

## Interview with Bitch

Bitch and The Exciting Conclusion

By [Kathy Belge](#), About.com Guide

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I had a chance to sit down with Bitch (previously of Bitch & Animal) before her show in Portland Oregon in November 2006. Bitch, lesbian electric folk musician is part of the band Bitch and the Exciting Conclusion with her partner, *The LWord's* [Daniela Sea](#). She talked to me about her new album, *Make This/Break This*, life with Daniela and the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival's women-only policy.



Bitch with Fiddle  
© Roberto Portillo

### Lesbian Life: Where did your name come from?

Bitch: Me and Animal had had some material and we needed a name for our first gig and I think she was pissed at me. She

suggested that I was Bitch and she would be Animal. I resisted for about four minutes and then I thought, what a way to turn feminist phrase. It was definitely an opportunity to reclaim the word Bitch and I really liked the idea.

### Have you had any problems with the name as far as being played on the radio or anything?

Not that I know of, but it's not like I get played on the radio all the time. I know on some of these legs of the tour with the Indigo Girls, some of the promoters were hesitant to put me on the marquee and stuff.

They thought it would turn off fans.

### Is this a new incarnation of Bitch & The Exciting Conclusion?

You mean, because Daniela's not here? She and I birthed this band, it was definitely a collaboration between the two of us. When she's not on tour with us, I still consider her an invisible member. She's a big part of a lot of the aesthetic decisions I make.

### What happened to Bitch & Animal? Why did they break up?

One thing is that we were girlfriends and that started becoming really hard. We broke up as girlfriends and tried to keep the band together, but the dynamics never changed. It just became a mess. And I was wanting to go somewhere else creatively. I wanted to explore my own empowerment and not having to bounce things off someone all the time. I love that I get to choose what we play each night. I like that kind of control. I'm enjoying it. I also find that musically I'm able to go a little deeper, as far as being a little more vulnerable than I have been in the past. I like to say my new work is more like a diary and less like a dialogue. My work with Animal was definitely like a dialogue. That's a good thing too. She and I were very psychically connected and I horribly miss being creative with her, but it's all the other stuff that got in the way.

**Tell me about *Shortbus*. It's my favorite movie of the year. I loved it. How did you end up in that movie?**

Basically I auditioned for it. I'm a trained actor. That's how I met Animal was at acting school. Then I rebelled against the whole thing because it felt really restrictive. They wanted me to look neutral and be this certain kind of girl. It's a really sexist industry.

Surprise, Surprise. I said, I'm going to come back to acting when somebody wants ME. That's exactly how it happened. John wanted me for who I was and not who I could pretend to be.

**Now that you've been back into acting...**

I totally want to do it more.

**Are we going to see you on *The L Word*?**

Not that I know of.

**What else do you want to do acting wise?**

Daniela and I are writing a movie together.

**What are you doing with Ferron?**

[Ferron](#) and I went on a tour. I played with Ferron quite a bit. I'm a huge fan. But I finally convinced her to let me produce an album for her. So in February we start that. She wants me to put some of my songs on it, but I want it to be a Ferron record produced by me. I'll play on it, but I want it to be all her songs.

**How did this come about?**

I'm so moved by Ferron by her music and her poetry and I really want people in my generation to understand her music. I love her records and how they're produced. When I bring my friends to her live shows they get what is so earth shattering, but on her records they don't.

It took me two years to even be able to stand next to Ferron without blushing. Because I had a total talent crush on her. You know those people that you're just like OMG, you're such a genius. Boy do I love her!

**About you and Daniela, now that both your careers are taking off and you're going in different directions how is that affecting you guys?**

Daniela was on the road with me a long time. When we fell in love, she came on the road with me for a good two years. She just hung out. She and I played music together when we first met, but we never did it publicly until this last winter. Things are really different this year because we're not able to get as much time together. But now, I'm so busy, the time really flies. I talk to her all the time and it's actually really exciting. It just feels like there is nothing being taken away, it's just being added right now. And we're going to take some time off and go away and get some down time together. When you don't have all your time together, it's nice to plan to have special time together.

**She's on *The L Word*, so has her being a TV star affected you as a couple?**

Sure, everything affects everything. It has and then it totally hasn't. She's very recognizable. We ride the subway in New York and eight people come up to her and recognize her, but she's always been that magnetic person in my life. Even when nobody knew who she was, and she was on tour with me, Daniela's always been a fascinating creature to people. Even when she was just traveling with me, people were always curious about her. She's just emitting something from her aura. That's why I fell in love with her in the first place. I stopped dead in my tracks the first time I saw her. There's something about her. It's not just about being on a TV show.

