

ORCHID MANTIS

how long will it take



TIME FLOWS (LIKE A RIVER)

The first sound you can hear on the album as the guitars fade in is the sound of the public transit subway trains arriving where I was studying in Seoul. At the end of the song you can hear them departing, leading into the next track, which transitions back to the US in setting and lyrics. That's why I sequenced these as the first two tracks on the album, to be two sides of a pair I guess. If I'm being honest, this song just started with me being really into Simulation Swarm by Big Thief and wanting to use a similar sort of clean, simple drumbeat - everything else came from that. The lyric at the end of this song's first stanza is a common phrase, but I first heard it in a manga, Solanin by Inio Asano. I read it again recently and connected with it way more than when I was a teenager. Just the general theme of wanting to maintain some sort of youthful "aimless" life you've previously known, wanting to just play music or make art instead of settling into what you perceive as a more monotonous and dull life.



LUCID DREAMS (10PM IN 2016)

This was one of the first tracks I wrote after I got back home. I was sort of working with a limited setup - just a 4-track cassette recorder, DI to audio interface, no amps or anything. Fake live drums from a plugin (although I added a real cymbal later) overlaid with drum samples. Sometimes I have a vision but often I just build a song one step at a time, without any particular sound in mind. That's what happened in this case. It originally had less of a busy chorus/shoegaze influence but I think Conor (mixing engineer for the project) developed that vision and I accepted it wholeheartedly! The lyrics are really personal, not much metaphor. It felt weird coming back to the US after this really intense phase of my life that's too personal to describe in depth but involved some big risks and some major disappointments. A big part of this track (and the album) is the realization that the universe is fully indifferent to you, and sort of accepting the positives and negatives implied by that. In the right context, it can be a truly freeing realization, or it can be the worst feeling in the world.



LIGHT WEIGHT (THREE APARTMENTS)

Not a whole lot I can say about this one. I'm pretty sure I wrote it the same night I stepped off the plane back home, playing guitar for the first time in months. I wasn't going to include this one, but of all the b-sides I started for this project this was the one Conor liked most so I went with it! Although the previous two songs bring it up often, this track really focuses entirely on this breakup I went through while staying overseas. To explain some lyrics - while I was studying I lived in 3 different apartments, each and every one of them in viewing distance of churches with these big glowing red crosses adorning them. I've always been interested in religious symbols and the power they hold for people, just conceptually. I didn't want to alienate anyone, but I also felt it would probably be correctly understood as thematic in nature.



I'LL NEVER GET BACK (THREE MONTHS)

It's funny, I was so excited about this song initially and predicted it would be the primary single of this album, but as the rest of the tracks came together it quickly fell out of favor for me. It's another one without any metaphor. I was kind of just spilling my soul out, these lyrics were glorified venting honestly. I don't know how much it can connect due to that, but when I have something to work through I try to write about it honestly. I definitely allowed myself less of a filter with the lyrics of this album, trying to really get the pathos of what I was feeling deep into the songs themselves. In this case, into an otherwise very upbeat sounding song. That felt right though as these lyrics are a catharsis, and catharsis is (most) always a positive thing.



I COULD LIVE IN SLEEP (TERMINALLY UNOCCUPIED)

This one grew on me a lot throughout the process of finishing the album, in its' unfinished state I was considering cutting it as it felt redundant after I'll Never Get Back, but I'd show the project to people and this one seemed to always stand out. This is me iterating on a sort of formula I've developed with the last few albums, this specific style of guitar with a steady, fast drum machine going. I had to rewrite a new chorus when the old one just wasn't working, this song definitely took a bit of trial and error. That was unusual for this album, the basics of most songs came together very easily. This is another one with pretty depressing lyrics and an upbeat instrumental. Tired and wired. I'm really proud of the phrasing on the lyrics too, I'm one of those people who struggles to utilize long sentences or words with many syllables - maybe you know what I mean if you've ever tried to fit pre-written lyrics to a melody you're using and come away frustrated. I was really just getting philosophical in this depressed state, really upset about a lot of things. This song and the one before are just two manic, upbeat venting sessions honestly.



SNOW WORLD (FILLED WITH STARLIGHT)

This one started as a weird guitar part i had that I sort of challenged myself to write a vocal melody for. I really couldn't tell if it was something or not, I think the project file is still named "don't know if this is worth it." But once I fixed it up, added drums and overdubs it just stuck with me. The lyrics directly reference Yume Nikki. If you've played that game it'll be pretty obvious. I've been trying to use prompts and sort of unusual thinking to break out of lyrical habits and explore subjects/approaches outside of my usual writing - one of those ideas was to write a song about a game I like. It's a bit of an inane subject I guess, but I'm proud of what came out in some weird way. This track and the one after could've been a little A/B side release, they really go together that much for me.



ENDLESS LIFE (HIDDEN STREET)

I don't even remember much of how I made this, really. I was definitely just working on gut feeling without any questioning - sat down, wrote a guitar part and added things until it sounded compelling. It was the fastest song on the album to put together. I guess I did try to emphasize the surreal aspects of this song. It was really hard to mix because I wanted it to sound calming/lullaby-like but also noisy which was a hard balance to strike. I'm proud of the lyrics to this song, they're a bit more impressionistic than how I usually write. I was staying at this guesthouse next to Seoul Tower & I think I wrote the lyrics outside that complex at like 3am. The "hidden street" thing is a dumb reference, again to games I played when I was much younger. Maybe some people who played the same MMOs I did as a kid will get it. I liked the idea of repurposing the phrase in a totally different context though, as if it's some sort of shared secret place.



