

Bittles' Magazine | Interview

With the album *Uplifting Themes For The Naysayer* **Walrus Ghost** has created one of the most beautiful and beguiling pieces of music I have heard in years. Here gorgeous ambience melds seamlessly with post-rock dynamics to create a wonderfully sumptuous aural landscape that relentlessly draws the listener into a surreal world. By **JOHN BITTLES**



Walrus Ghost - Foto: Mooncircle

And the fact that he is neither a walrus, nor a ghost does nothing to detract from the quality of the sounds he creates. **Walrus Ghost** is in fact one Christian Banks, a rather talented Brooklyn-based producer who previously recorded smoky instrumental hip hop under the name **Las Flores Project**.

In many ways *Uplifting Themes* is a big step up from his previous output, with the record exploring a richer, fuller sound that utilises elements of ambient, post-rock, jazz and much more to create something that is 100% his own. The album is out right about now on super-hot Berlin-based record label *Project: Mooncircle* and is more than worth a trip down to your local record emporium. Containing lush down-tempo tracks that are as sunny as they are melodic the record's ten songs gently encourage the listener to lie back, relax and allow themselves to luxuriate in sound.

We Build It Up To Tear It All Down features a string sequence which contains so much yearning that it makes the heart melt while *Fragments* is the sound of stillness where it seems hard even to breath. *Together* introduces an air of discordance to proceedings while *Narrowing Circle* betrays Christian's hip hop roots and is a head-nodding delight. Yet to single out individual tracks is somewhat missing the point with this album since it works gloriously as a whole.

Taking some time out from his busy schedule Christian was kind enough to agree to answer the following

questions where we touched on such topics as the new album, organic instrumentation, Betty Boop and a whole lot more. Oh, and if you fancy a listen to the record as you read [then pop over here!](#)

Hi there! To start with, can you tell us a bit about who you are and what you do?

My name is Christian Banks, I live in Brooklyn, NY, and I make music under the alias **Walrus Ghost**.

Your new album *Uplifting Themes For The Naysayer* is out on the 14th of Feb. Can you tell us a bit about how the album came about?

I worked on *Uplifting Themes For The Naysayer* over the course of two years. I wrote, recorded, and mixed all of the music. I play guitar, keys and Rhodes, vibraphone, etc; but I also work with several talented people. Chuck Palmer played drums, Justin Hopkins and Ace Comparato contributed guitar on a couple songs, Andrew Janss on cello, Mark Nieto played some bass, and Dave Engelhard played reeds. In terms of process, I compile all the recordings in a general sense for a song or idea, and then work heavily in the editing process to build out songs.

If you were trying to sell *Uplifting Themes for the Naysayer* with one track, which one would you choose and why?

I can't really pin down one song. I'd say if you like instrumental music, I think that there's at least one song for everyone on there.



The record is pretty chilled and was able to send my mind to a warm, sunny place even on a miserable winter's day in London. Where do you think the ideal place to listen to the album would be?

I hate the idea of an artist pinning their own music down to a singular experience. While a song can have a particular general emotion, I think what makes music interesting is that a song becomes a unique experience for every listener. Once I make a song and put it out there, it goes beyond myself. It's really up to the listener to decide what it means to them or how it makes them feel. Respecting that intelligence, creativity, and empathy of someone who is going to listen to your music is extremely important. It plays into what I think about during the song-writing process.

***Paperhands* contains the ghost of a beat that, for me, forms the heart of the track. Could you ever see yourself making a purely functional dance tune for the clubs?**

I like dance music, particularly a lot of classic 90s house and some deep house, but I have never tried making anything that would get club play.

Final track *Broken Dialogue* is so gorgeous and chilled it could easily calm down an irate badger.

What was the idea behind this particular song?

My goal with *Uplifting Themes For The Naysayer* was to create an album that is an interconnected experience, not just a cluster of songs haphazardly thrown together. I think with technology and the way in which music is experienced now, the concept of “the album” has become subconsciously less important, and at times completely thrown to the wayside. I’d like to bring the album, as a complete concept, back into the picture. When I put the album together, I tried to create a space or a purpose for each song to exist in a context with the others. With that being said, *Broken Dialogue* sequentially follows a very chaotic, climatic track. I liked the idea of closing the album with something that brings you down from that chaotic moment. It is a calm song, but a melancholic and reflective moment that I hope ends the record nicely.

Where did the name Walrus Ghost come from? Was it a certain classic cartoon?

Yes, the name came from an old **Betty Boop** cartoon that is cut to the **Cab Calloway** song “*Minnie The Moocher*”. I saw the cartoon in a class I took at university years ago. The reference doesn’t have much more meaning than that. It was simply a visual character that always stuck out to me and I thought it would make a great name for a band.

What does the future hold for yourself and Walrus Ghost?

I simply want to continue to challenge myself and keep myself motivated and inspired, push my creativity, just keep making new music. At the moment, I’m working on new material for **Walrus Ghost**, as well as a couple other projects. I’d like to work on more film and video projects in the future, I like the role that music and sound plays with the visual experience.

How did you hook up with the lovely people at Project: Mooncircle?

When I finished the record, I was just in the process of shopping the record around to labels, and a friend of mine recommended that I reach out to them. They were genuinely interested in the music, so I decided that working with them was my best move.

If the mission of the label Project: Mooncircle is to find »The conjunction between electronic and organic music« how well do you think *Uplifting Themes for the Naysayer* fits into this remit?

A big part of my sound relies on the electronic processing and abstraction of organic instrumentation, so I think the record fits into what they want their output to be. I definitely don’t sound much like the other artists in their roster, but I think that’s cool. Their desire to work with me shows that they are adventurous, they aren’t afraid to broaden their scope. If they continue moving in the same way, you can be sure to see really interesting *Project: Mooncircle* releases in the future.

Is there any music you’ve heard recently that has made you grateful to have ears?

I’m a little stubborn when it comes to new music; I have a tendency to stick to stuff that I’ve been listening to for years. I also try not to listen to one thing too much, I feel like that can sometimes affect your own creative process. Anything **Guillermo Scott Herren** puts out always inspires me. His work under **Savath y Savalas** is some of the most amazing, under-appreciated music out there. **Tortoise**, **Do Make Say Think**, **Broken Social Scene**, **Yo La Tengo** are always great for me; I always return to them. I would say for something

newer, like last year or so, was **Ulfur**. A friend sent me his music and I thought, »This is great«. His record *White Mountain* is so good.

Have you any final words for our readers?

I would like to say thank you to my friends and family who have supported me throughout the years. Thank you to the guys who played on the record, thank you to Luke Caspar Pearson for the amazing album art, and thank you to the guys at *Project: Mooncircle* for putting out the record. *Uplifting Themes For the Naysayer* comes out February 14 and a portion of the artist profits are being donated to the charities *Doctor's Without Borders* and *Food Bank For New York City*.

And just like that our short interview was over. Needless to say if you are a fan of ambient, down-tempo or simply great music then you owe it to yourself to check the album out.

Till next time!

| JOHN BITTLES