But little things change. We can't talk about personal things over dinner if we're out at a restaurant because there's people eavesdropping. That's the only details that's changed. It doesn't feel too extreme. It's actually really fun. It's an adventure. I'm not weirded out by it at all. And I'm super proud of her.

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### **I know you're very much a live performer. How do you take the energy from a live show and bring that into the studio?**

That's always a hard thing to do. I know fans of Bitch & Animal were always craving a live recording of us because there's a certain back & forth that is hard to capture on a CD. Although I am sitting on a recording of a live show that I will release at some point.

With this record, June Millington produced it. When I came to her with the record, there were some songs that I didn't know quite how they were going to be formed. I wasn't quite sure of the arrangements. Some of them were just poems. The title track, "Make This/Break This," when I recorded that song I had literally just finished writing it. It was a piece that had been floating around in my journal for a long time. But when I went to record it, I had never sang it before. I think that lends itself to a certain vulnerability. I knew what the melody of the chorus was going to be, but there's a middle section which is a long verse, it's a long complicated poem and I have never sang it before and June just hit record and said, "Sing it." It was the first take that we took. I think it's important in the studio to let yourself be vulnerable. Almost like you're telling somebody a secret.

### **Tell me about your new record: [Make This/Break This](#).**

I'd like to talk about the last track on the record. I made it from answering machine messages left to me by my friends while I was recording. That's the only song on the album that I made totally on my own. This record for me was a real huge culmination of support. It took me three years to make that record. I started it before I left Animal. I started it as a necessity, I needed to express myself in some other way. Making this record was an experiment in looking around and seeing that I had all this support and people who love me and these really good friends. I never thought of myself as someone who was bestowed with a shitload of friends, but I realized wow, there's so much love in my world.

So I took all these messages from my friends and made it into a song. It was a testimony to myself. It was like this song was reminding myself of who I was. That was going to be the secret bonus track, but I was so proud of that song I made it the last track on the album.

### **That reminds me, why is "Pussy Manifesto" a secret track on your first album?**

I want to make a new version of that song. It's a secret bonus track because when I first wrote it, I didn't think of it as a song. It was a book or a declaration to me. When we were in the studio, both Animal and the guy we were recording with were said, you have to record that song. And I said, it's not a song, it's a book. But they forced me to record it. I think I just felt shy about it.

**Do you feel like you get marginalized for being so out as queer and so feminist?**

Yes, no question.

**And?**

So, fuck 'em. What am I going to do? It's not an option for me to go in the closet. This album is very outwardly feminist. And it's interesting, for a lot of the songs I was in love with this trans guy. Before I met Daniela I was crushed out on this trans guy, so a lot of the songs you could probably think I'm a straight chick.

**Do you get shit from the trans community for playing at Michigan?**

Yes, from parts of the trans community. [People who think there aren't trans people at Michigan are so fucked up.](#) If someone tries to tell me [Michigan] is transphobic, I tell them to stuff it. There's so many trannies there. And it's not trans people being marginalized. It's people who were born as men. The festival is for people who suffered a girlhood. That's all it is. They're not trying to redefine what women are. I think it's really ironic, I don't see nearly as much activism around all male gatherings. I'm sure everybody over at Camp Trans are not protesting all the all-male gatherings that happen all over the country all the time. It is so the patriarchy. I'm so over it. I think it's totally the patriarchy and it's complete ageism.

**How so?**

Because going to Michigan is like going to another country. These visionaries set up Michigan for six f\*\*king days out of the year. It's not like they're trying to make a city. They want to have a party with only these kinds of people. They're our elders. They had a vision. When I was younger, I had a stereotype of what an older lesbian was. I thought they were nerdy, wearing purple all the time and walking around with their hand drum that they can't play. And then when I went there I had my mind blown by what an intellectual, what a survivalist community it was. If my elders want to say for these six days only these kinds of women can come, then I need to respect that. It is so against our nature to respect women for having boundaries. I think that's exactly what's happening.

I had the same experiences as a white girl at Michigan. I felt blown away that I couldn't go to the women of color events. I felt very entitled about it and very pissed off. And then I had to be schooled about it. I met this Black woman at a meeting and I told her I wanted to go to that, I feel it would educate me to be less racist. And she said sometimes people need to section off and they need to be with people who've had similar experiences so they can come out into the bigger community and be stronger people. I really had to respect that.

When me and Animal were on the scene, the three bands that people were going after were Bitch & Animal, The Butchies and Le Tigre. Ironically enough, the three bands that all have trans people in them, calling us transphobic. When I think of all of the girl energy/the raised female energy going into protesting that event when they could be getting the education of a lifetime and coming out into the bigger world and being such amazing trans activists. I would never go to a Black Women only event and demand that I be let in. I support us respecting our elders' boundaries.