



Warpaint on tour Photography Robin Laananen

The in-between moments of life on the road with Warpaint

MUSIC - FEATURE

Robin Laananen is both a photographer and the psych rock quartet's tour manager, and her new book *US/THEN* collects six years worth of photos from the band on the road

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Text Eve Barlow

Being on the road is so often romanticised. For those who have committed themselves to never having their feet in one place long enough to get settled it's a lifestyle completely foreign to anything else. LA-based photographer Robin Laananen knows all about the peaks and troughs. Laananen's been tour manager to psych rock quartet Warpaint for seven years now. A photographer first, she cut her teeth working on editorial in Seattle before the idea of the road became an obsession. It's far less common to meet a female tour manager and those that do exist are in high demand. Laananen herself worked with *three* bands last year: Warpaint, Refused and Savages. "With the name Robin I still show up in 2017 and someone will say out loud, 'I was expecting a man.' Sometimes you do end up still having to prove yourself which can be tiring. By the end of the night whoever questioned me will be hugging me or giving me their business card."

Warpaint have been more than just a traveling family and stable business relationship for Laananen, they became her muses. "The five of us are in a relationship," she says. "There's a chemistry and connection that's very family oriented. I always feel creative. They're always happy for me to take them out and explore and not every band wants to do that. Not every band wants to have a camera in their face the whole time. Tour is insane travel, insane lack of food or

sleep, and the fact that I travel with people that are open to have me document the real stuff is very addictive.” With her camera in tow, Laananen’s been documenting the groundhog days of Emily Kokal (vocals, guitar), Theresa Wayman (vocals, guitar), Jenny Lee Lindberg (vocals, bass) and Stella Mozgawa (vocals, drums) longer than anyone else. “It’s great to have the access,” she says. “I’m not an outsider shooting them, I’ve had the same day they’ve had. I’m the one who has responsibilities, so they don’t pay attention to me being there in front of them with my camera any more. Their guards are down.”

This July, a collection of never-before-seen photographs is being published. Titled *US/THEN* it also comes with a 7-inch vinyl live recording of Warpaint’s “Bees” and “Whiteout”. We caught up with Laananen in her neighbourhood of Silver Lake, Los Angeles just before she takes another loop around the world to talk us through these exclusive images.

JENNY LEE LINDBERG, NIIGATA





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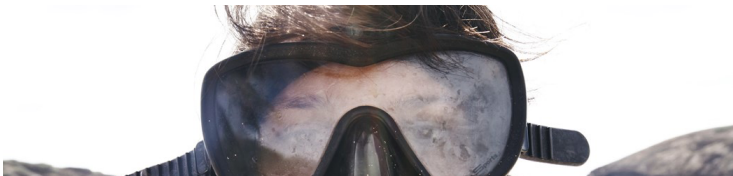
Robin Laananen: We were going to Fuji Rock and it was her birthday. That tour we landed in Japan and then you drive four hours to Fuji Rock. They played, spent the night, then we drove back to the airport the next morning and flew to Singapore. With the time changes across countries, she had a really, really long birthday. It was also a very long six week tour and that was the beginning of it and homesickness had kicked in. That was an interesting time for her. With birthdays on tour we do our best. I always make sure there's a cake and some kind of champagne party, hopefully a dinner with lots of singing. You try and make it special and you hope it's not a travel day with 15 hours of flights. I enjoy finding presents that are travel friendly. Art supplies are always good because they all like to draw.

STELLA MOZGAWA AND JENNY LEE LINDBERG, OSLO



Robin Laananen: This was a fun festival. I remember Kanye West was playing a different stage at the time, and in between Warpaint songs I could hear him lecturing at the crowd. Stella and Jenny are Warpaint's rhythm section and always playing off each other. Right behind Stella is one of my favourite spots to stand and shoot. It's not so good for my ears. I am so used to seeing the four of them communicate as one unit and I always forget how unique that is until I talk to someone seeing them for the first time. You can see their relationship in how they communicate onstage. They're not separate people up there.

STELLA MOZGAWA, HONOLULU



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Robin Laananen: Stella and I like to go



snorkelling. We once went in Croatia where the water was so salty we were just floating. In



Honolulu we took a taxi to this cove an hour away and both bought disposable underwater cameras to take pictures of sea turtles. Stella had her own snorkelling mask on tour for a while there. You have to make activities on the road. When you're in the midst of months of touring you get tunnel vision – you see a venue, you do your job. It's important to make an effort. I don't care how many times you've been to Hamburg you take a bike ride or a walk. I try to walk every morning before people wake up, I take my camera and listen to the city and take pictures. Otherwise you could be anywhere. We do our best. Sometimes we exercise or go to the spa, do something for your body.

