MARIKA HACKMAN BIO

BY EVE BARLOW

It's amazing how the floodgates open when you shut out all the internal and external noise around you, stop pandering to stereotype, cease listening to your anxieties, and no longer feel like you have to fit inside the compartment society has built for you. 'I'm Not Your Man', the second album from Marika Hackman, begins with an impromptu hearty laugh. It's not the sound of silliness, it's the sound of liberation, spontaneity and collective joy. Skype-ing from one of the many East London bedrooms she's called home over the past year, she peels a piece of tape off her laptop's webcam. “I watched Black Mirror once,” she says in fine spirits. The 24-year-old is feeling more herself than ever. Life isn't necessarily funnier or happier, but when there's cause for a joke or a conversation or a big ballsy statement, she's not holding back any more.

“I used to be very self-conscious,” explains Hackman, all breezy. “If something sounded a bit too pop or like I'd heard it before I'd mould it into something different. This time around I thought, Fuck it I'll just let it flow.” The results of this newfound semi-anarchic approach to songwriting are most immediately heard in the grungier, harder, catchier thrill of 'I'm Not Your Man'. But beyond the sound, the biggest departure is in the writing. The new Hackman is far less introspective and self-conscious. Marika 2.0 is unhinged, uninhibited and shamelessly free.

Before last Christmas, Hackman and her friend and producer Charlie Andrew (Alt-J, Rae Morris) finished mastering the follow-up to 2015's 'We Slept At Last' in Iguana Studios, Brixton. Written across various flatshares in London, the oldest song 'Violet' was penned almost 18 months ago. Why did it take so long? Well, first off Hackman left her management and signed a label relationship with AMF Records (Loyle Carner). That didn't just lend Hackman new avenues for exploration, it bought her a lot of time and a lot of distance – mainly, she insists, from herself. Hackman never panders to the expectation of others. Her own worst enemy has always been within. This time she vouched to cease preventing herself from going where she wanted the songs to take her. Naturally, that took a minute. “I stopped being a massive control freak!” she says.

The break from her former team and the decisions she'd had to make since has left her feeling freshly empowered. “I wanna put myself out there,” she says. “How are people gonna connect with me if I'm hiding behind a wall?” Hence titling the record 'I'm Not Your Man' after one of the lyrics. There's an open-ended nature to the discussions within, conversations on femininity, sex and sexual identity, millennial ennui, the pressures of living in a social media bubble and the perils of being young in a fast- paced industry. “The record's all about female relationships, romance and breakdowns, but there's also a dim worldview going on. 'I'm Not Your Man' can either mean, 'I'm not your man, I'm your woman', or it can mean, 'I'm not a part of this...',” explains Hackman.

It's a fiery statement from a songwriter who no longer wants to be shackled to limiting descriptions. When presented to the world five years ago, Hackman couldn't escape the trappings of being compared to every other fey English rose singer-songwriter lady with a guitar. “I'm not some miserable git that walks about feeling depressed all the time,” she laughs. “None of my friends would describe me like that.” From the opening of 'Boyfriend' you immediately sense the transition. It signals a raw, rockier and immediately more brazen beginning to a 13-track record that packs a far gutsier live punch than any of her prior folk leaning output. It's also really funny. “I've got your boyfriend on my mind,” she teases, finally breaking out of couching her thoughts on sexuality and love in metaphors. “I felt more bold and confident to stop hiding things, to stop talking about water, lakes and trees when I just wanna write about the fact that I've broken up with my girlfriend.”

The themes of sexual fluidity are ongoing throughout. “People find it easier now to identify as queer, lesbian or gay, it feels more safe.” Hackman hasn't yet decided how to define her own sexuality but has had plenty prior experience to know what bums her out. Men, for instance, who seem to think lesbianism or queerness between women is born out of a male fantasy. “Some guys think it's fine for their girlfriends to get with another girl. But if it's with another guy they go ballistic. The language we use pisses me off. It's the passive stuff that drip feeds into society and winds up being far more damaging.” To deal with it head on, Hackman flips the construct around and addresses The Man herself – literally and figuratively.

At first, producer Andrew, who has worked on all her previous output, was shocked. “I don't think he saw it coming,” says Hackman. “It was a curveball.” More surprising, however, was her musical choices. Casting aside the whimsy guitars of before, Hackman consciously wanted to turn up the knobs in the studio, to live out her teenage fantasy of fronting a raucous band. “I wanted to let rip and lose control. That's the kind of music I've always wanted to make. When I was younger I wasn't looking at Joni Mitchell. I was looking at Nirvana thinking, 'I wanna be like that!'”

To help channel this feral female energy, Hackman recruited her best mates – London quartet The Big Moon to play as her backing band. They all met at a gig once and an immediate friend crush ensued. “They really captured the soul of what it all meant to me and brought a lot of fun and creativity,” says Hackman. “A lot of messing about and cuddling.” There was no concern that bringing in a much-hyped band to play on a number of tracks would take the shine off her own project. “I just wanna make the right record and if that's involving people who can fucking smash it then that's what I'm gonna do. Bands coming together is so important, particularly for women.”

The unspoiled nature of the recording environment has thrown up a truly dynamic, multi- genre sound. It's all tied together via razor sharp wit and authenticity. “I'm a massive cultural hermit when I'm making a record,” says Hackman, who strays from sonic influences during her process. The subtleties contained within span from Cate Le Bon weirdness ('Round We Go') to Warpaint dirge jams ('Gina's World') to straight-up Britpop choruses ('Time's Been Reckless', 'So Long', 'Good Intentions'). “People were saying it was a mash-up between Radiohead, Blondie and The Cure,” laughs Hackman, self-mocking. “Great!”

Tracks such as 'Violet' are explicitly about girl-on-girl relationships, with Hackman

fixated on her lover's mouth. “I was totally in love with her and it's such a sexual song.” 'My Lover Cindy' comments on the way we dispose of one another. “Sex is such a throwaway thing. I have a terror of falling out of love with people. You just don't trust your emotions.” 'Good Intentions' is an ode to any struggling millennial who's pushed peers away while pretending everything's alright. “In this glistening world of shiny Instagram posts it's important to say, 'Come on guys, it's not a fucking hoot 24/7'. In my friendship group there are emotional struggles. We live in a strange, dark world and people find it hard to deal with. More importantly, they find it hard to say so.”

It's particularly the way Hackman defies regular constructs about traditional femininity in the songs and on the heavily detailed, intentionally metaphorical album cover that speaks to a generation. “I've never been a traditional feminine female,” she says. “I was constantly mistaken for being a boy when I was little, I never wore dresses, I never understood why at Christmas I'd get a doll and my brother would get an Action Man. ‘I know so many women who are like that and it doesn’t define your sexuality. I don't know why we even have these petty rules that young girls have to abide by. It's absolutely bizarre.”

Hackman is putting together a live band to tour 'I'm Not Your Man' – she'll be creating a racket all of her own. “I can't wait to see the reaction,” she says. “That's the thrill of reinventing yourself. I might piss off a lot of die-hard folky fans but this is still my brain, it's still my world, and I'm gonna create it how I want.”