

# Hank May

## *Tails*

For Hank May, no subject is too small to put to song. To make his new album, *Tails*, the singer-songwriter spent much of his time wandering the streets of his native Los Angeles and spending time with friends, all while absorbing small details that might one day make for a good lyric. “I put my antennae up pretty high for this one,” he says. The resulting collection of songs seeks the sublime amidst the daily toils of life on earth.

*Tails* follows 2021’s, *One More Taste of the Good Stuff*, which is technically May’s debut, but longtime supporters have known his music ever since he started uploading songs to MySpace in high school. He spent the decade after college in New York, bartending at the DIY space Palisades and writing music sparingly. Upon returning to LA, he decided it was time to



photo credit: Mario Luna

actively pursue music again. *One More Taste of the Good Stuff* comprises songs May had written over a vast span of time, while the ambitious *Tails* distills a set moment in May’s career. “I started writing *Tails* immediately after putting out the debut,” May says. He’d lived with those songs too long, and it was time for something new. “I intentionally set out to make a pop record with intricate arrangements, and was thinking of this as a playlist more so than a narrative album. I wanted the songs to move beyond my personal life and instead speak to a broader audience.”

Friend and collaborator Patrick Taylor joined May at his home studio and together they messed around with a keyboard, guitar, and mic, looping sounds that might inspire a song. The intimate setting gave May the opportunity to experiment without fear of judgment, and in those sessions, he began to cobble together what would become *Tails*. May recorded *Tails* with producer Jon Joseph, who was recently signed to John Congleton’s new publishing company Animal Rites, a joint venture with Domino Publishing. While *One More Taste of the Good Stuff* could be described as an indie

singer-songwriter record, *Tails* is decidedly ungoverned by genre trappings. On “Aliens R Us,” a willowy drumbeat that sounds like Spanish *palmas* guides the listener through a meditation on “delusions of grandeur leading to acts of violence” inspired, to an extent, by the events of January 6th. Later, the absurdly catchy, synth-driven anthem “I’m Just a Lover Now,” sounds off to a slew of surprising influences, including the 1975, the Replacements, “Wonderwall,” and Elliott Smith. “I had a eureka moment listening to ‘A Real Hero’ from the Drive soundtrack and decided this track needed a big synth bass. That brought it into the 21st century.”

As modern as May’s new sound is, the casual familiarity of his lyrics, the wry spin on the quotidian, will remind listeners of artists like Jens Leckman, Weezer, and Modest Mouse. On “Life is Sweet,” May complains of the birds singing outside, who “are fighting, they’re just bitching,” over a seasick,

hip-hop inspired groove. The song boasts what May refers to as one of his “zingers,” when he delivers the instantly-quotable line: “Are you not the living definition of despair.” Deaths of despair were on



album artwork

his mind in the aftermath of the pandemic, when the vast number of people who died of self-inflicted causes unrelated to the virus, like addiction and suicide, were accounted for. Album opener, “Rainy Day,” is a frustrated, mournful song for those left behind during the national crisis. “Go home and lock the door/ America

will take care of ya,” May sarcastically sings.

Even at its most bleakly resigned, *Tails* fosters a hopefulness that might feel unearned amidst the ongoing turmoil that defines contemporary life in the U.S., but May reminds the listener that there are still beautiful things to fall in love with day in and out. On “Morgana” he sings to his beloved houseplant, while “Wild West” can be read as a happy-go-lucky confrontation with the doom-and-gloom future. “The sky is turning/ Not crashing down, it’s changing colors/ See? Now it wears a frown,” he playfully sings on the opening verse. What begins as an upbeat plea for hopefulness soon descends into chaos,

as May’s voice grows louder amidst the swell of an acoustic guitar and its surrounding production. That sense of disarray signals both a loss of control and acceptance of that loss, as if May is giving himself over to the raw sensation of each living moment, good or bad, big or small, with willful abandon.

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