

# High Places

## *High Places*



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**High Places** is Mary Pearson and Rob Barber. Mary and Rob met while Mary was completing a music degree in bassoon performance and Rob was working in visual art, teaching lithography and etching at an art school. Both were performing as solo musicians at the time. Mary relocated to New York from Michigan in late spring 2006, and the two soon after began collaborating under the name **High Places**. The name refers to a place where one has a better vantage point and can gain broader perspective; it references a love for mountains, rooftops, and of course metaphorical “high places.” The duo has an “exquisite corpse” style of songwriting where they exchange ideas back and forth, challenging one another’s expectations, pushing songs to new places, or more aptly, new heights. They began by releasing a number of singles as well as contributing songs to a few compilations. These early and varied works were collected and released in July of 2008 as *03/07-09/07* in advance of tours with Deerhunter and No Age.

Since its inception, **High Places** has created a signature sound out of using bass-heavy, yet crisp beats, lilting vocal melodies, syncopated rhythmic lines performed on folk percussion instruments, guitar duets turned into treated samples, and percussive lines created from the manipulation of household objects. The songwriting is expansive and fluid, all the while managing to be concise. Overall, the compositions are settled and assured. **High Places** gravitates toward the organic over the electronic, and that natural aesthetic adds warmth and intimacy to the recordings.

In a live setting, the band creates their layered recordings with Mary singing and simultaneously manipulating her vocals with various delay and reverb pedals, while playing some hand percussion, recorders, and creating and controlling various loops. Rob handles the drums triggering a variety of percussive sounds with his drum pads, as well as playing hand percussion, wooden blocks with contact mics, and singing some ambient vocals. **High Places’** self-titled debut was recorded by Rob and Mary in their apartment in Brooklyn’s Fort Greene neighborhood between January and May of 2008. They employed a wide variety of instruments to make this album ranging from the more traditional: 12 string guitar, banjo, shakers and rattles, bass, bells and Kalimba, to the inventive: plastic bags, mixing bowls, wood blocks and other common household objects. The album has a contemplative and organic lyrical tone emphasized by the themes of goodness manifested in nature, hardship and wonder as necessities to human existence and growth. Additionally, the idea of maturation and development is further accented through the recurring mention of trees and their extending, enveloping branches. Rob created the **High Places** artwork by using photos taken by both band members. The images are drawn from nature but all have a subtle, mystical, “golden” motif, a fitting frame for the album’s recurring themes. This can best be summed up by the words to “Gold Coin,” a song that was inspired by Kahlil Gibran’s *The Prophet*:

**The ocean is your god-self  
The sun is your god-self  
God as air  
Part of you is man  
Part of you is god-self  
The rest is just stumbling in the mist**

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