STELLA MOZGAWA, LONDON



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Robin Laananen: We used to do such long

tours. This one was taken when there was six weeks left still. It started in New York, went to Europe and the UK, then Australia and Asia. This was a BBC Radio 6 Music session for Lauren Laverne. They always enjoy her show. They'd played London the night before and we were on our way to Brighton. When you're doing that much travel between continents, you just listen to your body. The time of day doesn't matter any more other than whatever time you have to play. Stella was really tired. These girls can be a lot tougher than some men I tour with. They never complain. Men struggle when they're sick. Sometimes one of these girls won't be feeling well and she won't tell me until it hurts. There was a time when we flew into Glasgow, had no sleep, and went straight to a show then flew out at 4am the next day. I looked at our former crew's faces in the elevator and said, 'Man up guys, you don't see me or the band complaining.'

JENNY LEE LINDBERG AND THERESA WAYMAN, KUALA LUMPUR





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Robin Laananen: This was another long tour. It was our first show in Asia flying in from Australia and it was raining in our dressing room – pouring! There was a hole in the ceiling. Asia have such enthusiastic crowds. Aside from parts of Japan, some of the cities have never brought the bands over so the appreciation is wonderful. Even though it was raining in our dressing room the venue was great. I’ve always been impressed with production in Asia, especially Japan. They bring things next level.

THERESA WAYMAN, MANNHEIM

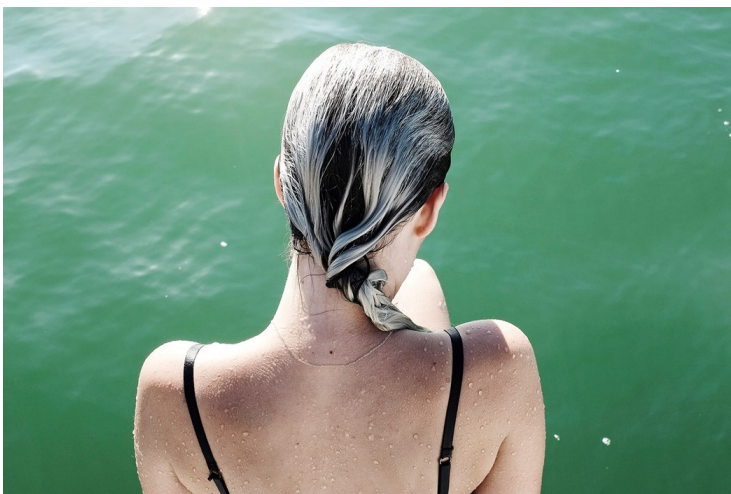


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Robin Laananen: This was a festival and there were horse stables so it felt like we could smell horses the whole time. We were on a leg from

the US to Europe to the UK back to US to Mexico City and then back to Europe. It was almost seven weeks. Theresa had such severe jetlag. That was a really rough day for everybody and it was freezing. You're tired from fighting off being cold. This was a fly-in date so we didn't have a bus to go to. The whole day can be brutal, you're surviving and I'm trying to bring some kind of happiness to it. Luckily that day they didn't have any press – there are times when you just can't stay awake, it's like someone's sucking you underneath. Unless they're deathly ill they won't say they can't do something. Sometimes I have to make a judgment call if they're losing voices or they haven't got out of their bunk because they have a fever. They had a great show and that's what happens. No one watching their show is gonna know what they've been through. After we couldn't get out there fast enough to get to the hotel.

EMILY KOKAL, VEVEY



Robin Laananen: This is one of my favourite photos of Emily in Vevey on Lake Geneva in August 2014. The show's promoter arranged a boat trip for each band after soundcheck. The girls were on one boat and the crew was on another so we were racing. We spent the afternoon surrounded by the Alps. Moments like that are the ones when you feel really lucky. They played the main stage of the Nox Orae festival at 10.30pm right off the water and our hotel looked like a gingerbread house. It doesn't feel like real life, but then you're getting up the next morning to take a flight somewhere and that's payback.

