

# Carthago Delenda Est

## Music from Janet Feder, T H I S C L O S E

Posted on December 9, 2015 by Part-Time Audiophile 3 comments  
— *by Paul Ashby*



([http://parttimeaudiophile.com/2015/12/09/music-from-janet-feder-t-h-i-s-c-l-o-s-e/20150330\\_daliophoto\\_\\_dsc7602-c/](http://parttimeaudiophile.com/2015/12/09/music-from-janet-feder-t-h-i-s-c-l-o-s-e/20150330_daliophoto__dsc7602-c/)) Janet Feder is from Boulder, Colorado. She's a songwriter, a singer, and plays a custom-made nylon string baritone guitar. Sometimes she treats the strings with thread and metal objects. Her orbit includes folk and avant-garde, yet her music isn't any of those things. Or maybe it's all those things ... while totally eclipsing the sum of its parts.

Janet brings substantial musical heft to the table.

Her newest self-released album, *THIS CLOSE*, has been available digitally (<https://janetfeder.bandcamp.com>) for months now; I've been listening to the FLAC version since its May release. The vinyl, CD, and DSD files, however, were just issued in November. An SACD with a 5.1 mix is expected soon.

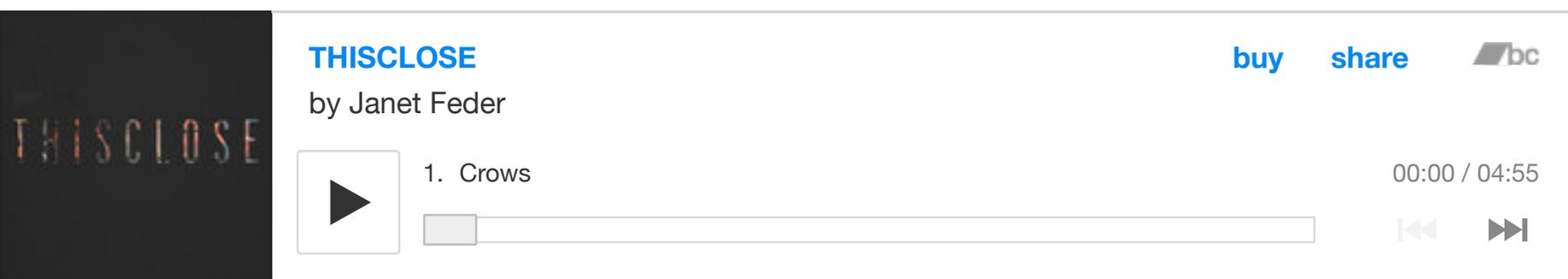
On paper, some may feel tempted to approach Feder's work with caution. Artists with an avant-garde background sometimes build barriers — a calculated alienation, a certain brand of affected disaffection. It's a conceit that can send the intrepid music journalist scrambling (more than usual) for the thesaurus.

Janet Feder isn't about walls. Time spent with her recordings is not, in Laurie Anderson's words, Difficult Listening Hour. The listener won't be held at arm's length. Unfortunately (for me), this approachability doesn't make communicating her appeal any simpler. In this case — barriers or no — I'm tempted to just recuse myself from reviewing this new album of hers, because I'm concerned I like it too much (yes, this is all about ME).

So how close is *T H I S C L O S E*?

Most of the instrumentation is fairly sparse, with exception of the opener, "Crows."

A rumble of flammed toms is the fanfare for Feder's heavily-filtered vocal. Reverb is everywhere; the atmosphere is languid, dreamlike. Janet's spidery guitar lines spin silk around the percussion. The song's dark feel is buttressed by heavily effected, sustained guitar solos by engineer / co-producer Mike Yach. Headphone listening reveals a Lanois / *Le Noise*-type vocal mix, where snippets roam from channel to channel, then disappear and reappear, altered, via appropriately warped analog effects.



**THISCLOSE** [buy](#) [share](#) 

by Janet Feder

1. Crows 00:00 / 04:55

This is like nothing Janet's ever recorded, yet it's still a...well, thoroughly *Feder* song. When "Crows" concludes, it's like finally surfacing after being under water a few seconds too long.

