

**Christian Lee Hutson**

***Paradise Pop.10***

***Paradise Pop. 10*** feels a lot like finding an unpublished collection of short stories, scrawled hastily on the sides of airsickness bags and cocktail napkins, each one detailing the life of the unwitting passenger fortunate enough to be seated next to **Christian Lee Hutson** on their flight to Fort Worth.

Anyone who has had the good fortune of falling in love with his earlier albums - 2020’s ***Beginners*** and 2022’s ***Quitters*** - knows that he is a keen observer of both himself and the world. Those albums earned the Californian singer-songwriter international attention, with *Pitchfork* noting that, “*Few lyricists can paint such clear portraits in such a small space; even fewer can set them so naturally to such long-breathed melodies*”, the UK’s *Guardian* commending his work as “*small films in song, delicate and devastating, lingering long*” and *No Depression* heralding the arrival of “*an artist fully formed and wise beyond his years”*.

From the first line of the first song on this new album - “*Tonight your name is Charlotte / In a play within a play*” - he reminds the listener that he is again weaving a web of autobiographical fiction. However, this time he has somehow both simplified and sharpened his style.

On ***Paradise Pop. 10*** you will visit the CC Club in Minneapolis, a San Francisco stage production of a Tom Stoppard play, a bowling alley at the Jersey Shore, and a 2003 Subaru where two dads consider kissing each other after a game of pick-up basketball. Despite how broad the world Hutson creates is, the album gives you the impression that you are at an airport gate of sorts, and all these characters are gathered together, waiting for their lives to begin. They make light conversation with each other as their flight continues to be delayed…just another 15 minutes.

Recorded at **Figure 8 Studio** in Brooklyn NY, the lifelong Angelino and his frequent collaborators - 4 x GRAMMY winner **Phoebe Bridgers**, GRAMMY-nominated producer & songwriter **Marshall Vore**, and GRAMMY-nominatedengineer& multi-instrumentalist **Joseph Lorge** - ventured east to make ***Paradise Pop.10*** and picked up some friends along the way. Lauded singer-songwriter **Maya Hawke** - whose latest album credits Hutson as producer and co-writer - co-wrote and sings harmony on the sharp and shoegaze-y earworm “**Carousel Horses**.” The song is a spiritual sequel to “**Age Difference**,” a single from Christian’s last record,***Quitters****,*which depicts the crumbling of an unbalanced love affair: “*You shouldn’t feel stupid/ I just knew before you did/ Now I’m sitting here spinning my wheels/ I bet you know how that feels.*”

Recorded in the depths of winter, the close-knit talents from Los Angeles hunkered down to craft a brilliantly constructed and tender album. A captivating, breezy charm permeates every track,with each song hooked around Hutson’s warm, earthy vocals and dexterous story-telling. Whether fragile, finger-picking folk or rousing, beachy, power pop, these songs are informed by a sense of creeping melancholy about the place Hutson had spent most of his life; the sprawling, inscrutable city of Los Angeles had become haunted in his mind. A move to the East Coast, and the “eyes up” city of New York, was required to refresh his memory banks. “*I wanted to make an eyes up record. A looking forward record,”* he says.

He explains, “*Sometimes when you live somewhere for a really long time, the place starts to feel like a memory graveyard. Every corner becomes kind of haunted in a way, kind of dragging you out of the present. That’s the street that Mikey used to live on. I smoked a cigarette in that alley with Zoe. There’s the rooftop we used to watch planes land from…y’know? That’s what LA became like for me, in the time after I made* ***Quitters****.”*He expounds, ***“****My last two records were really about exploring the past and mapping a little “star tour” of memories. Spending so much time revisiting all these emotional landmarks ended up giving me the feeling that I was missing my life. Like it was passing me while I was looking the other way. It felt really connected to the city. I would spend half my life in the car, just completely on autopilot, reliving my life from the beginning on repeat every day.”* Having relocated to New York City he says he feels a very different energy around him, one he describes as,*“You’re alive right now. You’re living your life today.”*

Accompanied by **Shahzad Ismaily**’s synths, Hutson’s rich voice shines most clearly on the album’s first single “**After Hours**.” He sings from a condominium in a corporatized Heaven to the woman he misses back on earth. “*Big budget productions of the lives of your loved ones / The good stuff is behind a paywall”*. Though the citizens of this Heaven are offered daily glimpses into life on Earth, our narrator prefers to imagine the minutiae of his love’s routine while he waits for her to join him.

One of the album’s most sparse tracks, “**Flamingos**,” finds Hutson at the piano backed by longtime musical collaborator, and the album’s co-producer, **Phoebe Bridgers** singing harmony. In this song we catch a glimpse of an anxious traveler, fresh off a flight from Tokyo, as he weaves and bobs through a crowd to reunite with a girlfriend. *“I’m taking the red eye over the dateline / A sea of slow walkers all taking their sweet time*.” As he describes what he sees in her, we see him struggle to resist the urge to point out the differences between them, always reminding her of the score. “*Losers remember the people who won / Winners are never afraid to lose / You only think about falling in love / I only think about you*”. The listener is left with the question: If you love someone as they are, could you ever really lose?

The album is somehow both literary and unpretentious, maybe best exhibited in the final track, “**Beauty School**”. Singer-songwriter **Katy Kirby** sings backing vocals on this surprising pop-punk tinged dose of poolside folk rock. “*In a mirror universe / Time is moving in reverse / I’m gonna turn my life around / everything is different now*.” The lyrics to this chorus call back to that of another song from the record; “**Candyland**.” “*Dismantling my time machine / I’ll probably put back together for the final scene*.” Again, Hutson gives the keen listener the impression that he is actively re-narrativizing his life. That he has wound up somewhere he never thought he would be and is trying to wrap his head around how not to ruin it.

***Paradise Pop. 10*** takes its name from a real life “town” set deep in the woods of Parke County, Indiana, near where Hutson spent some of his childhood. There, just past the population sign, you’ll find a row of five houses on one side of the road and a cemetery on the other. Hutson shares, “*When I was a kid, my dad used to take me up there, mostly because of the novelty of the town limits sign, but also because it was so quiet and peaceful. For years, he would say that if life ever got too crazy, we could go up there and start living our real lives; be the people we were always meant to be. It occurred to me while making this record, that most of our lives we spend waiting to “be the people we were always meant to be.” I wanted to name this record after that town because it always symbolized an arrival to me. It was the ‘when’ that I looked forward to as a child. ‘When’ it all made sense and I was finally who I was meant to be.”*

Such a sleepy backwater could feel like a limbo of sorts, like time is frozen; leaving room for your mind to wander either backward into your regrets of the past or forward into the future, into the unknown. But if you can learn to quiet these thoughts, you might realize you aren’t waiting at all. There is no delay. You are living. You are here.

**Olive Plunk**

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