

BEAR'S DEN

BIOGRAPHY 2019

Bear's Den more than live up to the promise of their first two albums with 'So that you might hear me', their extraordinary third long-player.

The title is taken from a lyric in "Blankets of Sorrow," the elegiac, wistful ballad that closes the album and perfectly encapsulates the theme that runs through 'So that you might hear me': the need to be heard, acknowledged, understood. That brief, simple sentiment that underpins all of the songs on the album expresses a universal desire that so often goes unspoken, but runs deep within us all - the primal, fundamental need for meaningful human connection.

"To me, it's about trying to communicate with someone and feeling like you can't reach them anymore" says Andrew. "That deeply resonated with me. Unwittingly, it became a theme of the album."

'So that you might hear me' is the follow-up to Bear's Den's, UK silver-selling debut, Islands, which earned them an Ivor Novello nomination in the UK and a devoted following worldwide, and 2016's more expansive Red Earth & Pouring Rain, which went Top 10 across Europe. 2017 saw the band cap four, non-stop years on the road with the largest headline shows to date, from sold-out tours of the States to a 7000-capacity arena in Belgium, and sold-out hometown shows at London's iconic Brixton Academy and the Hammersmith Apollo.

The speed and scale of their success meant that Bear's Den hadn't taken a break since forming in 2012 – Red Earth & Pouring Rain was written in just three weeks squeezed in between tours and main stage festival slots at the likes of Pukkelpop and Lollapalooza Paris. Last year, finally, they took a step back to focus on their future.

For the first time, Andrew and multi-instrumentalist Kevin Jones had their own studio, a cubby called Josiah Booth Studios next to The Church Studios in north London, where they could leave their instruments plugged in and come and go as they pleased. Musically, there were no self-imposed constraints. Nor was there a time frame.

Both had a hankering to incorporate piano and more electronic instruments into their sound. Kev began playing with ideas on piano and drum machines while Andrew alone went to a cottage in a remote part of the English countryside with a guitar and started scribbling lyrics.

"In the past, I've always tried to understand what I'm writing about," says Andrew. "This time, lyrics came from a more subconscious place. Like they were things I needed to say and I worked back from there. I'm inspired by people who wrote as though they were trying to figure out their own feelings as much as explain them to anyone else. The aim was to be more honest and instinctive, like when you blurt something out and can't take it back, so you have to deal with it."

Glorious opener "Hiding Bottles" builds in to their rockiest song to date, but is also doused in electronics. The idea for the song began with a synth pad and the lyric "Hiding bottles in the cold

blue light.” Like several of the songs, it turned out to be about Andrew’s relationship with a close family member with an alcohol addiction and his attempts to address it.

“It was a situation that I could file away while we were on tour,” says Andrew, “but back home, I had to confront. The lyrics recall real conversations, trying to reach and help someone. It’s also about recognising what you can and can’t change, however hard you try.”

The first single “Fuel On The Fire” blossoms from the throb of drum machine beats in to an orchestral beauty. “Laurel Wreath” is a majestic track built on piano with electric guitars and synths that shimmer like strings. Both the haunting “Fossils” and the deeply moving “Crow” fuse acoustic instruments and electronics so organically it seems daft to distinguish between them.

“I love how the boundaries between genres have gone in the age of streaming,” says Andrew. “No one listens to music in boxes anymore, so why make it like that? Our songs incorporate all sorts of sounds, but not in a pre-ordained way. We could start with a weird pocket synth sound or Kev playing a creaky old upright piano. We just tried to follow our collaborative intuition and go where each song suggested.” The result is a record that is both bold and exposed, at once intimate and widescreen. While the music leads the listener down different paths, the lyrics unfold as though revealing secrets, each line littered with clues.

Lyricaly, “Crow” was inspired by Max Porter’s award-winning, 2016 novel *Grief Is The Thing With Feathers* while “Not Every River,” the album’s short, self-produced shimmering centrepiece, is about acceptance – or as Andrew puts it, “being okay with what’s not okay”.

Bewitching album closer “Blankets Of Sorrow” turns to nature to explore familial love and ends with Andrew sighing that tweaked album title over acoustic guitar. “We decided pretty early that the title should be: So that you might hear me” he explains. “We changed the ‘will’ in the title for ‘might’ to acknowledge a sense of hope. The implication being that situations can change, particularly if you talk about them.”

So that you might hear me was demoed at Josiah Booth Studios and recorded at several studios in Seattle over the course of seven weeks with the producer Phil Ek (The Shins, Fleet Foxes, Father John Misty).

“Kev and I are both huge fans of The Shins – their early records helped teach us how to write songs,” says Andrew. “We’d never met Phil, but it was our dream to work with him so we sent him our demos and, luckily, he loved them. Working with him in Seattle was a deeply rewarding and massively educational experience.”

Bear’s Den’s four-man touring band also appear on the album, joining them in Seattle throughout the recording to beef up the songs with brass, drums, electric guitar and more electronics.

“The album has grown and evolved from all of the processes we went through. Every step of the way, it has been instinctive, collaborative and pushed us both lyrically and musically. From writing the songs to Kev and I working on the songs together in the church, working through them as a band together with Phil in Seattle and even ultimately mixing with Craig Silvey (Arcade Fire, The National) in London. Each separate process shaped and informed the album enormously.”

“The album started out as an attempt at trying to communicate with someone honestly. Our thoughts are not all rational, not all considered or tied up with ribbons and bows. This album is an attempt to reveal the honest and difficult challenge of communicating with anyone that you really care about.

“We’re immensely proud of it and hugely excited to share it with people.”