



Christian Kjellvander

Hold Your Love Still

3 November 2023
CD / LP / digital



"I want to give you this and ask for nothing in return."

Naked but for a soft blanket of reverb, Christian Kjellvander's tender voice invites us into his latest creation, the swooning 'Hold Your Love Still'. His first solo album since 2020's 'About Love And Loving Again' finds the Swedish troubadour in a reflective mood, exploring the difficulties of an honest life amid the entanglement of capitalism, and imploring us to nurture that faltering hope for a better tomorrow. Though he's grappling with existential and environmental tensions, Kjellvander strides from stoicism to optimism, augmenting his trademark minor melancholy with soaring major compositions, each concise, precise and considered – a conscious turn towards song from the freeform expressions of recent collaborations. Rich in natural imagery, understated poetry and an infectious empathy, with meaning imbued in every line, this is the work of an accomplished songwriter at his most vital.

For Christian, the love of the album title is a state of energy or a concentration of feelings, an ineffable quality which he sometimes feels is missing in modern society. Dewy opener "Western Hemisphere" affirms that everything we need is already in our grasp; we just need to stay still long enough to see it. A grounded celebration of the power of nature, this is a reminder that the long grass has more beauty than the manicured lawn. Our preoccupation with perfection also informs "Notes From The Drive Between Simat and Alcoi", a travelogue from South-Eastern Spain inspired by breathtaking valleys, a Cistercian monastery and the comforting distortion of a well used sound system. Recalling a gig in Alcoi, a town famed for its labour movement even as the world's pickets fall hushed, Kjellvander rejoices in the jagged countryside, weathered stone buildings and buzzing speakers, protesting the straight lines and clean sound of our commercialised existence as the song builds from ballad to anthem.

"Baleen Whale" compares the accumulated weight of watching the news or internalising the troubles of others with a filter-feeding whale, which eventually finds itself beached. Set to the steady rhythm of rumbling bass and brush drums, delicate piano and sombre strings create a melancholy backing for Kjellvander's tale until a sudden swell of hopeful chords carries the chorus aloft. Four songs in and Christian fashions his love into a love song, examining intimacy and vulnerability on the gorgeous "Terns Took Turns". Not only does he capture the moment of surrender to overwhelming affection, but also the kind of closeness which allows communication without words.

The cinematic and stomping "Disgust For The Poor" delivers a dissection of capitalism, consumerism and continued colonialism and questions whether we can do more to make a difference while enjoying all the comforts of an unfair system. Intoxicating and imagistic "On Wine And Jesus Christ" sees Kjellvander realise a longstanding desire to explore his relationship with alcohol, recalling the ways in which he's used it, and it's used him, on his way to a healthy enjoyment of the holy feeling it can bring.

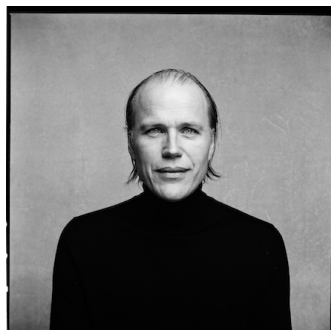
The sparse and stately "We Are Gathered" stretches its languid groove over nine minutes, weighing the balance of the album's thematic thrust and marrying accountability with optimism. As the piece spirals out into a mostly instrumental ending, a delicate solo floats above the solemn groove before boldly untethering into a crescendo of rolling snare and staccato guitar. The optimism extends to the pastoral and placid psychedelia of closer "Dream 2066", a reassuring vision of a possible future free from climate disaster and the clutches of capitalism. Kjellvander's comforting croon leaves us with a lasting message of the power of togetherness. A fitting finale to a faultless LP, this is an affirmation that it's not too late to make a change, and that some of us might have come to that realisation earlier than others.

Tracklisting

- 1) Western Hemisphere
- 2) Notes From The Drive Between Simat And Alcoi
- 3) Baleen Whale
- 4) Terns Took Turns
- 5) Disgust For The Poor
- 6) On Wine And Jesus Christ
- 7) We Are Gathered
- 8) Dream 2066

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