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Insight, Music

Music for the Masses

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By: Piper McKeever



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the album on his website *Music for the Masses* as, “sardonically mocks earnest, erudite reflection while containing earnest, erudite reflection.” Folk seems to be the unifying foundation for the songs, though it takes on prog-rock and punk-rock influences. *Music for the Masses* is far from Jacobsen’s first project, and his Spotify has an impressive eleven albums available. Jacobsen, a former student (though ungraduated) of Berklee College of Music, has a strong background in music. When I asked Jacobsen about his musical influences in his college days, he said, “I went there playing jazz fusion bass and the experience was a lot like the movie *Whiplash*. I was listening to a lot of involved musicians’ music like Mahavishnu Orchestra or Weather Report or old school jazz like Miles Davis. Then I woke up one morning and realized that I really didn’t like jazz.”

The album starts with the title track “Music for the Masses.” Jacobsen’s vocal quality calls back to that of early punk bands as he establishes an anti-institution sentiment in the first lines. Jacobsen sings, “You went to a famous higher institution / And you want to write a song about the French Revolution? / Don’t. No one will care.” Jacobsen laments in the song that if one wishes to become famous and successful in the music industry, they’d better focus on their looks and sing about *derrières* rather than about important historical events.

Though one might think that the second track, “All I Want for Christmas” is yet another cover of Mariah Carey’s song of the same title, do not be fooled. Though reminiscent of an Irish drinking song, the subject matter is very different. Jacobsen laments in the song, “All I Want for Christmas / is to not have the flu.”

“It’s My Fault” makes an interesting thesis that all the problems in the world are derived from... well, masturbation. Though this was my least favorite song on the album, I can appreciate him taking a position against superstition. On the lyrics of the song, Jacobsen explains on his website, “This one might go a little too far, but hey, I think it’s funny. This is supposed to ridicule a pretty common human tendency to blame our personal failings and vices for clearly unrelated bad things that happen in the world ”





sorta maybe kinda care” repeats throughout the song.

“Calendrier Révolutionnaire Français” is the most distinctive song of the album. Starting with a nearly haunted church organ sound, I was caught off-guard as it transitioned from “Sorta Maybe” because it is so different from the previous songs. Still relatively quirky and disjointed in ways, his unique musical perspective shines through this song. Frequent pauses between stanzas into guitar-focused sections, the staccato in Jacobsen’s voice, and length also play into prog-sensibilities and storytelling. One of the most ambitious songs of the album, the song deals with the subject matter of time as a revolutionary tool in the French Revolution.

“Deck Chairs” is one of the saddest songs on the album. The short song takes on an acoustic guitar sound, though Jacobsen retains his grungy vocals. According to his website, the song has been in production since 2005, and though the simplicity in it has a more effortless quality than I’d expect from a song in the making for almost twenty years, I appreciated the more raw quality.

The last song, “For Anyone Who Cares to Listen” starts with piano, and reminds me of a final song in a musical where the main character wonders if any of what they’ve done really even matters. The song is meta, acknowledging that even after all the hard work Jacobsen puts into the album, there’s a possibility that no one will end up listening to it and he contemplates the possible futility of the endeavor. The song is a sweet and earnest ending to an album that mostly focuses on the humorous.

Though *Music for the Masses* contains irreverent songs about the music industry and our inadvertent self-importance, it is also touching in unexpected ways, with his final tracks being more serious. When I asked him about the organization of the album, Jacobsen said, “The contradiction was intentional with *Music for the Masses* saying that no one wants to hear a song about the French Revolution and then the second half starting with a song about the French Revolution, or more specifically, the revolutionaries attempt to





mood. However, this is risky because someone who may appreciate the reflectively earnest and melodic ‘For Anyone Who Cares to Listen’ may be turned off by the over-the-top NSFW humor of ‘It’s My Fault.’” While I don’t believe I am likely to listen to many of these songs day to day, I found them interesting to consider as far as their message and novelty. However, I do imagine enjoying some of these songs, like “Music for the Masses,” with friends before heading off to a party as a quick pick-me-up and to lighten the mood.

As for what Jacobsen hopes one will take away from his album, he says, “I’d like people to just remember something about what they listened to. There are millions of great unknown songs available for streaming out there. I hear songs all the time that I think are great while listening to them. However, an hour or two later, I often can’t remember anything about them. Whether it is a lyric, a melody, or a vibe, I try to leave the listener with at least some kind of a hook. It could be a laugh, a groan, or an earworm melody. For the right listener, I am hoping they may relate to the general theme of making art because you want to in the face of indifference. Even if most people would rather hear a song about butts than a song about the French Revolution, write your song about the French Revolution. Rearrange the Deck Chairs on the Titanic so they look how you want them to look. If that keeps your mind off your problems or the world’s problems, it is still time well spent, even when the ship ultimately sinks.” Finally, his advice for young songwriters is, “I’d say that learning theory and learning about as much music as possible are important and really helpful. However, you shouldn’t make yourself like music because you’re ‘supposed to.’ You should give it all a shot and try to understand what other people see in as much music as you can, but at the same time, if you just want to play like Greta Van Fleet, then just play like Greta Van Fleet.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