"Ticking Time Bomb" follows. A Bruce Langhorne-esque banjo is plucked somewhat hesitatingly. Bass clarinet wanders up and down the scale and an accordion washes and wheezes, sounding as though it's working up the gumption to mimic a pedal steel guitar.

*If I could be you I'd know what to do  
but I am not  
you are you  
at least that much is true  
underneath my pillow  
sewn between the sheets  
there are no more words even when I speak.*



The breezy vocal shows Feder at her most confident; it also seems dissociated from the disjointed accompaniment. After a couple of verses, the instrumentation breaks loose: there's a fusillade of fragile things shattering on the floor *a la* Joy Division's "I Remember Nothing." When the song finally lurches to a close, the coda is the faint horn of a distant train.

Following the two vocal compositions, the majority of the rest of the album is instrumental, and it's on those songs that Janet's guitar stands out. There's a unique rhythmic groove that sometimes seems transposed from Joni Mitchell's best playing, say, on "Amelia" or "Hejira". Some of the

instrumentals are freeform-ish, and some more composed. In the latter camp, the guitar/piano duet "Happy Everyday, Me"'s churning, focused, driven energy springs from Feder's guitar, which seems less prepared (as in treated) than on some other tracks. "Happy Everyday, You" showcases her prepared guitar talents, with some impressively nuanced stringed acrobatics.

"No Apology" and "You As Part of a Whole" veer into more freeform territory, with improvisational space moving to the forefront. "No Apology" features very distant (and then very present) sustained electric guitar drones and feedback from Mike Yach. "She Sleeps With The Sky" goes through several mood changes. A faint background of crickets, however, is a near-constant. Paul Fowler's multitracked, wordless voice — alternately wraithlike, then Mellotron-heavenly — is woven through the latter portions of the song. It's a high point of the lyric-less tunes on the album, and benefits from high-volume headphone listening.

**THISCLOSE** by Janet Feder [buy](#) [share](#)

1. Crows 00:00 / 04:55

*THISCLOSE*'s title track is an instrumental with Morse code-esque bleeps, improvised (?) intermittent chording, roaming reverb, and an extended "barely audible" ending section that reminds me of the closing bell-drones of Eno's "Some of Them Are Old", albeit slowed to a speed that's equal parts pleasurable and interminable.

While I'm invoking arbitrary comparisons, Hugo Largo's sound comes to mind — stillness, depth, with the silence between the notes sharing center stage. I also sometimes think of Steve Tibbetts when listening to Feder's instrumental pieces. There's a similar breadth of emotion, a sense that

the songs come from conflict, external and otherwise. There's stories here, and even without lyrics — perhaps *due* to the absence of lyrics — those stories come across vividly.

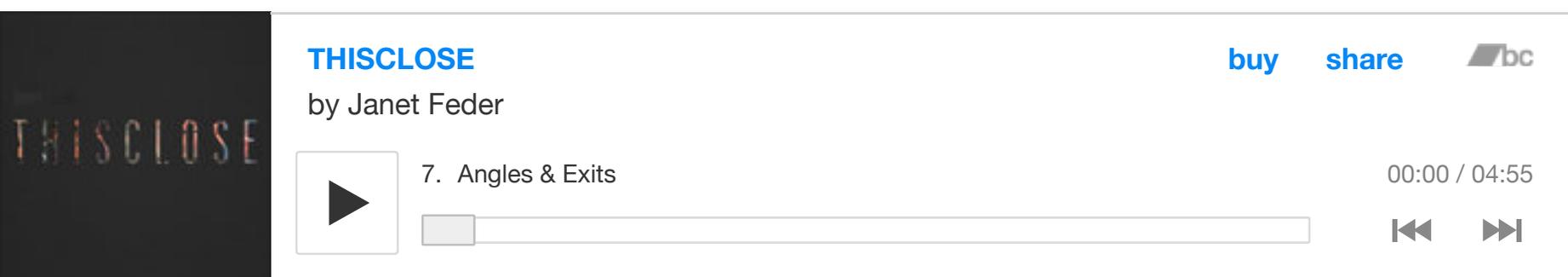
The instrumentals are all excellent, and have their distinctly individual vibes. Janet's vocal work, though, is where a good part of her maturation from album to album is most evident.

On her 2012 album, *Songs With Words*, there's a song called "White Men Landing".



It's an understated gem that resonates long after the last chord has faded; it sounds better than ever three years later.

