

# KYSON

Biog - 2018

The most hypnotising songs are ones we can sink in to, forgetting about everything as their words and melodies wash over us. That's the kind of musical alchemy Kyson creates. The moniker of producer, singer and songwriter Jian Liew, this Australia-born artist is making abstract electro-folk that's designed to take you closer to his complex and nomadic soul.

Growing up in late-90s and early noughties Adelaide in a creative household – Jian's father was a collector and restorer of antique furniture and there was always something spinning on Jian's mother's record player, her eclectic taste favouring everybody from Leonard Cohen to Massive Attack – impacted Jian's yearning to create: her record collection transformed from a family relic into a source of inspiration. A few years later, Jian first flexed his musical muscle: his mother's same LPs were used to create samples as he dipped into the world of hip-hop production in his early twenties.

10 years ago, when Jian left Australia for Europe, he headed to Berlin intending to soak up the city's art and experimental music scene. He's called the German city home for so long, flitting between there and Vienna to record, but he's never officially wrapped a song there. Instead, he says it's best for him to retreat to a more peaceful place to gather his thoughts. "I always took stuff from Berlin," Jian claims. "I went there, consumed its creativity, got immersed in its beautiful art scene and then stored it. Then moved it all to a quiet place, like Adelaide and let it free there. I'm very grateful for that." When you hear his tracks, his way of juxtaposing his inspirations with the beauty of isolation comes together in perfect harmony.

That escape from his home country transformed his sound into something skin-prickling and strange; soul-bearing and melodious all at the same time. Jian's latest work could be described as a cocktail of Ben Howard's vulnerable vocals and Arthur Russell's entrancing production, but Jian's ear for a strong hook elevates it into something greater; a sound he can call his own. After all, it's already led to two well-received records released through LA cult label Friends of Friends in the past half-decade: 2013's production-based *The Water's Way* and its 2016 follow-up – on which Jian first decided to sing – *A Book of Flying*. A third chapter, forming with an air of mystique typical of Kyson's creations, is on its way.

Unlike most artists who spend their childhoods obsessing over instruments, Jian barely touched one until he turned 19. Before teaching himself to play the keyboard, he chose to spend time listening; an unorthodox move that makes his work under the Kyson moniker even more meticulous. On 'Every High', one of Kyson's latest releases, Jian's coos his rich lyrics over layers of looping, echoing vocal samples, gentle guitars and sporadic percussion. To Jian, each component is vital. They all combine to create a denser, more satisfying sound.

Having spent the best part of a decade collaborating with other artists, both on record and off, Kyson has become something of an emotional safe space for Jian now. "I like working with other people as a producer or a co-songwriter," he says. In the past, he's collaborated with artists like SHIGETO, singer-songwriter Merryn Jeann and blues singer Alice Phoebe Lou. "But music is so sporadic to me. It comes at the strangest times: sometimes it's 3am; others it's at six in the morning." Freed from set studio slots and writing sessions, Kyson has given Jian the opportunity to burrow deep inside himself, mining his own emotions to write, produce and perform. He likes that independence. After sonically interpreting everybody else's state of mind, with Kyson, he's allowed to turn the lens back on himself.

Now in the final stages of completing his third project, Jian is revelling in a moment of stasis right now. He's currently releasing a series of individual tracks "about friendship and love and things that are hard to manage when you don't have a solid home". They all draw inspiration from that nomadic life he's living, between Berlin, Vienna and Adelaide, and while they're not a set body of work – a conscious decision on Jian's part – they're like stepping stones to his next, full-length project.

What's still to come is just as dynamic, he says, "all part of [his] emotional and sonic journey". With a pair of solo records and a growing list of production credits to his name already, crafting dynamism is something Jian Liew is an old hand at now. Kyson's future? It's only set to make him greater.

- words by Douglas Greenwood