Oh, yeah, definitely. Funnily enough, I've never even seen Logo. I've definitely felt a wave of it. Yeah, I mean even just the certain visibility. My friend (lesbian hip-hop artist) God-des has had a lot of visibility because of that. And just them being at all of the events and honoring this part of our community. Yes, I've definitely felt another level of visibility because of it.