On *THISCLOSE* there's a song entitled "Angles and Exits." Feder's been performing (<http://www.npr.org/event/music/156997677/janet-feder-tiny-desk-concert>) the song live (<https://vimeo.com/46516180>) for years, but this studio version is as close as it gets to definitive.



And if the song's resigned, pensive intensity wasn't enough to keep you on edge, Feder's final harmonic chord takes a good twenty seconds to decay.

Great songs. Great stories. Well played. Keen songwriting. How's the recording?

Super Audio Center's 32 channel DSD rig at Immersive Studios in Boulder shoulders the responsibility. All effects are analog. The background is silent, black. The acoustic instruments have an uncanny, audibly tactile quality, the electric guitars burn, and the close-mic'd vocals make it seem as though the singer is inches from your ear. The DSD files have an eerily preternatural feel; the 24/88 FLACs are spookily real, as well.

The LP was pressed at Quality and my copy was devoid of surface noise, with a dynamic range blooming with blissful mids and bass. There's a silkscreened deluxe LP package that whispers low-key extravagance: a die-cut sleeve with two color inserts, all wrapped up in a silkscreened box.

I've heard this album on LP, CD, FLAC and DSD, and listened to the transcoded MP3s on an iPad. I've played the CD on repeat in my truck's trusty mid-fi Rockford Fosgate system, and streamed it to my backyard patio's cheap Polk "weather-resistant" speakers. The 5.1 SACD mix, when it arrives, will test the mettle of what passes for my home theatre system. It'll all be good. Great, even. You don't need an audiophile pile of hardware to appreciate Janet's music, but if you need something new and unique to show off your fancy-pants system, this is it.

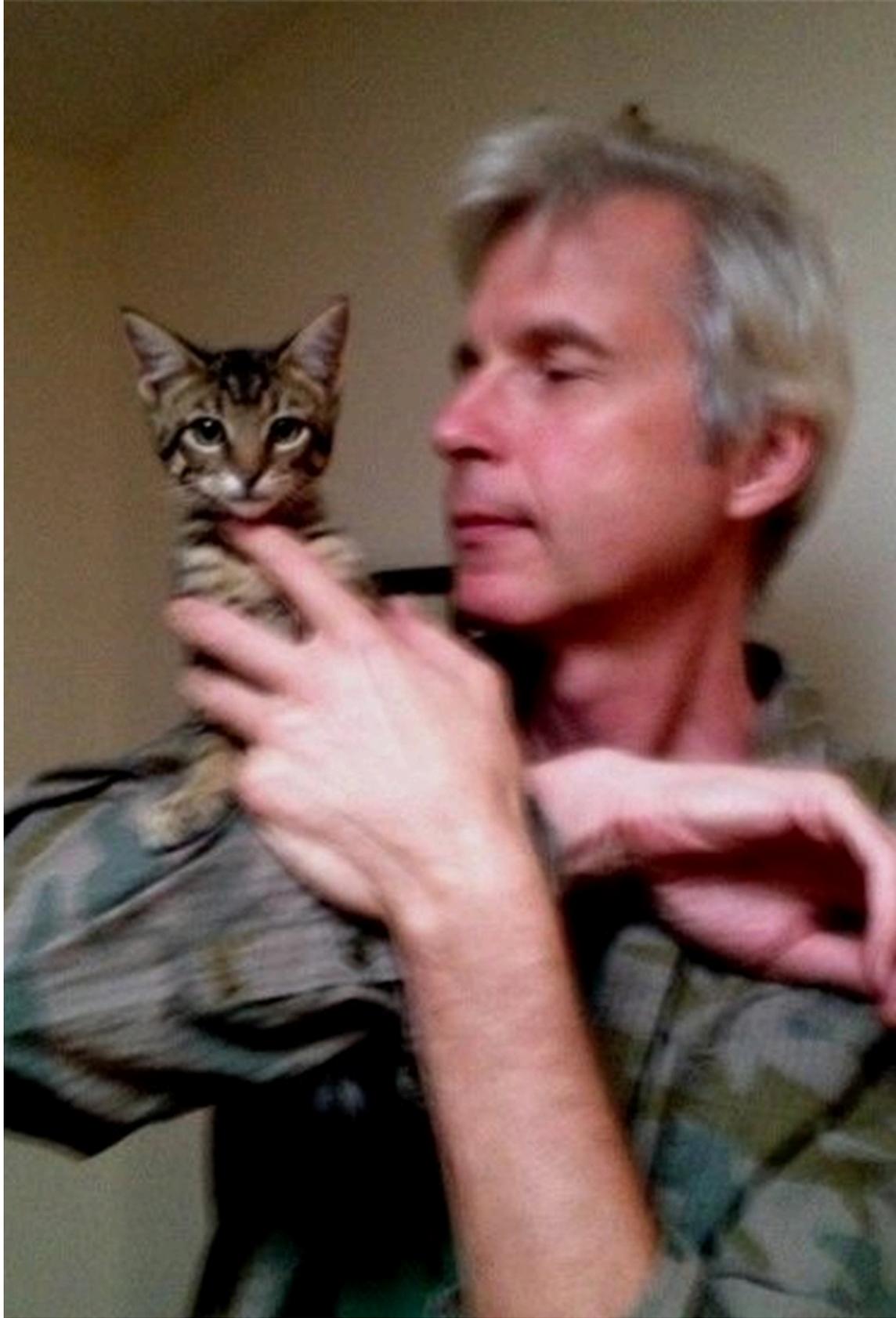
Summation. You want summation? If you pressed me to define the genre[s] occupied by *T H I S C L O S E*, I couldn't. But I could venture some likely landscapes.

