



Christian Kjellvander

About Love And Loving Again



CD / LP / digital

Veröffentlichung: 30. Oktober 2020

TR468 CD 198982 / EAN 4015698542899 // LP 198981 / EAN 4015698269437

Right from the crescendo that welcomes you in before it drops away into an atmospheric landscape, the voice at its centre so quietly intense he may as well be singing inside your own head, Christian Kjellvander's new solo album undeniably feels like a big record. The seven songs on this gently unhurried long-player are allowed to build and meander, make unexpected turns or even pause to look over their own shoulder before moving on, four of them ending way beyond and one just shy of the seven-minute-mark. It comes as a bit of a shock then to learn that this sound that ranges from almost-silence to unbridledly expressive, widescreen hugeness was created mostly as live by a minimal three-piece line-up in a Stockholm studio basement:

- Per Nordmark on drums
- Pelle Anderson on a Fender Rhodes, a Prophet 5 and a Korg Prologue
- Christian Kjellvander on vocals, guitars and whatever came to hand, adding just a touch of bass at the end of two songs.

It was May 2020 when this trio congregated, a time, of course, when all of Europe was under strict lockdown, with the famous exception of Sweden. But Kjellvander has a point when he claims that working in the studio also amounts to a kind of self-isolation: "It's very similar. When you're not on tour you're kind of in lockdown. I was living in the country in the middle of nowhere for eight years, and that's kind of been in lockdown."

Indeed, *About Love And Loving Again* is the sound of Christian Kjellvander waving goodbye to the converted old chapel out in the Swedish wilderness where so much of his music of previous years was written and recorded, "The Baptist Lodge" that lends its name to the opening song. "Meanwhile at the Baptist Lodge there is new paint on an old Dodge," he sings, and "once it goes east it ain't ever coming back." The song's evocative lyrics contrast the image of an iconic American car with another stand-out line that finds the singer at the outer edges of Sweden: "I drove down to the southernmost beach in our country"

"I never thought it would come out in my lyrics subliminally," Kjellvander says, "but for many, many years after growing up in the States and then moving to Sweden, I felt that I was an immigrant. Only after about twenty years there it dawned on me that 'Wait a minute, I have kids here, I'm really living here now, this is my life.' In the late nineties when that whole Americana thing broke, of course I was in that scene at the time. But I've moved on, and really my music is set in Sweden nowadays, or just Europe in general."

"Cultural Spain", probably the most tightly written and arranged song on the album, was finished following a mad dash across the old continent back to Sweden, just as borders were being closed in all the countries he passed through. Like a lot of this record, its semi-abstract lyrics are full of complex sexual politics: "I heard women talk about other women / I'd just slipped into one of those men / I'd swallowed her sorrows / Because I knew how to use them" You don't need to be a celebrity sleuth to realise that much of *About Love and Loving Again* is deeply autobiographical. In fact, the goddess that steps "out of the water and straight into my family" in the opening song is none other than his current partner, Swedish singer Frida Hyvönen, who also sings backing vocals on "Cultural Spain" and took the cover photo of a bare-chested Christian lying on his bed in the half-light.

Meanwhile, a couplet like "Love turns to past and past turns to fiction / And the happiness is the first thing we forget" from "Actually Country Gentle" unmistakably alludes to the recent ending of his 13-year marriage. But it will sound both painfully and consolingly familiar to anyone who has ever gone through a similar experience in life, "when trouble fell in love with itself" (from "Trouble"). Crucially, Christian Kjellvander describes a world that is much bigger than his private self, and yet: "There is a vulnerability in it, I realise that now. When you're in it you're just writing and you kind of get to the point where there are moments of clarity that make sense and that move you. And once you step out of that realm you're kind of, 'Whoa, this feels kind of... naked.' I've always written about stuff that's been close to heart, but it's special, this record. It's quite open. It's what I was going for. I wanted it to be truthful and vulnerable."

The arguably most uncomfortable moment, announced by a rare appearance of distorted guitar, occurs in "No Grace", a song that digs deep into the singer's own childhood memories. "I thought back to that time I was spit in the face by my own mom / Or when my father broke my nose / And the whole family had to wait until he was in good enough shape"

But it's right at the end of the album in the closing song "Process of Pyoneers" that a mild touch of self-irony eventually blends into quasi-spiritual revelation: "I'll play a new rock'n'roll guitar and find god eventually / But every god is a chance / Every god is only a dream / But maybe every god is not just an idea" - As an artist who is "constantly trying to look under different stones" (he explored vastly different territory on his last album, recorded on the hoof with a Swedish jazz band) Christian Kjellvander has learnt to rely on instinct rather than intention.

"I just usually try to follow the lust of it. There needs to be lust in music," he says, wisely, "All great art is in a sense just one person's view on things and shouldn't be taken for anything more than that. And the older I get the more I trust it. There is no anxiety anymore. Do I feel this is good? Do I feel this is saying something that I haven't necessarily heard before? Yeah, good. Then we'll go from here."

Robert Rotifer, Canterbury, July 2020

Tracklisting

- 1) Baptist Lodge (The Galaxy)
- 2) About Love And Loving Again
- 3) Cultural Spain
- 4) Trouble
- 5) Actually Country Gentle
- 6) No Grace
- 7) Process Of Pyoneers



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