

## Laura Marling and Mike Lindsay on surreal, yeti-fronted project LUMP: “We’ve gotta give him the right cuddles”



Laura Marling and Mike Lindsay of LUMP Credit: Mathew Parri & Esteban Diacono

By Larry Bartleet

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### **The pair told us about how Father John Misty, Ivor Cutler and a crab bite informed their surreal new album**

For a project as dreamy and cerebral as LUMP, its birthplace is an improbable one. On 11 June, 2016, Laura Marling and Tunng’s Mike Lindsay met for the first time at a bowling alley inside The O2, while the former was supporting Neil Young on his UK arena tour. Just two days later, the pair were in the studio recording what would become a 32-minute collaborative album, and within the week Marling had recorded all her parts.

It’s only now, 22 months on, that the self-titled album has been announced for release via Dead Oceans on June 1. It’s an album informed by the Surrealist Manifesto, Father John Misty and Marling’s six-year-old goddaughter, and the project itself is lovingly depicted by a yeti that the duo insist is LUMP made manifest. “It will continue to create itself from here on,” says the accompanying promo. “Lindsay and Marling will assist it as necessary.”

NME called the pair up to talk through the project they’re calling a “cyclical drone journey album”.

## **What did you like about each others' work when you met each other?**

**Laura:** "I'd been a Tunng fan – and early on in my career we'd intersected a couple of times but never really met. I didn't know Mike was one of the main men behind Tunng'.

**Mike:** "I've been a fan of Laura's for a long time. I have a memory of us playing at Cambridge Folk Festival together back once upon a year, and being blown away. I also saw her playing at Hop Farm Festival in 2010 and was quite impressed with the whistling... 'Devil's Spoke' was a favourite of mine for a long time. It was just really nice to be able to meet Laura and ask to do something together'.

## **How did working with one another compare to your other collaborations?**

**Mike:** "It was great. There's only really one other person that I've worked with – Sam from Tunng – that's able to hear an idea of a piece of music and then take a pen and pad and scroll down sublime stream-of-consciousness poetry, and then get on a microphone and turn that into song – and then leave the studio – within about an hour and a half. And I'm sat there going: 'What the fuck just happened?'

**Laura:** "It was the first time actually that I've left... not *left* music to somebody else, because it was already there... but it was a real wordless process in a way. We didn't discuss what we were doing very much. That's when it feels magic. I think we respected each other's positions, in what our roles both were, so it was just easy. And it was really quick as well – my part only took about six days."

## **Is this the first time you've collaborated with someone since the Mystery Jets, Laura?**

**Laura:** "Basically, yeah."

## **Would you want to do a bit more of that now?**

**Laura:** "I think it has to be the right thing. This has turned out to be a proper 'doing it together' thing, rather than just singing backing vocals on other people's tracks – which actually I've done a lot of. And I like that, but it doesn't feel quite the same. I think I'd like to do more, yeah'.

## **A few years ago you expressed a distaste for drums, Laura – have you changed your mind about that?**

**Laura:** "I have changed my mind. My tastes change, and my voice has changed, and my musical interests have changed. I'm a bit more at ease about it. I think that was probably said at a time when I was Bonnie Prince Billy-obsessed and I wanted to take all the cymbals away from everybody, but I don't feel that way any more."

## **At what point did you decide what LUMP would sound like?**

**Mike:** "I had a couple of things that I was working on, without knowing what they were going to be. I was a bit shocked when Laura said she was up for coming to try something out, literally within a couple of days of meeting. So I was like: 'This is all I have'. Luckily that all gelled really well. But yeah, I had this idea of making some music where everything blended into each other. I didn't know until Laura got involved that it was going to be magic."

## **Laura, you mentioned Kate Bush's singing voice in a recent interview. Was that someone you were wanting to channel?**

**Laura:** "Not consciously. I was surprised by that, actually, because I'd never consciously thought about singing style, or emulating someone else's. Obviously I was brought up on Joni Mitchell, so that's how I learnt to sing. It was Mike's direction actually – you had a few things in mind for what you wanted my voice to do that you'd heard me do before, I guess?"

**Mike:** "Yeah – but actually, listening to what we've ended up with, I've never totally heard you do some of the things that you're doing on the LUMP record. You go through all ranges of your vocal capacity and it changes from song to song. It's quite special!"

## **How did you decide on the yeti figure representing LUMP?**

**Laura:** "I can't actually remember now. It felt like the product of mine and Mike's working together was something beyond what either of us wanted to take credit for, so we thought we'd just bring LUMP into it and let him take all the credit!"

**Mike:** "I think it goes quite well with your goddaughter's naming of the band as well."

**Laura:** "Yeah, my six-year-old goddaughter came up with the 'concept', I guess!"

## **Had you played her the music?**

**Laura:** "No I hadn't, but I had just met Mike, and a couple of days later I was doing a festival at the Royal Festival Hall, and my goddaughter came to soundcheck. She was playing the drums, and I asked her what she would call a new band, and she said 'Lump' without even a moment's breath. So that was it."

