

JESSE MAC CORMACK

BIOGRAPHY 2019

Not everything appears instantly. Jesse Mac Cormack's astonishing debut album arrives unhurried: a work of ardent, kaleidoscopic art-rock that is at once a dazzling premiere and the culmination of a meticulous five-year evolution. Over the course of three EPs – 2014's *Music for the Soul*, 2015's *Crush* and 2016's *After the Glow* – the Montreal native has gathered accolades and refined his vision, nourishing a songwriting that is lavish and undaunted. Whereas Jesse's earlier work drew heavily from folk and roots-rock – Les Inrocks called him the “new hero of modern folk” – the songs on *Now* are prismatic and forward-facing, recalling the adventurous pop of Tame Impala, Talk Talk and Perfume Genius.

As always, Jesse played most of the instruments himself, from bass to steel drums to analog synths. He's a home-studio wizard and a blazing guitarist, tapped to salute Stevie Ray Vaughan at last year's Montreal International Jazz Festival. His approach has been informed by years of collaboration – performing across North America and Europe with bands like Patrick Watson, The Barr Brothers and Cat Power, and producing acclaimed albums for Helena Deland, Emilie Kahn, Philippe Brach and many others. For his own first LP, Jesse knew he wanted to make music that would thrive in a live setting – lit up with choruses and incendiary guitar riffs, fluorescent synths, and upfront percussion. Instead of working from melody and chords, songs like “Give A Chance” were built from the rhythm section up, imagining the way an audience might respond.

This sense of exploration suffuses *Now*'s 10 songs, but so does a sense of dream: the idea that discoveries aren't just made by forethought but by feel. Seasons pass, relationships change, lessons come from unexpected quarters. “Yesterday is already gone and tomorrow may never come,” Jesse explains – and songs like “No Love Go” and “Nothing Lasts” try to abide in that precarious present. Other tracks draw on feelings of reverie and trance, desire and compulsion, even the singer's experiences with psychedelics.

Yet for all its searching, Jesse's music never seems aimless or confused. These aren't slack-jawed jams: they're would-be hits, clear-eyed and direct. If the record has a landscape, it's the open space of the Mojave desert – “vast and weird,” the tranquil bed of what was once a teeming ocean. Death Valley has long loomed large in Jesse's imaginary; he returned there to shoot the album's artwork, and two forthcoming music videos.

“If you succeed at being yourself, nothing can stop you,” Jesse says. For some, albums are statements: the summation of who you are and what you want. For others they’re documents: the recording of a particular moment in time, before it fades away. Now is somehow both: a statement of principles and a blink of the eye; painstaking songcraft and an acknowledgment of flow. At 30 years old, Jesse Mac Cormack is gathering the world around him. He’s living in the moment – with a song on his lips, a guitar in his hands.