Like all the best music, this is road music. Whether that be crawling in freeway traffic, or on US395 north out of Bishop, or on a half-empty airplane at dusk heading west over the Rockies, or a more figurative, contemplative journey at night with headphones and a drink or two while staring out the window, watching it get dark.

*T H I S C L O S E* is at once intimate and open. There are no walls. Janet Feder is that close.

The album is available on Janet's Bandcamp page (<https://janetfeder.bandcamp.com>). Its wholesale distribution is handled by Hostile City (<http://www.hcdistro.com/store/news/>).

## About the Author



(<http://parttimeaudiophile.com/contributors/paultimmy080314-copy/>) Paul's been working in music retail and wholesale since 1980. He realizes this doesn't necessarily mean he's a smart person. He has contributed to PS Audio's PS Tracks site and Tower Records' PULSE! magazine.

Paul hoards vinyl and has been known to resemble a computer audio apologist, but he's hardly ever defensive about it. He spends far too much time not putting his CD collection up for sale on Discogs. Among his other hobbies are wandering inexorably along the audiophile hardware upgrade path, Macintosh computer futzing, digital photography, cat herding, DIY landscaping, and trying to keep orchids and tropical plants alive. He insists on acknowledging that his sweetheart, Kate, cheerfully (and indispensably) helps prune some of the denser verbiage in his contributions here — although she evidently didn't have much to do with this particular thatch of text.

You can find Paul regularly on his own site, *Anything But MP3* (<http://www.anythingbutmp3.com/>).

tagged with lp, Review, vinyl

◦ Music

### 3 comments

Paul December 9, 2015 5:58 PM

0

0

i  
Rate This

Thanks Dean – glad you're checking it out.

(everyone: if Amazon's out of stock (or even if they aren't), try Janet's Bandcamp page – it's linked in the article. They take PayPal and a greater percentage of your money goes to the artists. Bandcamp also packs LPs a hell of a lot better than Amazon does).

I neglected to mention that Janet's album is my favorite recording of 2015...but I figure that comes across in the review, probably.

Reply  
Dean December 14, 2015 9:56 AM

0

0

i  
Rate This

Paul is right. From my Amazon order one of the albums that was labeled as new wasn't in shrink wrapped plastic. LP was in mint condition but I was expecting it to be totally wrapped up. That and the packaging was so so. Amazon double boxed each LP but the first box was thin as hell. A single bigger box would have been better.

Also Janet's albums are VERY enjoyable. In my budget system her music is quite fun.

Reply  
Dean December 9, 2015 11:43 AM

1

0

i  
Rate This

Thanks for the lead on this. The music sound awesome. A break from the normal stuff I listen too. I was able to get last the regular LPs from Amazon. They should get to my door by Fri. Can't wait to give them a listen on my TT.

Reply

Blog at WordPress.com. The Dynamic News Theme.