

Album Review: *Hold Me While the World Burns*

By Conor Warren (He/Him), Guest Author

Here is the first thing that you realize about falling in love as an adult: One of you will die first. Depending on your disposition you might hope either to avoid that pain or to spare your lover from it, but the unavoidable fact is that when you are in love, the best you can hope for is to die at the same time. So goes the prevailing theme of Matti Joy's album *Hold Me While the World Burns*, exploring the highs of love... and the inevitable decay to come no matter where those highs reach.

To call this album a love letter would be doing it a disservice. While some songs, like "Incredulovely," lean into the saccharine nature of loving with gentle beats and a tonality reminiscent of Father John Misty's ooey-goey songs, there is much more that highlights the bittersweet nature of time spent while anticipating loss.

Matti Joy outlines her life philosophy simply in "Compost in Training." While most of the songs on her album allude to the separation (or perhaps lack thereof) inherent in death, this track makes it explicit. There is no wind or promulgation of self through ideology such as in the cover of "Havana Burning"; there is simply the fact of decay and dissolution even extending down into inked upon flesh that will disintegrate just the same as unmarked skin. Here, we are hit with the gut wrenching confrontation of what loving means when we will all turn to dirt; who am I when things fall apart?

The good news is: Matti doesn't tell us the answer. Instead she responds by examining the different ways that love can play out. Love of justice, love of neighbor, love of self, and love of enemy all swirl together to inform love of the beloved. You can't fight it: from Matti's vantage point, to love another deeply is to love the world deeply.

Still, this is not a naive and rose-colored sense of loving. Inherent within it is recognition that the world is burning, people are killing and dying and desperate for a better life, and within all that we find the essentialness of love. Of self, neighbor, lover, and stranger. At the end of the album all the pain and sorrow of navigating this world entrenched in rot and ruin is held away by the beloved. Both "Hold Me While the World Burns" and "Whisk it Away" encapsulate this feeling. For narrative reasons I would have liked "Hold Me While the World Burns" to be the final track on the album, but frankly either works as a farewell in this letter on loving and (eventual) losing.

The sound itself of the album is one that anyone familiar with the renaissance of queer folk music should immediately recognize. Most songs begin with an acoustic opening of no more than thirty seconds to set the tone and pacing of the story about to be told, and then we are introduced to charming vocals. Here is where Matti shows off her adroit abilities to work with

the resources she has available to her both in terms of producing back-up vocals and layering other instrumentation over the stringed instruments. This tactic works well for the most part. Most of the songs have those qualities of production that complements Matti's incredible talent, but there are times when production detracts, such as the progressive layering in "Incredulovely" eventually taking away from the intimacy of the song.

However, the album as a whole is tied together very well stylistically, with the biggest departures coming in the form of "Unbound" and "Havana Burning," which are coincidentally/not coincidentally the two most explicitly "political" songs on the album. "Havana Burning" is a Dan Reeder cover and shines as an example of what a cover should be. There is no crude transposition of the song into one's own style as scores of covers have been prone to do, but a transposition of the song into Matti's own lens. The song has a more intimate and original feel than the original and incorporates Matti's technical expertise wonderfully. Here, the shifts in quality lead to an emphasis on Matti's anger and outrage at the cruelties we, the USA, inflict upon those simply seeking a better life. Borders themselves become bondage, a concept expressed through the energy of these songs extremely well.

Overall, the execution of the album is smart, though at times I found myself wishing Matti would color outside the lines just a little bit more. The stand-out song is "Compost in Training," which is by far my favorite song in the album both sonically and lyrically. The issue of decay and dissolution is one that all humans must eventually grapple with if they are to live enlightened lives, and this song encapsulates the struggle, grief, and joy in the knowledge of our own unbecoming. Likewise, in this song I found myself struggling more with the knowledge that what rings true for me is likewise true for every man I've loved. On top of these themes Matti's vocals carry both the pain and the whimsy of our respective journeys to the grave, even more so when discussing the sloughing off of tattooed skin. Love and rot all rolled into one heart wrenching song, contained in a bittersweet and moving album.

Stream and share the album:

<https://share.amuse.io/album/matti-joy-hold-me-while-the-world-burns>

(streaming links - full album)

<https://mattijoy.bandcamp.com/album/hold-me-while-the-world-burns>

(purchase link- full album + 8 bonus tracks)

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