SKY IS GETTING DIM (ROOFTOP REVERIE)

Often maybe a track or two on an album will be a holdover/b-side from earlier sessions that I never really developed. This is the only one like that on this project, and I think it's a bit noticeable but I was excited about making something so pop-adjacent (at least in my mind). This song for me is really visually tied to this rooftop bnb I stayed in. It was super cramped but worth it for the view, especially as the sun went down. So that's the setting of this song for me. (Oh god I really promise I didn't mean to make that pun I'm only seeing it now)



OUTSIDE LOFI (AIRPORT MOTELS)

Another really visual one. This first half really places me on the street outside Lofi, a bar/nightclub in Hongdae, Seoul. The second half sort of transitions to the subway train heading home late at night - field recordings, and this really floaty, spaced out synth hanging there. That's just a phone voice memo recording of a heavily circuit-bent toy keyboard my friend got for like \$20 at a goodwill. Unbelievable find considering it had a full patchbay installed. On this album, I initially wanted to really stress space and time and have a flowchart almost, of where physical settings transitioned as instrumentation changed throughout. There's still a bit of that, but not really. Maybe I'll go for that again in the future.



FATE INCARNATE (THE NEW YEAR)

This one started during a several day shut-in recording session at a mountain house with some friends. I have this footage of us jamming on the original instrumental and just trying things out. I was so excited about how it sounded then, but when I got back home and tried to really put the song together, it just wasn't working. I was almost going to cut this one, but after several retakes, key changes and remixes, I settled on this version, which actually includes the original jam audio just sort of hanging in the background as texture. I'm really proud of this one because of that, because I really had to work with this one to get it sounding good to me. It also feels like an usual vocal delivery/melody for me, especially the middle verse - always happy to try new things!



BOARDING CALLS (CREDITS ROLL)

This was really just me pursuing a fluke guitar progression I sort of liked till the vocals really came together & stood out to me. I pictured it as a really barebones Galaxie 500 thing. I'm so happy with how it came out, even though everyone tells me it doesn't sound like them at all. The lyrics are all about flying. The weirdness of leaving a place, and looking down from several thousand feet up knowing everyone you know in that city is contained in your field of vision. Little ants. I'm so proud of the dual guitar solo I added at the end here - it seemed like the song needed a climax and I wanted to keep the song all analogue so some melodic guitar moment like that felt right.



YOU HAVE MY SOUL (FOREVER AND ALWAYS)

This track is definitely the one I listened to least while making. It was just hard for me to get through, I don't usually write from this sort of place. Usually I try to wrap my lyrics up in metaphor or phrases & ideas that seem interesting to me, but here I again let myself write a pretty straightforward breakup song, just processing out loud and coming to some peaceful place with it. I wanted to just let the lyrics be raw and wallowing, which is not usually how I approach things. I wanted to have something to contrast the rest of the songs if that makes sense - I figured it would stand out and give the album a sort of emotional peak. These last three songs (before the coda track) all grapple with it from different angles I guess, and there's an arc there in my mind. I wanted to make the slowest, most quiet song in my discog for this one, which is something that's actually hard for me production-wise as my amateur instincts tend to make everything too loud and in-your-face. That's the thing I'm really proud of with this one. I think Conor and I were able to get into slowcore territory with it. Bands like Low and Bedhead. Wanna do more like that. Get even quieter. Even sparser.



HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE (RING OF LIGHT)

I was really excited about this demo. It was one of the songs I started while abroad, working with just Ableton and my laptop. It took forever to add vocals because I was just so worried I would ruin it by adding anything at all. I love chord progressions or melodies that seem to go on forever, just droning. That's sort of what I was going for here. The second verse lyrics expand on a phrase I actually dreamt about - the "Even in all the worst of things, there is still a beautiful ring of light" was a quote from an interview with the director of a nonexistent movie I saw in my dream. I just woke up with it and had to immediately write it down. The question "how long will it take?" is referring to this concept of a terminal happiness or peace, like how people always picture this end-goal state of life that feels so distant from their current state. That was something I was thinking about a lot, especially as I was processing this breakup and sort of having to hold hope for some future point when things wouldn't hurt so much. I had to just remind myself that time was coming, to help me get through the present moment. And sure enough, it did get better. The next song on the album is meant to move the album's focus into the past tense instead of the present, reflecting on this time period from that future place of peace and acceptance.



IT WILL BE ALRIGHT (SLEEP AND TIME)

This song started as a theme for a video game I'm still developing on and off. I've scrapped everything twice already but it'll be finished one day, right? This is maybe my favorite of the whole project. I was so excited when I got that piano part figured out. It felt like an unusual instrumental for me, while still a natural outgrowth of what I've always been doing, and I just really wanted to do it justice. What I'm proud of is just how calm and healing the song is for me personally - although perhaps that's a given considering the lyrics were essentially just me trying to reassure myself things would get better. I don't know. This song, more than maybe any song I've released, was directly removed from my heart. There's no buffer in this one. On most of my past albums I've gone with slow, sad final tracks, so I really wanted to break that habit. There was no doubt this was going to be the final song on the album (not counting the short coda), as it was the most positive note I could end the album on, and the most truthful.



TIME ERASED (TIME-ZERO FILM)

This song is a reset. Time flows, and time erased. It has meaning to me, but it doesn't really come across unless I explain in detail, which I will not. Somehow I liked the idea of that. Putting a little coda that exists purely for me and someone else. This is the "where are they now?" montage at the end of the documentary. It's the scene that flashes forward to the present day, as past events fade from memory. Except they don't, because I preserved them on time-zero film. I preserved them with this album. Credits roll.