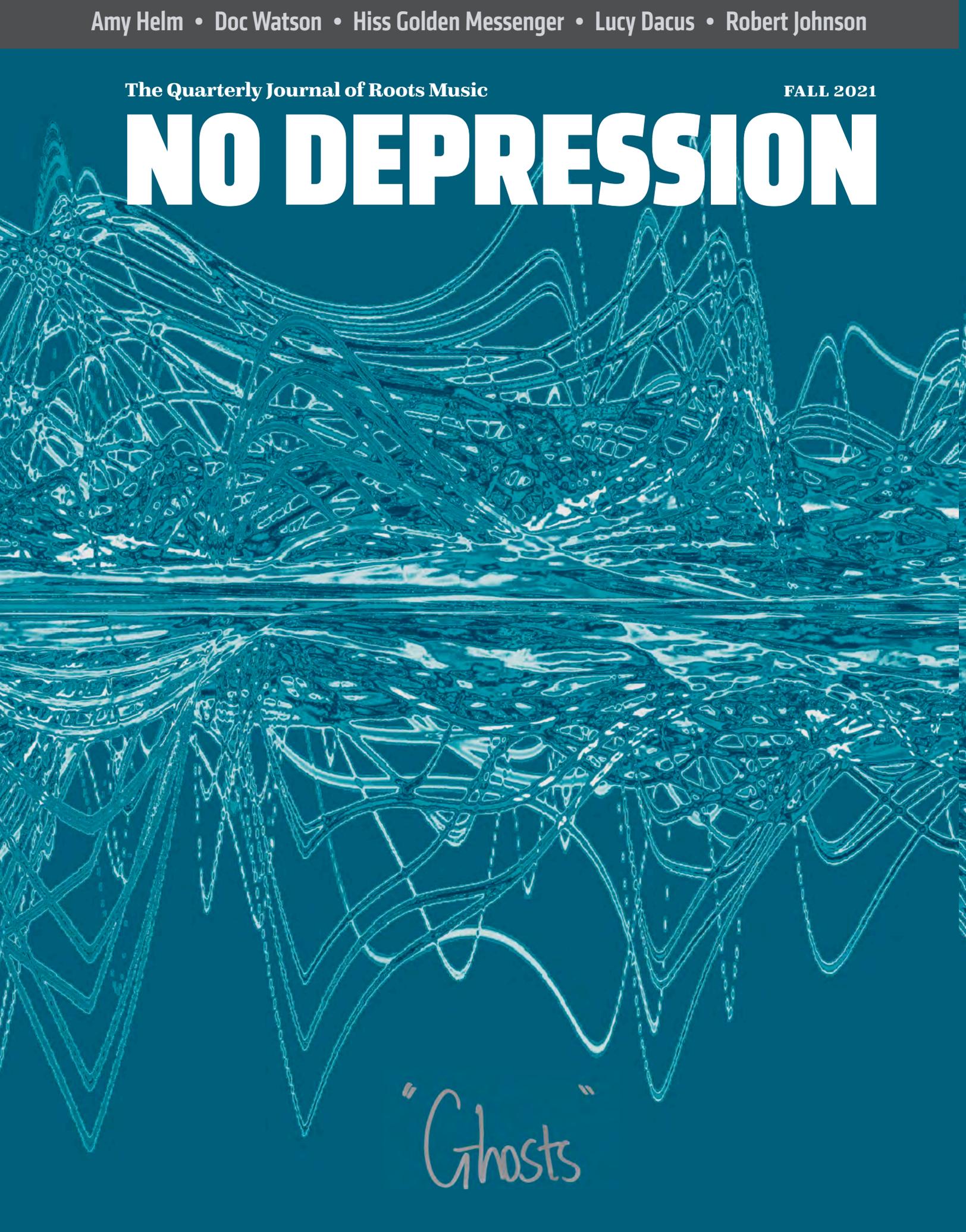


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NO DEPRESSION



"Ghosts"

VISITING OTHER SELVES

Lucy Dacus' *Home Video* reflects who she used to be

by Caitlin Wolper

When she was younger, Lucy Dacus lived by a number of rules. No drinking, no drugs, no sex — all hallmarks of her religious upbringing.

Commenting on her past self, Dacus muses, “She [was] the type of person that would say the word ‘wedlock,’ just deeply inheriting vocabulary from church.” And that previous version of herself apparently wouldn’t approve of how the singer-songwriter lives now.

On her third album, *Home Video*, which came out in June, Dacus revisits her childhood in Richmond, Virginia,

through clandestine, episodic glimpses that include Vacation Bible School, old movies, and sneaking out of her parents’ house. Weighted with years of perspective, the album follows the ghost of who Dacus once was.

“Through this album cycle, I’ve been feeling watched by a high school version of me. I feel like I kind of reawakened her by making these songs, and I feel this impulse to represent her in a way that she would be happy with, and yet she doesn’t exist,” Dacus says. “The closest thing is me now, but I do feel judged by and watched by her.”

That anxiety is pressing from the opening track. On “Hot and Heavy,” she sings, “Being back here makes me hot in the face / Hot blood in my pulsing veins / heavy memories weighing on my brain,” instantly immersed in the heat of recollection. What was most difficult when Dacus looked to the past, she says, was confronting both who she was and what she did. Even if nothing was objectively irresponsible or cruel, perspective caused revelations when she considered the formerly mundane.

