



# NIKI & THE DOVE

## Flying Free

Words by Laura Studarus | Photo by Per Kristiansen

**N**iki & The Dove seem somewhat otherworldly, delivering larger-than-life tunes built around multi-instrumentalist Gustaf Karlöf's complex webs of electronics and singer Malin Dahlström's oversized voice and ambitious storytelling. But, speaking from Dover, England over a cup of tea, the two best friends from Sweden chalk up their partnership not to the hands of fate or other supernatural forces, but rather a gradual evolution. "We had sporadically been making music together over the years," says Dahlström, dispelling the idea that their current musical constellation simply fell from the heavens.

Both veterans of Stockholm's music and theater scene, Dahlström approached Karlöf on a whim in February 2010 with a rough demo of what would become Niki & The Dove's debut single, "DJ, Ease My Mind." With both members delighted by the tale of a broken-hearted woman finding solace in song, they began a more formal collaboration as a band. "For the first time I feel free to do exactly what I want to do," says Dahlström of the band, which has already produced three EPs. "Niki & The Dove became this forum where all your ideas can grow. You don't have to throw ideas away because they don't fit into the picture."

"Nothing has felt as important as this," adds Karlöf. "For the first time I feel like it's really me, so to speak. In other occasions [I felt] like, 'Oh, I'm

pretending to be something.' I don't feel like that anymore."

*The Fox*, their most recent EP and first release for Sub Pop, encompasses a collection of ambitious ideas, including personal narratives and densely layered production—or, in the case of standout track, "Gentle Roar," both. Starting from a Knife-like groove created by Karlöf hitting a water bottle against his knees, Dahlström improvised lyrics inspired by her childhood fear of subway trains. "The lyrics are about the fear that has grown on you without you knowing it," she explains. "When you suddenly one day come to the point to question why you fear what you fear, then it's a revelation."

In need of a chorus of voices, the band invited 15 of their closest girlfriends into the studio rather than hiring professional

singers. "The lyrics are very important to me, so I wanted it to be people we know, singing it together with me," says Dahlström of their ad hoc choir. "We had a good time that night!"

Reluctant to discuss the specifics of their forthcoming full-length, due out on Sub Pop this fall, both members admit to possessing a genre-specific drive. "When I listen to some pop music, I can understand, better, the essence of life," says Dahlström. "Every human being has to bring some kind of meaning to her life. I think that for me, some pop music helps me with that, and helps me discover what's underneath the everyday life."

"The pop song is so powerful in a direct way," concurs Karlöf. "You don't have to go through your brain; it goes straight to your heart."

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