

COYOTE + OAK

VOLUME I

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A PRINTED MAGAZINE, CREATED BY AND SHOWCASING CALIFORNIA ARTISTS AND ENTREPRENEURS.
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PEACE IN THE BLUE HOUR

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Having released one album a year since 2007, Chris Lambert recently took a brief hiatus from songwriting to confront his family history and get to know himself more deeply. After eighteen months and a road trip across America, he's returned with a new sound. *The Blue Hour* is his most personal album to date.

You've released an album every year since 2007, but you took a break between your last project and this one. Why the break? What did you do during that time?

CHRIS: There were a lot of reasons. I spent the last year, year and a half trying to piece together my childhood and the events that might have led me to be who I am today, and wondering about things that I'm holding onto—things that I hadn't processed and things that have shaped me. I was trying to resolve a lot of personal issues, and I was starting to feel like working in art, in general, and creating was sort-of selfish. I felt like maybe it wasn't something that I should be doing this far into my life—like maybe I should try to be a little bit more responsible. Through error, I sort of found my way right back into it. It felt like a big gap, but in reality, it was just a six-month period longer than between most of my albums.

Based on the fact that you've been able to release new material consistently for the last ten years, it seems like inspiration doesn't hide from you. Was it a difficult choice not to give into your creative urgings [during that break]?

It was very difficult. I kind of feel lost when I'm not working on something. I really like to create. Whenever I'm not in the middle of a big project, I feel sort of useless. I think I was maybe punishing myself too, for spending too much time in music, and I was feeling guilty about that. In my head, I've had a countdown for how long I'm allowed to continue doing music without it being my career, or making me any money, or paying the rent, and I've pushed it back each year. So when I hit a point where I didn't have a place to live, and I didn't have a job, it just seemed like a very selfish thing. So yeah, it was very hard to come to a point where I thought I might have to

stop. I think I've reached that point several different times, but this time, it somehow felt more final.

Would you say this album is much more personal than others?

I think that all of my albums have always been about me, but in a more veiled way. I do a lot of concept albums usually, where I'm telling a story—almost more like writing a novel or something. I tell my own stories but, this time around, there's no metaphors, there's really not much poetry; it's just raw and autobiographical, almost like it's straight out of a journal or a diary, and that was definitely intentional.

It does seem pretty risky to talk about some of the very personal experiences you've had and about the people involved in this way. Have your friends and family had a chance to listen to the music? How have they reacted?

There have been a variety of responses, but there have been some that have not been too happy about it.

And how have you dealt with that?

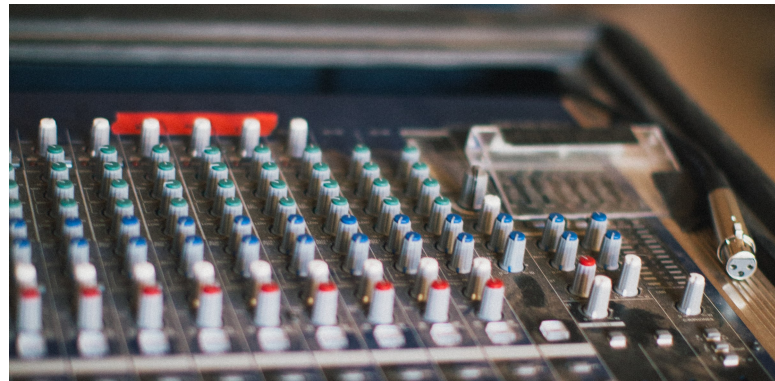
Uh... I guess I'm still learning how to. As of right now, I'm just trying to remind myself that it's the best thing for me. I look at it like therapy. There's a lot of stuff that we hold in, and if you don't let it out, it can do a lot of damage. But sometimes when it comes out, it can hurt people's feelings. It's weighing the importance of both. I feel like if I held it in, it would be a lot worse.

In the trailer for your album, you express concern that the music will be too personal for listeners to connect with. Do you feel like you were able to strike a balance on this album? Are you still concerned that people won't be able to draw the parallels between your experience and their own?

I still don't know. A lot of people have caught on to things that I thought were subtle, like who certain songs are about or what events I'm speaking about. I just know that I really enjoy artists who sing about themselves and not just about universal things. I get the most out of listening to artists who are very unguarded and upfront about their personal experiences, and I find that, actually, the more specific an artist gets about their experiences, the more I can sympathize with them and the more that I'm able to put myself in their shoes. I'm sort-of hoping that people can do that with me too; that maybe people will be able to connect with it that way.

One of the tracks that really stood out to me is *Doña Ana*. Can you tell me about *Doña Ana*? Who is she?

Doña Ana is actually a street in New Mexico, where my grandfather died twenty-three years ago. He ran for City Council in Santa Maria, [California] and lost, and then he moved to New Mexico, and lived there by himself. He ended up dying of alcoholism, and because no one was around, he wasn't found for a long time. My whole family has been, sort-of, shaped by that incident. I was four when he died, so I didn't really know him that well, but I've seen the impact that that event had on my family. I decided to try to see if I could find the house where he died.



It's a very strange house that's built underground, with only the roof sticking out on top, in the middle of the New Mexico desert, with nothing around it for miles. It's on Doña Ana Road. I just ended up sitting in front of the house, trying to imagine what happened to him, why he left his family behind and moved to the middle of nowhere, where he didn't know anyone. The conclusion that I came to is that he's never going to be able to apologize for the way that he left his children and his family; he's never coming back. The best thing that we can do is let it go; honor him for who he was, but not dwell on the questions.

You have a unique sound, which I have a hard time describing. How would you describe your music to someone who's never heard you before? What is it that you create?

Yeah, that is really hard. I have made full-on electronic albums in the past; my last album was like loud alternative rock, maybe indie rock. With this one, I've been settling on the term "ambient folk." It's acoustic, but there's a lot of atmosphere, and sort of spacey, ethereal sounds. It's kind of unique, in that it's not just folk.

How did you come up with the album title?

The only way that I could record this album was to use the only time that [the studio] was available, which is in the mornings, so I was going in between 5 am and noon. "The blue hour" is the time between dawn and when the sun actually comes up. The sun is just below the horizon line, and it tints everything this really deep color. Traditionally, I guess it's been a really inspiring time for a lot of artists. I didn't know that it was a thing until I looked it up. That's how I sort-of see this album- in a couple of different ways.

[Chris lives with a condition called synesthesia, a neurological phenomenon in which stimulation of one sensory pathway or part of the body triggers an automatic and involuntary experience in a secondary sensory pathway or body part. It causes a person to connect things that are unrelated.]

For me, it's letters and numbers [connecting] with colors. So every time that I'm working on something, it has a very strong color to it that I usually end up trying to work into the artwork, just for my own sanity. A lot of these songs were a pale blue color and so [the title] fit in that way, but also in that [the album] is fifty minutes long, so it's close to an hour of sort-of sad or "blue" music. It's unintentional, but I'm trying to let people know that I'm aware that it's a little bit heavy. I look at it as 'my blue hour'.

You didn't really have a choice about the time of day you recorded, but did you find that you are like other artists who find the blue hour inspiring? Did it work for you?

Yeah, that's definitely my favorite time of day. I've never been a night owl, and I don't like being up too late. I don't like waking up either, but I love being awake as early as possible. I've had a lot of great experiences and memories where I just wake up early to watch the sun come up. I find that it's the time that I feel the most in touch with the world, and I feel most at peace. I don't think a lot of people enjoy being up that early, but I really do. ☺