STELLA MOZGAWA, MUNSTER



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Robin Laananen: This is Stella with her Brompton, which she brings on tour. This was a

day off. If the hotel has bikes I'll borrow one and the two of us will ride around town and find what I've coined 'snob coffee' and vegan food. We look on Yelp for the snobbiest coffee, the types of places where you walk in and they judge you immediately... that means the coffee's really good. Riding a bike on tour changes everything. Brompton often give us a couple to have and you get to explore more on days off. Warpaint love bikes. We all rented them in Amsterdam. It's supposed to be relaxing biking there, but it scared the hell out of me.

STELLA MOZGAWA AND JENNY LEE LINDERBERG, LONDON



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Robin Laananen: This one is a warm-up session in the dressing room (of the Hammersmith Apollo). I was so proud of them playing that venue in March 2015. It was a wonderful show. The UK has always been really welcoming to the

ladies. That night we were gonna bring in a piano to go full-on, but we didn't in the end. They've played Brixton, then Hammersmith and they just played Roundhouse last year. London's always fun.

THERESA WAYMAN AND JENNY LEE LINDBERG, BOSTON

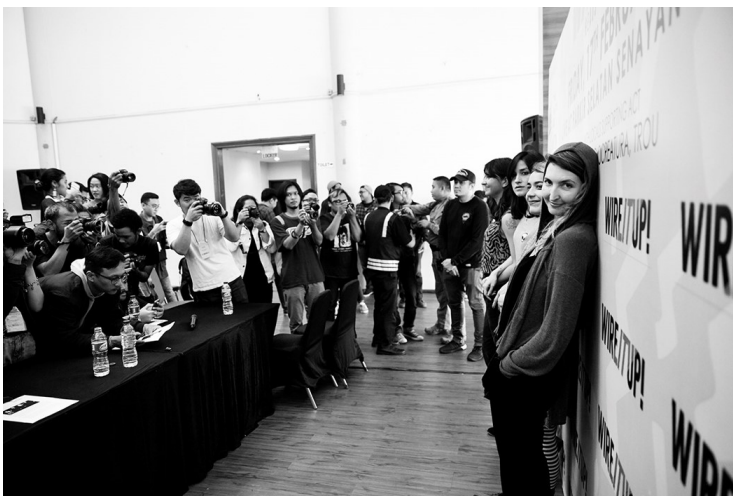


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Robin Laananen: The girls were putting freckles on their faces. I love the photos of them interacting like that. That was right before they were gonna go back on for the encore. That was really great tour. We had FACIAL as support band who are great friends, so it was good vibes the whole way. They've never decided to not go back on for an encore but they have changed what songs they're going to play depending on their mood. This last tour in March they stopped going offstage, and just put the encore songs in the setlist. Encores are basically like a runner

stopping a race and having to start running again; you lose momentum. When a band comes offstage you can tell right away if they're having a good or bad show. This one was one of the ones when everyone was having a good time and they jam more when they're enjoying it. It's those moments of raw emotion where there's no facade being put up and they're honest with how their day is going that I love to capture.

EMILY KOKAL, JENNY LEE LINBERG, THERESA WAYMAN AND STELLA MOZGAWA, JAKARTA



Warpaint on tour Photography Robin Laananen

Robin Laananen: This was a press junket. In Jakarta, everything is very secure. We had a police motorcade and security taking us to and from press and the festival. The fans had never seen these girls in person before. The band were signing autographs afterwards and it was super sweet. Some of their fans wanted my autograph too. You couldn't go anywhere in Jakarta

without security. I always like to try and go to the highest place to take a cityscape shot. I ended up travelling half an hour taking a security guard on this whole field trip with me just because I wanted a shot.

JENNY LEE LINBERG, ICELAND



Warpaint on tour Photography Robin Laananen

Robin Laananen: Jenny was also performing her solo Jennylee show and we had a Warpaint show at Iceland Airwaves. Then there were two days off and the last day before we travelled we all went to the Blue Lagoon together. I'd been before and knew they would love it. The next day when we flew to Atlanta it was US Election day and we were all in good moods and thought, 'There's no way this is gonna happen.' We had a connection in DC at 6pm, so we landed, checked into a different airline, and ran to the nearest airport bar, then just saw everyone's faces and thought, 'Oh shit.' I remember being up till four

or five in the morning thinking everything was a bad dream. The next day we were all in Wholefoods together, tearing up.

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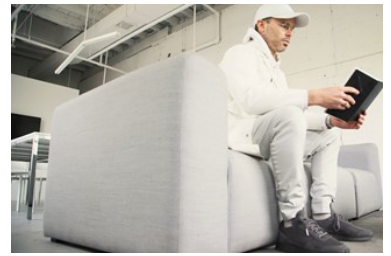
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