



"After years as a classical composer and a stint as guitarist with The Show Ponies, the Houston-born, L.A.-based artist takes a more country turn."

—AUSTIN CHRONICLE

"Harris' beleaguered warnings and nasally delivery are reminiscent of Mountain Goats' John Darnielle, but his message is more about self-preservation than faith." —ROLLING STONE

JASON HAWK HARRIS

LOVE & THE DARK

RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 23, 2019

Jason Hawk Harris hit rock bottom during the writing and recording of his debut full-length *Love & the Dark*. In the last few years, the Houston-born-and-raised, Los Angeles-based musician endured life-altering hardships—illness, death, familial strife, and addiction—yet from these trials, a luxuriant and confident vision of art country emerged.

With an unlikely background, Harris is a singer/guitarist/songwriter who walks his own line, one that touches on Lyle Lovett's lyrical frankness, John Moreland's punk cerebralism and Judee Sill's mysticism and orchestral sensibility. There's even the literary and sonic audacity of an early Steve Earle, an outlaw unafraid to embrace harmony.

Jason's grandfather exposed him to country music at an early age, and his family celebrated holidays with group sing-alongs. In his teens, Harris began listening to punk, indie rock, and, notably, Queen. In some part inspired by the instrumental flair of Freddie Mercury & Co., he later took the educational plunge into classical composition and was eventually wait-listed for the master's program at UCLA, when things took a turn.

While touring and performing in the indie folk band *The Show Ponies*, Jason started writing his own songs, intuitively returning to his country roots but incorporating his classical and rock 'n' roll performance skills. He released his first solo offering, the *Formaldehyde, Tobacco and Tulips* EP in 2017 and hit the road.

Meanwhile, his world fell apart: his mother died from complications of alcoholism; his father went bankrupt after being sued by the King of Morocco; his sister was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis and gave birth to a premature son with cerebral palsy; and—subsequently—Jason got sidetracked by his own vices.

Love & the Dark is not THAT country narrative, though; that of surviving through pain. But it's not NOT that either. **This is his personal narrative on death, struggle, and addiction, of a life deconstructed and reassembled.** From the opener, "The Smoke and the Stars," it's apparent this album, produced by Andy Freeman, will take you to compelling new places. An ache, a longing, claws its way out of the speakers, the gradual drone blossoming through without rigid genre designs. You can hear **the essence of classical music** in a long crescendo; you can feel his Houston upbringing in JHH's soulful and humid inflection; you can sense his Los Angeles home in the sharp and risky dynamics. You can also hear the joy and exquisite desperation when he swings for the fences, belting "Maybe I was just waiting for you, to get through the grapevine, tear down that door, and let me live in those green eyes of yours."

On "Cussing at the Light," the classic "drink-you-off-my-mind" trope has **an updated countryopolitan vibe** with its precise harmonies courtesy of Natalie Nicoles, and later a raucous teenage urgency rumbles through the punchy "I'm Afraid." The buoyant roots-pop "Red Room Blues," **featuring vocals by folk/bluegrass maven Rachel Baiman, touches antecedents stretching from Jason Isbell to Nick Lowe.**

In the **dark balladry** of "Phantom Limb" (also sung with Baiman), when he softly describes his mother's funeral through keenly personal details, "I got this shirt. Smells like the viewing/ Formaldehyde, tobacco and tulips/ I've washed it ten times, and it won't come out," **he takes us to the bottom with him.**

While his music acknowledges mortality, pain, and hardship, it's also Jason Hawk Harris's way of working through it. *Love & The Dark* is a hypnotically convincing album; you can feel the unknown, but you need not fear it.

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