

CONVEYING EMOTIONS

JOSE GONZALEZ AND CRAIG HOLLYWOOD RAISE THEIR RIGHT FISTS AND CHAT ABOUT THE NEW PRESIDENT, RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE. AND THE FACT THAT BONO MAY NOT BE AS MISINFORMED AS MANY THINK.

If you could twist back the hands of time and ask Swedish folk artist José González a question such as 'do you think that you will receive international success by choosing to cover fellow Swedes (The Knife's) track *Heartbeats*?' (Yes, that song from the Sony Bravia advert with the bouncing coloured balls) he would have probably laughed at you. However, this is exactly what happened.

Around 2003, González single-handedly took over the world of popular folk music. His debut album *Veneer*, which included the seminal tracks, *Crosses* and *Slow Moves*, was the first example of his trademark ability to combine flawless classical guitar structures with a vocal warmth that would raise the hairs on the most hardened of necks.

Since then production has gone into overdrive. Having released no less than six EPs (which have included covers of Kylie Minogue's *Hand On Your Heart* and Joy Division's *Love Will Tear Us Apart*) and also the 2007 sophomore album *In Our Nature*, there wouldn't be a better time for José to bring his music to Perth. Preparing to headline the opening night of the Beck's Music Box at the Perth Festival, González wastes no time going into detail about his last album.

"*In Our Nature* is a slightly more dramatic album, I think. The songs are sound wise and lyric wise a bit more... what do you call it?" At this point the first word that sprung to this writers mind was deeper? "Yeah, maybe deeper, hang on nah not deeper, I guess stronger in a way" he laughs. "I guess *Veneer* was a bit more introspective and *In Our Nature* is more about general stuff and not so much about the person. It was inspired by current events around the world. But I've tried to write them in a not so specific way. A song like *How Low* is a song about negative externality and about any situation where you have symbiotic relationships. Where both parts are having something positive out of it, but at the same time they are external effects of what they're doing. Whereas *Killing For Love* is more about tribalism and how people are able to hate because of their love for and idea or love for an object."

If you placed the album *In Our Nature* into your CD player, it wouldn't take long before you picked up on sturdy political frequencies. Considering that the inauguration of the 44th US President (Obama) took place on the very day that José and I shared our conversation, it would only have been fair to raise the issue. "I'm not really a political artist, I don't know actually. I don't know really what political means," he laughs. "I like the feeling of, you know, bands like Rage Against The Machine when they get all excited about something with their fists in the air, or like, a good Bob Dylan song. I like the feeling and it's more aesthetical, the feelings that I'm trying to convey sometimes, I try to avoid specifics in my lyrics."

OK, fair enough, however, was González a bit let down that he wasn't invited to perform alongside U2, Bruce Springsteen and Beyoncé Knowles at President Obama's first ever White House knees-up? "Yeah... it's cool," he laughs "I always think it's weird when artists get too involved in politics, or actors. I think it's always a risk. I'm

sure that a person like Bono is pretty well informed, but I think that many others, probably not so much. What I'm trying to say is that just because you're a good singer, it doesn't make your point of view any more important than anyone else's."

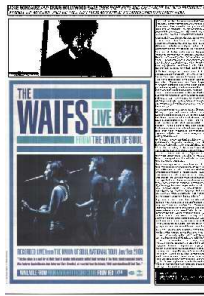
Another interesting characteristic about the release is that it tallies in at just over half an hour long, which is arguably petite in the scheme of up to date album construction. González seemed enthusiastic to lay some foundation with regard to this fact, "I'm pretty aware of it. When I first started making my first album I noticed that the songs were short, and I like it that way. I didn't want to make them longer. I guess I got inspiration from old albums where you have the vinyl LP with two types of songs on each side, and those LP's weren't longer than maybe 30 or 40 minutes. So that was the standard before the CD came and people could make, you know, 50 or 60-minute albums. I feel like it's easy to lose the focus if you have a long album. But I think that as long as you put a lot of effort into making good songs, it shouldn't matter if it's two minutes or a good song that is ten minutes."

As previously mentioned, González has a somewhat fanatical penchant for delving into the illustrious art of producing 'the cover song.' From Bronski Beat's *Smalltown Boy* to Massive Attack's *Teardrop* (which sits proudly at track number five on the *In Our Nature* release) all bases have been covered. "When choosing the covers, I mean, with The Knife it was fun to pick it up because it was still to be played on the radio. Joy Division, or the song *Love Will Tear Us Apart* was a song that I used to listen to a lot when I was younger, and Bronski Beat is more a song that I used to see on MTV and *Music Box*. It's been like that many times, I don't get into that many artists but I do know some songs here and there and I cover them."

If you've shelled out on a ticket to Saturday's event and were wondering what to expect, then you should probably get ready to be involved in an atmosphere that would evoke balmy levels of raw sentiment. Before signing off, González gave insight into his writing philosophies, and finally a taste of what to expect. "I'm definitely trying to write songs that convey emotions and often when I'm playing live, I like to play the songs in a way that you get into the mode of reflecting. Of course, if people like it, they like it. I like making good songs, and if people like them, that's pretty much why I would want to play. In a way it's pretty simple but yeah, I guess, it's all about conveying emotions. It depends on the listener too, but many times I've heard people saying how a song like *Crosses* makes them cry. And it's interesting, I'm pretty sure that there are harmonies and part of the lyrics that makes people think about maybe an episode of their lives and it makes it more emotional."

WHO: José González

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