

## **Discussions -- Jay Dunner**

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**QUOTE OF NOTE:** “We have to be students of life and be very careful as we move through it. There’s always some kind of unexpected moment that happens each and every day, and you have to adjust. Music is like that. You can’t ever take it for

### **AURA MVULA THE DREAMING ROOM (RCA)**

A graduate of the Birmingham Conservatoire at Birmingham City University, Laura Mvula authored the music for the Royal Shakespeare Company’s 2017 production of *Antony and Cleopatra*. As a pop artist, she remains one of the most fascinating singer-songwriter performers of the 2010s. On *The Dreaming Room*, she pushes her gospel-based compositions through all manner of musical fun-house mirrors, adds keyboard-driven digital vocal harmonizations that extend well into jazz territory, and crowns these with lyrics of empowerment, independence, and pride. The songs’ complexities are neatly disguised by their accessibility and universality of themes. The best pairing of tracks is “Nan,” a charming dialog created by Mvula, simulating a phone conversation between Mvula and her grandmother, full of British politeness and family endearments, mated with “Phenomenal Woman,” the album’s dynamic powerhouse of praise for this ancestor. The bass and drums are one, while Mvula’s processed choirs

### **ALLISON PIERCE YEAR OF THE RABBIT (Sony Masterworks)**

Over the fifteen years from 2000 to 2014, sisters Allison and Catherine Pierce graced us with five increasingly rich albums featuring their uniquely seamless vocal blend in folk-rock settings that Fleetwood Mac would have died for. The Pierces’ decision to disband following the release of their masterful *Creation* CD, in order to pursue solo interests, left fans wondering how the sisters’ respective post-*Creation* creativity could possibly measure up. Cat Pierce has since released only four singles, all throaty alto and electronics, as if Stevie Nicks had just discovered Pro Tools. However, it sounds like most of The Pierces’ trademark layered harmonies hopped over to *Year of the Rabbit*, Allison’s full-length, cohesive solo debut. The title references the fourth year in the twelve-cycle Chinese zodiacal calendar; one of the “rabbit” years is 1975, Allison’s birth year. The rabbit is viewed as a tame creature symbolizing hope for a long time, and Allison’s lyrics evoke a similar sentimentality, albeit tinged with a bit of melancholy. And the music? It’s The Pierces Unplugged, with a Nashville grounding, led off by the ruminations and regrets of “Fool Him.” Allison’s woodsmoke vocals curl comfortably around producer / multi-instrumentalist Ethan John’s acoustic arrangements, as Allison sings of a relationship troubled by broken trust. The entire album is an understated, genteel set of folky aires that both complement well and differentiate from Allison’s former, edgier material with her sister. Until The Pierces go off hiatus, this is probably the closest you’ll get to their tight harmonies. Fans of First Aid Kit and/or Emmylou Harris will feel right at home here. \*\*\*1/2

\*\*\*\*\* Outstanding. \*\*\*\* Excellent. \*\*\* Good. \*\* Fair. \* Ecch!

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