"Something in the Water:  Hugh Gulland and

His Pen-Pal:  Freakwater's Janet Bean"

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"We tell people we met in the women's penitentiary," claims
Janet Bean of her songwriting partnership with co-vocalist
Catherine Irwin. For the record, this Cell-Block H version of

Freakwater's biography is pure fantasy; their only prison

being one of small-town boredom in Dullsville, Kentucky

when they first got together way back when, to employ their under-used vocal talents on some country songs.

A decade-plus later, abetted by long-time
Freakwater bassist David Wayne Gay and a roster of
other collaborators, Janet and Catherine are tugging
the heartstrings of an ever-growing audience with
their bittersweet country-folk duets, as demonstrated
most recently on the End Time album (Thrill Jockey).
Perhaps their most assured excursion yet, this last
release sees those aching vocal harmonies enhanced
with slide, banjo and some lush string arrangements,
painting Freakwater's tales of loss and regret with rich
autumn colours.

Having missed the chance of a face-to-face chat
with the Walkman on hand, Janet rashly consented
to interview by e-mail, thus opening up her working
days to a battery of disruption over a number of
weeks courtesy of BoB. Here's a distillation, with a
few appendants to try to add a bit of context where
necessary.

**On multi-banding and creative fulfilment
(Janet's other long-standing musical
involvement is as drummer with Eleventh
Dream Day).**

Well, I am not remembering so much tuneful singing
on my part in EDD. In the studio I suppose I was
given a few shots at singing, but live singing behind
the drums is not so easy.  Over the years it became
easier and better - or at least I hope so - but still
today I would rather sing playing no instruments so
that I can concentrate fully on the song.

I think early on I would have said that Freakwater
was perhaps a more creative outlet for me, but now I
think I have found a way to get the most out of both.
I adore playing the drums and if I don't get to do it
for a long time it is truly a big void, and I want to hit
stuff. So it's best If I get to play the drums. As far as
the two projects conflicting, the verdict is still out. At
first I did not think so. Musically I don't think they
conflict in the least, but the time each band requires
was a problem, and EDD lost out more often than
not, Looking back I realise this, but Tortoise (EDD
bassist Doug McComb's other band) was also gaining
momentum so it was difficult to find time for all of us
to be together. Rick (Rizzo, EDD frontman and Janet's
husband) is the one who suffered the most from it all
and I am very sorry for that.

**There's a detectable element of melancholia
or world-weariness in Freakwater's music. Can
you comment on this?**

If I had any sense it would be through. That's not in
response to your interview, but in regard to my
anguish.  You see the reason I keep going is because
when somebody really does me wrong I can stealthily
reveal the true horror they have perpetrated against
me, or me against them, without too much damage.
Then I feel all better.  To tell ya the truth I usually only
give myself a hard time. My songs are little lessons to
myself and if I sing them enough maybe I will learn the
little lessons.  I am a very sick person. Did you hear the
joke about how do you get an artist off of your front
porch? You tip him for the pizza.

**So who's done you wrong and can you tell me
more about what you mean by sick?**

Okay do you want names? Where do I start, maybe
with Warren Beatty; then there is Johnny Depp, Iggy
Pop, Bill Clinton, Clint Eastwood, Johnny Paycheck. . .
they all broke my heart. Loved me and then left me.

In regard to your question of sickness. I suppose
in the continuum of sickness I fall within its
parameters. I guess. For the most part I have grown
accustomed to my quirks and I would hate to see
them go for good.

I truly don't know how (my quirks) affect what I
do (musically), and if I could explain what I do and
why I do it then I wouldn't have any excuses left for
my troubling behaviours.You can't claim psychosis if
you have a clear notion of what you're up to. I just
love to sing. I really love to just sing. I sing all the time,
in the car, in the shower, doing the dishes. It drives my
son a little crazy. I write in bursts. I won't write
anything for almost a year and then I will have a mad
rush of ideas and come up with five or six tunes. Five
or six is a lot for me, but I have been lucky enough
to not have been the main writer. My dream is to be
a back-up singer for a funky soul review. I could wear
a long gown, wear my hair up, and do that back and
forth stepping thing that back-up singers all know
how to do.

Kiddie Altamont ?
Oh my I had a nutty Sunday I performed with Jon
Langford (Mekons) at a concert for children. Jon had
them in the palm of his hand with fabulous Burl Ives'
tunes and other kiddie sing-along classics. I, on the
other hand, felt like I was at Kiddie Altamont. Cups
were flying, children were running across the stage,
and the din was a force to be reckoned with. I was
up there singing as slow as molasses, performing
songs about children dying of various things such as
leukemia and snake bites. I don't know what the hell
I was thinking. If you are ever asked to sing songs for
kids I suggest not doing As Tears Go By; although I felt
I did a pretty good version of it. It was kind of eerie.
As I sang the lines about wanting to hear the
children sing and the rain coming down, it was all
coming true right before my eyes. I made enough
cash to take my family out for dinner so all turned
out well.

**Finally, some thoughts on combining music,
family life, and the day gig.**

I think of playing music as a privilege. I am exceedingly
lucky to be able to get past what it is that makes
people think they can not, or do not have what it
takes. I don't mean what it takes to play a show, but
what it takes to just pick up a guitar and write a song,
or even sing a song just to make doing chores a little
more enjoyable. I certainly don't feel that I am owed a
standard of living that is reasonable for this luck, or
talent, or whatever you want to call it. Sure, I would
rather not work at a desk everyday and for most of
my life I have not had to. If I toured much more than I
do, and put much more effort into selling records than
I do, then maybe I wouldn't have to come to this job
everyday, but I wouldn't be home with my son. Being
around my son is what makes me happy. Besides, I find
that the more you take part in the world around you
- the everyday world that most deal with - the more
you discover very kind and interesting people that
have interesting stories.

*End Time* is available now on Thrill Jockey, who have
also released Eleventh Dream Day's latest, *The Stalled
Parade.*