Such a revelation is clear on the Auto-Tuned “Partner in Crime,” the



manipulated musicality of which echoes the exaggerated truth of its narrative — from “When I asked you to coffee / Could you tell I don’t drink it?” to “When you asked my age, I lied ... It’s not your fault, it’s mine.” Written about her relationship with an older person, Dacus reflects, “At the time I felt like I was prepared for it ... [but] just because you know the risks doesn’t mean that you’re impervious to them.”

Now, she continues, “I feel like I’m constantly reassessing [the past] because I’ve realized how little insight I had in the moment. If anything, I’ve

learned to trust myself less through this [album-writing] process because I’ll read back through my journals and expect to see something that was really important to me ... but I was editing in real time. And I can admit things now. I couldn’t admit them, and so I trust myself about who I was when I was 16 more now than I would have trusted my 16-year-old self.”

‘Endless Care’

Dacus hesitates to describe her younger self in specific terms; she speaks more

readily of the church doctrines that defined her early years. However, one trait has remained steady throughout her life: She places friendship as the “highest form of love” and prides herself on hosting, gathering, and connecting people with friends, housing, and other opportunities.

Home Video’s retellings make clear her endless benevolence: a determination to shelter, guard, and care for those she loves. It’s implicit on “Going Going Gone,” a warm track almost reminiscent of children’s nursery rhymes in its bouncy simplicity.

boygenius



After the group vocals, there's laughter and conversation among her and the backup singers; Dacus thanks them, then says, "I owe y'all ... whatever you ask for."

Her collaborators on that song, Phoebe Bridgers and Julien Baker, who join her in side project boygenius, are deeply familiar with what Bridgers describes as Dacus' "endless care." She's "all-knowing and very wise," Bridgers continues. And more directly, "She sees through my bullshit."

Baker agrees: "Lucy's quite an open person, an inviting person, in a genuine way. She facilitates inclusion, and it brings her joy."

Both agree Dacus is fiercely protective. As Dacus says, "I want everyone in my life to be experiencing the maximum amount of joy and security that they can, and I will crush any force that is trying to ruin that in whatever way that I can."

Sometimes on *Home Video*, it's almost painful for listeners to hear how readily Dacus gives away that love. In tender, lilting "Christine," Dacus bursts with adoration, while also protesting her friend's relationship: "But if you get married, I'd object / Throw my shoe at the altar and lose your respect / I'd rather lose my dignity / Than lose you to somebody who won't make you happy." Even writing and releasing the song meant Dacus ran the risk of losing "Christine," but she was willing to sacrifice their relationship in favor of her friend's future well-being. In "Thumbs," too, Dacus comforts a friend who meets with her father after 10 years apart, singing that they're "connected by a pure coincidence" and stressing, "I would kill him / If you let me."

On an album that's so intertwined with personal stories, there's a risk of upsetting or offending people who are part of that past — it's something Dacus was worried about, even though, in a

self-professed "bold move," she included the names of everyone who inspired a song in her record packaging's acknowledgements.

"I recognize in this album, more than myself, all the other people. This album feels less like auto-fiction [than] a catalog of characters from my life. I'm the consistent character, but every single song — apart from 'Hot and Heavy,' which is kind of about me — is about a specific person in my life," Dacus says. "I had not really felt able, up until this point, to speak about other people's lives: I felt like I could only touch on my own."

Personal Lore

Home Video focuses on the bigger implications of what, at the time, appeared to be inconsequential events in Dacus' early life. The record also shows the reverse — the moments that seemed important at the time, but were far less consequential in the long run.

"I actually think about ghosts a lot in different capacities, I mean literally ghosts, like, I believe in ghosts," Dacus says. "I didn't for a long time, but then you have experiences, and then you can't not believe in ghosts." But for her, dredging up these memories meant confronting ghosts far more familiar, recent, and living.

"There are some people that I've given power to by writing a song about them, even people who I don't want to have power, so that feels complicated — to breathe new life into something that I had actually closed or thought I had closed," Dacus says.

"You're shaped by everything that you've come into contact with, whether you like it or not — things that you had control over, but also things that you didn't have control over. And I've been shaped by pain that people have put me through," Dacus says. "And I'm not saying everyone should experience pain,

it's a growing exercise, but I do think that I grew because of those things, or at least I have an awareness that follows me."

It's an awareness that the film-boy prototype in "Brando" only liked the idea of her ("All I need for you to admit / Is that you never knew me like you thought you did"). It's an awareness on "First Time" that the past informs the future ("I can't go back to who I was before I met you / I can't undo what I've done, and I wouldn't want to"). And above all, it's an awareness of the importance that relationships have played in her life: Her love for and relationships with others have been integral in the development of her identity.

Dacus has honored current relationships by including "people that I love and trust to be a part of my work so I can capture aspects of them forever," including a friend's art and tapping another to be a stylist. Then of course, there's the inclusion of a number of singers beyond Baker and Bridgers on the record.

"The most meaningful [inclusion] to me was making the 'Hot and Heavy' video and having my grandma be in it. She has dementia, and doesn't actually remember recording, but whenever she watches the video, it's like, 'There I am!'" Dacus says. "Every time, it's like the first time."

Perhaps the most potent aspect of *Home Video* is how it captures Dacus' personal lore, a diary entry revised, amended, and honest. Though the stories are bottled to the record, they live on as a package that will follow Dacus into the future, an inextricable part of her and her artistic trajectory.

"I had a friend who, we really liked this idea of future ghosts when we were younger, and how you build your ghost now," Dacus says. "Recording in any sort of way is like binding the soul to something. All my journals contain me and all my records contain me." ■