

Christian Lee Hutson starts his new album *Quitters* with a laugh. In this follow up to his ANTI records debut, *Beginners*, Hutson moves away from the focus on growing up to the dread and complications of growing older. The laugh that announces *Quitters* is the kind you'll find at the end of John Huston films, one of resignation and release, and somehow a cosmic laugh that says "California," a place where lonely people gather together like birds.

Across *Quitters'* 13 tracks, Hutson crafts this portrait of the place he's from. In these short story-like songs, Hutson presents characters who carry this golden light and sinister geography inside them. It's a place where everything in the end gets blown away and paved over with something new, where even the ocean and fires are always whispering, "One day we'll take it all back." This is a Los Angeles in constant transition, where childhood is lost, where home is gone and can never be visited again. Yet Hutson's world is also one of happy accidents, where doors are left open on purpose, hoping that someone new will walk through. In the end, what's left are these songs created by some future spirit, written to comfort the person we are now.

Produced by Phoebe Bridgers and Conor Oberst, *Quitters* is also a departure from the digital recording of his debut. Hutson stated, "When we made *Beginners* the aim was to make simple digital recordings of how I would play the songs in the room. With this record, Phoebe and Conor had an idea that it would be fun to make it to tape. Phoebe is my best friend and making *Beginners* with her was so comfortable and easy. So I wanted to work with her again." "I took a long time with *Beginners*," Hutson added. "I had those songs for 10 years, but these songs came out a lot faster." Because the songs from *Quitters* were written in a shorter time, "there was a little bit of insecurity with the lyrics. Having Conor there served the purpose of someone who I really respect as a lyricist and could soothe my anxiety."

With *Quitters*, Hutson pulled from a wide range of influences for his second record: the tight rhymes of John Prine, Bob Mehr's book about the Replacements *Trouble Boys*, and Scott McClanahan's auto-fiction *The Sarah Book*. It's a recording that also feels like a sonic expansion from Hutson's debut.

"We made *Quitters* all at once. We hadn't seen each other for sixth months and this was the first time being in the room together again. It was a real familial feeling, working with the same people, playing with the same people where everyone gets so good at knowing one another's tricks and are complimenting one another's weird mistakes. My favorite records are when the guitar gets fucked up and then that becomes the recorded version. And it's those accidents that make them special."

The song "Rubbernecker" announces Hutson's two great themes: memory and pain. Written along with his friend and artist Alex Lahey, "Rubbernecker" was the last song written for the album. Hutson said, "After I made the record, I was thinking about marriage, about codependency and lying to yourself. You like to think this is my life and these are the parameters. You can't even see you're on this path until you wind up in the darkest wood, but you keep walking because the road is comfortable." The song charts a relationship's demise, through a proposal, a rupture, and then ultimately a breakup. Hutson pointed out, "It's about the way that when your life is falling apart, friends fixate on the falling apart rather than just providing support." The song also contains some of the album's many perfect rhymes: *Self-esteem vending machine/a doctor's office magazine*.

Yet, the song "Cherry" returns Hutson to some of the high school themes from his first album. Hutson states, "I wrote that when we were mixing *Beginners* and is the first song that I wrote for this record." The song charts the ridiculous "cringey" lies we tell in our adolescence. Hutson also pulled from

memories of older friends from high school. Hutson said, "I wanted to describe that part of growing up in Los Angeles, having a cool older friend who will drive you speeding and have you jump out on the roof of the car. These people who do these flawed things and tell this type of lie." However, Hutson's gift is describing these characters and the world they inhabit without moralizing about it. He is less interested in the "why," but in the simple mystery of describing these remembered moments from a place.

Likewise, the song "Age Difference" allows Hutson to expand on the Los Angeles character song tradition of Randy Newman and Harry Nilsson. The track concerns a character who is finding that they are on the *dark side of my thirties*. Hutson said, "There's a specific type of an older man that I have encountered a lot in LA. The aging rocker who hasn't had a long relationship and they are the McConaughey-like character who is dating a much younger girl, and they have just stopped progressing." Yet Hutson refuses to pass judgment in a world filled with judgment. Hutson is interested in describing the world the way it is, not the way we want it to be.

So if every great record is a world, then this is Christian Lee Hutson's world. It's a California filled with the fuzzy haze of a dream, and the half-remembered moments of a forgotten life. Songs that say, "That was so long ago, but I still remember you." A world where the past is never past, and the old people we once were still live inside the new people we are. It's a record brave enough to say, "In the *good* old days, when times were *bad*." But beyond the songs, it is this voice. The voice of someone who was alive in 2021 and recorded a group of songs with his friends for us to hear. And one day these people who shared these sounds will look back and say, "We were all there for a moment? And we were young once, weren't we?" For there is a consolation prize. *A breath on the window/A message that no one can see*. While the whole world seemed to be ending, we still listened to one another. We tried to hear. And so we joined this sad laughter. Together.

- *Bio by Scott McClanahan*