## **How do you think the yeti ties into the surrealism of the album?**

**Laura:** "The yeti became a suitable analogy for the animal unconscious, the randomness – and the weird dancing, like you've never learned how to dance. It became a fitting thing to put everything on. He'll continue his journey in the videos and keep getting weirder!"

## **How did surrealism come into the lyrics?**

**Laura:** "I'd been reading the *Surrealist Manifesto*, and then also this book about Leonora Carrington, who was married to Max Ernst for a long time – and I was listening to a lot of Ivor Cutler, weird Scottish poetry. I was fully in that dome..."

## **Is literature always an influence on your lyrics?**

**Laura:** "Yeah, I think so – for creating imagery and where to pull things from, surrealism and people like Jodorowsky – who are really into the unconscious, and letting the unconscious come to the surface – that's where the best pool of weird imagery is. So yeah, definitely."

## **There's a very powerful image of a crab in 'Shake Your Shelter'. How did you pick that?**

**Laura:** "The morning that I went into the studio with Mike, it was the summer and my friend had just been bitten by a crab. He felt like he had a spiritual awakening because it was such a shock. He was joking obviously, but I thought that was quite spectacular, that there's some gravity to the existence of a crab that it can impart on you."

## **You've said another lyric – "crooner in crisis" – is something Father John Misty said to describe how he wanted to be lit. Do you think he'll find out that he's been immortalised in song like that?**

**Laura:** "I imagine someone will get it back to him. I hope he doesn't try and get a writing credit on the song. That'd be super awkward."

## **The album ends with a two-minute credits track where you read out the personnel, Laura. What made you decide to do that?**

**Laura:** "With literature or academic work, you always credit people that contributed to the work, and I'm stuck on this thing that nobody's given credit in music. I think it's really weird – it's really out of touch actually, considering how collaborative music is now – especially having 18 people writing a Beyoncé track or whatever – and so Mike, you set this weird musical backdrop off, and we just tried to read the credits in a slightly interesting way. Is that right, Mike?"

**Mike:** "Yeah. You were mainly saying you were concerned with streaming and digital platforms, where you don't get to see the credits, because there's no notes. That might be changing now, but that was the idea. On the vinyl version there's just reverb of the reading of the credits, because you *can* read the credits. So it's even more twisted out, which is pretty spectacular."

## **You've called this a 'cyclical drone journey album', Mike. Explain.**

**Mike:** "I just put that on the website yesterday! 'Cyclical' meaning: the whole album's tied together with this flute, a resampled drone, and each track's in the same key. So as one track finishes, the other track can then blend out of the previous track, and as the credits or the reverb of the credits roll out, it could start all over again with the drone, completing the cycle. And that is the journey! It's quite a short record, so it's good when it feels like you could start over again and it takes on a different sonic platform on second listen."

## **It's a bit like your four-song suite, Laura – was it a similar experience creating this?**

**Laura:** "It was actually – a similar writing process. Not that they're linked in any other way, except for the stream of consciousness. I think, setting a drone-y background, I might be particularly susceptible to cults or things, because I get easily lulled into a slightly mindless space."

## **Why was it such a long time between recording and release?**

**Mike:** "It kind of got played with. I would say that you had quite a lot to do with the shaping of the music, Laura, because I would send versions to you and you said what you did and didn't like. I think we'd wrapped up the record at the end of 2016, but then your album ['Semper Femina'] came out. So it's been so nice to pick it up again now and put it together as a live project."

## **How will it differ live? You must need more than two of you...**

**Mike:** "There's four of us!"

**Laura:** "It's different. It's really cool, but it's different from the record because you can't have 20 of me doing the backing vocals."

**Mike:** "It's more band-y, almost shoegaze-y in parts."

## **What's the future of LUMP?**

**Mike:** "I hope there's a future of LUMP.. I guess we've gotta give him the right cuddles. Or her. See what the whispers are."

**Laura:** "See how he takes to touring. Might not like it."

**Mike:** "One step at a time. But I'm really enjoying it so far, we'll see what happens."

## **What about in your own separate capacities? What are your future plans with music?**

**Mike:** "Tunng has got a new record coming out at the end of the year, which will be the original line-up for the first time since 2007. That's quite exciting. This has been a wonderful way of getting back into sonic experimentation, and now there's a Tunng record as well. That's enough for me, really, this and that."

**Laura:** "And I'm just this. I'm always writing, I always write, but there's usually a point where I feel like I've turned a corner and the last record has ended. I haven't turned that corner yet I don't think – I'm still in 'Semper Femina' mode."

## **But you've got a summer of LUMP coming up?**

**Laura:** "Yeah, it's the season of LUMP. We're doing Latitude..."

**Mike:** "Yeah, and a handful of special unique shows at the beginning of June."

## **You're doing two shows in one night in London – is the small venue size important for the LUMP experience, do you think?**

**Laura:** "I think so, so that LUMP doesn't get too overwhelmed."

**Mike:** "It feels like an intimate project and I think the shows should represent that also. That's what we decided."

**Laura:** "Of course, if it goes stratospherically well, then we will be doing stadiums. We're not averse to that."