**Julia Shapiro – *Perfect Version***

When Julia Shapiro flew home from a cancelled Chastity Belt tour in April 2018, everything in her life felt out of control. Dealing with health issues, freshly out of a relationship, and in the middle of an existential crisis, she realized halfway through a tour supporting her band’s third album *I Used to Spend So Much Time Alone* that she was going through too much to continue. “I was really struggling; I was really depressed. I felt like I couldn’t sing or be a person,” Shapiro recalls. “At that point I couldn’t even imagine playing a show again, I was so over it.”

Returning home to a newly empty Seattle one-bedroom apartment, Shapiro had wanted for a long time to learn how to record and mix her own music, and out of the uncertainty of the future of her music career and her health, she began to record the songs that would become *Perfect Version*, her solo debut for Hardly Art. What she created in the space of ten songs is an intimate and beautifully self-aware examination of feeling lost in the life you’ve created for yourself. It’s an album of shimmering guitars and layered vocals that feels vast in the emotional depth it conveys and masterful in the way each song is intentionally crafted and recorded.

Throughout the record Shapiro tries on different ways of living, all thematically centered around the idea of what it would be like to be a perfect version of yourself. “How can someone be so blindly confident/I wanna know that trick,” she wonders on “Natural,” the opening track that begins using another person as a mirror and then pans back to a bigger picture: what would it take to really love yourself? The album is peppered with ideas of what self-improvement could look like—whether it’s learning a skill and living out in the woods, going to bed at a reasonable hour, or even more playful, deeply relatable lines like “I should really delete my Instagram.”

Shapiro has a knack for turning simple images into something profound, drawing influence from songwriters like Elliott Smith to capture complicated moods. The everyday act of circling the block trying to find a parking spot becomes a metaphor for trying and feeling like you can’t quite get anything done. “All my problems feel like paper/I can finally rip them up,” she sings on the title track, describing a moment of lightness in hanging out with friends who can find humor in your failure “at least I have my friends to laugh at what I’ve done.”

Over the course of a tumultuous year of trying to find stability amidst depression and surgery, Shapiro ultimately rediscovered the parts of music that she loved through the process. Her perfectionist qualities create an album that shines in tiny lyrical moments and meticulous guitar parts. “When the rest of my life felt out of control, I felt like this was my chance to be in control of everything,” says Shapiro. She plays all the instruments (save for a mouth trumpet solo by Darren Hanlon and guest violin by Annie Truscott) and after recording and mixing the first batch of four songs at the Vault studio with Ian LeSage decided to record the final six tracks alone in her apartment, adding drums in the studio later and learning to mix them with the help of her friend David Hrivnak. *Perfect Version* is a fully realized vision from a gifted songwriter finding a more intimate voice. “So what comes next?” she questions on the album closer “Empty Cup” which explores the quiet satisfaction of being alone with yourself and creating a blank slate. “A lasting sense of self,” she concludes.

-- Robin Edwards