

Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds - Ghosteen

story · December 30, 2019

Nick Cave's latest record 'Ghosteen' is, in my opinion, the best album of the year. Perhaps, the greatest collection of songs this decade. And, arguably the pinnacle of the artists' long and storied anthology. A sonically dense cloud of swirling drones, stark, desolate, keys and atmospheric synths make up the entirety of the eleven songs. Together, with Cave's storytelling narrative, lyrical journeys and forays into the imagination, they conjure a hypnotic trance-like state that both lifts and descends into darkness and light, and stages a stinging, bittersweet clinic on the forces of hopeless despair pitted against fierce love. It is, at its core, an expression of the complex fragility of relationships when entangled in a spiral of shared grief. A struggle to cope with excruciating loss, all the while painfully aware of the severed threads on the mortal bonds we have with those that remain. The storm, and its aftermath have wrought a change that requires reckoning by those in its wake. What is present, is the fear of losing all: loss of control and meaning; every thing and every one, that once gave forth bountiful happiness and joy. The fight portends no certain outcome. Rather, it is a day to day dance barefoot through broken glass. These are the seeds of the songs on Ghosteen, and what they reap are as magical, intimate and delicate as a butterfly's wings, and as ethereal as the spirits of those that no longer reside with us.

I had assumed the subject matter would revolve loosely if not metaphorically around the tragic death of Cave's 15 year old son in 2015. In addition, it is evident that a prominent theme is the question of whether Cave's own marriage will ultimately survive the catastrophic event. The songs are as much a tribute to the love he has for his wife as they are a dedication to his fallen boy.

Percussion of any kind is sparse and intermittent at best, minus the menacing plucked bass string loop evident on 'Hollywood.' There are few guitars and no dramatic, thunderous drums, but then again these have never been a prominent fixture of Cave's work. His magic is in his words and the voice that he gives them, often breaking to the point of faltering entirely; raw, unfiltered and without a corrective take, and by virtue of this, able to convey his message more deeply and personally than any other medium.

The power of Ghosteen lies not only in the expressions of sorrow and grief, but the love of life in all its unbridled glory: its tragedy, its consequences and its triumphs. And there is not one among us who cannot relate. As the record closes the song Hollywood echoes a stark

reality:

It's a long way to find peace of mind. I'm just waiting now, for peace to come.