

TEI SHI

Biography:

Crawl Space documents Tei Shi's transformation from the cautious and curious new kid on the block to a confident, self-possessed and buzz worthy artist. Written and recorded over a year and a half, the album traces a much wider arc, from Tei Shi's earliest musical explorations to this, her first long player. Growth is never easy, though, and if the title makes the process sound difficult, even claustrophobic, that's because it was. In fact, there is a palpable physicality surrounding this record, and it reveals itself everywhere: from the album's song titles (Keep Running, Lift Me), to its rhythms, to its astonishing cover art. Constant motion is a fact of life. A real, physical crawlspace fits only one person and demands that person move forward, out and through it. Tei Shi's debut evokes that feeling and the experience of centering oneself, changing focus.

Born Valerie Teicher, Tei Shi remembers composing songs as early as eight years old - sometimes in a diary, other times recording herself on tapes (some of which are featured on the album) - setting down phrases or melodies as they came to her. Born in Buenos Aires and growing up between (Bogota,) Colombia and (Vancouver,) Canada, she began dreaming of herself as a singer, a performer and an artist. Perhaps symbolic of this newfound determination, around the same time, she struggled with an extreme fear of the night and entered a period of insomnia. To combat this new fear of the dark and unknown she forced herself to hide inside her family home's crawlspace for a minute each night, in order to confront her fear. This crawl space became a sort of symbol for her at this formative phase of her life.

Teicher treated her musical aspirations the same way for some time - comforting and important, but still secret, still too personal to really show the world. "For the first year or two, I was testing the waters," she says. "I wanted to be in the background a bit, to put the music out there and have it be more of an abstract thing. All of the earlier artwork was a little more ethereal, too; it didn't have me on it." Even as she began to study and release music, this instinct to hide kept a hold on her.

With each new song and performance, however, successes and encouragement began to pile up and while at the beginning Tei Shi flourished in a collaborative and peer-based environment she realized over time she needed to to reclaim her own singular creative space. "I started to realize I didn't have a clear sense of myself as an artist independent from the people I was surrounded by," she says. Ultimately it took the end of a relationship that had begun around the inception of herself as Tei Shi to spearhead her own musical development. "That relationship was not only a huge part of my life, it was an integral part of the identity I had formed around Tei Shi," she explains. "It had spanned my whole experience as Tei Shi and had been very interwoven with it." That breakup came to a head partway through recording the songs that would come to make up *Crawl Space*,

and while the relationship is deeply embedded into the album, the songs explore something less like heartbreak, something closer to the deconstruction of identity.

Throughout every song, Tei Shi brings a remarkable clarity to the very act of vulnerability, to exposing oneself and inviting others in. Album opener and lead single "Keep Running" is as telling a song as any, balancing futuristic, deconstructed pop with an expert dash of something new wave, almost italo-disco. Tei Shi's voice cuts through with a sweet melody and a warning to "keep running, keep running for me." It is as much a command as an act of mercy, and the urgency is met with the finality of a refrain that "time is up." "How Far", a song Tei Shi describes as among her most personal and fulfilling, is minimal but bent on pushing maximal limits. As Tei Shi's soprano reaches dizzying heights, "How Far" explores what we do when a relationship becomes destructive, when you're trying to change one another into something the other person simply can't be. Here, Tei Shi wonders aloud how much can one person or even one bond between two people take before it falls apart, as she asserts that "If it pleases you to see me struggling, I will...If it pleases you to see me sorry, I'm not." "Say You Do" follows immediately and doubles down. Tei Shi's voice is crystal clear and unaffected here, her self-awareness front and center.

"Earlier in my career, I hid because I wanted first and foremost to be seen as a creative person making music. I thought that if I presented myself as a singer people wouldn't get that I write, that I produce too. "People have this idea that you can only check some of the proverbial boxes as a creative woman, that you can't be attractive and sexual and a great singer and a solid performer and a great writer and be in control of your creative space, as if some of those are mutually exclusive for a human woman. My ambition is to represent all of those without having to sacrifice one for the other.

Like the album's themes, its visual concepts reflect Tei Shi's personal sea changes. Visual nods to motifs like Flashdance were never intentional, but make sense in hindsight. "I wanted something more raw, feminine and sexy but still real," says Tei Shi. She counts artists like Fiona Apple, Debbie Harry, and PJ Harvey among her inspirations - women who sexualized themselves in a way that wasn't contrived but instead elevated each's independence and creative authority. "For this record, I definitely realized I want to be identifiable as me, my personality and my music. You want that connection, you want people to get who you are, so you have to show them." Similarly, *Crawl Space* would be incomplete without the gorgeous "Como Si", a nod to Tei Shi's childhood in Colombia and her bilingual upbringing. Originally written as a poem before she set it to a melody, it is the first song Tei Shi has ever released in Spanish. "I really wanted to do something in Spanish because it's such a big part of my identity. I love the language and it's a way of preserving this part of myself.

Crawl Space traces the arc of major changes across every facet of Tei Shi's life, and embodies the sound of an artist creating and commanding her own space. And while the process can be claustrophobic, Tei Shi proves that it can also be liberating, even exhilarating.