***At Home With My Candles***by Half Shadow

Release Date: April 8, 2022
(Bud Tapes / Dove Cove Records)

*At Home With My Candles*, Half Shadow’s third LP is an album of mythopoetic paeans to the domestic uncanny—the mysterious and unseen worlds experienced at home. Recorded almost entirely in quarantine, the record’s songs chart the beauty and strangeness that domestic life can conjure, at once ordinary and utterly mystical. Long the enigmatic moniker of Portland’s Jesse Carsten, Half Shadow’s new songs expand the project’s intimate poetics into something more expansive and encompassing, without ever losing a sense of tenderness. Intimate folk songs magnify into anthemic chant-alongs, lo-fi dirges, and primal pop experiments. Genres blend with a subtly psychedelic grace, with Carsten’s voice delivering dream-laden poems always at the center of the sound. Listeners are sung into an interiorized sphere: an otherworldly landscape of tension, languor, and mystery. From the place of home a whole cosmos fans out.

Taking its cues from the surrealists, and especially Leonora Carrington, whose famous self-portrait inspired the lead off track (“Inn of the Dawn Horse”), the album’s lyrics welcome dream logic and non-linearity as central tenets of their make-up. Like the fractured, domestic narratives of Maya Deren’s oceanic films, or the strange, liminal interiors of Dorothea Tanning’s paintings, these songs eschew conventional extraversion, instead revealing subtler stratas of the domestic. Home becomes a portal to the imaginal: painted in all the vivid and occasionally unsettling colors of the unconscious realm. Eternity grows from the psychedelic soil of the yard (“Song for the Garden”), enigmatic presences stalk a darkened bedroom (“In My Room (A Creature Approaches)”), and a lover’s whispered voice opens the entryway to a clandestine beach (“Flame (Flower in the Air)”). As in so many dreams, landscape and interiority blend, revealing an elemental world, that while unpredictable, is full of beauty and visceral emotion.

*At Home’*s songs test this boundary between the interior and the infinite, as on “Moonless (Unmoored)” in which Carsten repetitively incants “what door can you open onto timeless shore? / an ocean breathes in a midnight, / moonless and unmoored.” Something more profound and unexpected haunts this space, an uncanny presence worthy of devotion. With an ecstatic tenderness, Carsten’s lyrics come to chant this living unknown: “From my heart is tethered / even more / From my heart is tethered great emptinesses of galaxies abhorred / and your great face / my word to explore / your great face, opening / like a blossom on the verge of / nothing more.” From the opening of the garden gate to the black edge of the expanding universe, these songs brim electric, full of a hearth’s roaring fire, and the darkness after its gone out. What cosmic force might be hiding in that absence? What deep mystery can a house hold? Revelations are poised in half-light, uncovered only briefly, before slipping back into the dark.

This duality of light and dark, the hidden and the exalted has remained a marker of Half Shadow’s poetics since the project’s beginning. This record is no different. Returning from a particularly exhausting tour in November of 2019, Carsten came back to Portland with the intention of putting new songs to tape. Turning inward felt like the right medicine following the extroversion of travel and a busy show schedule. Coincidentally most of the Half Shadow songs collected in notebooks and voice memos over the last year were about home—its beauty, generosity, its difficulties, and strangeness. What began as two weeks of recording time expanded into months of writing and rewriting, dreams collected and poeticized, and a deeper, more insular experience of home as the gloomy winter in the Pacific Northwest set in. Then, the virus, a country-wide lockdown, and a requirement to view the home-space in an entirely new way. From an expressly outer world, to an overtly, uncomfortably inner one in a matter of days. From sunlight into full, unexpected shadow.

What began as a thematically synchronistic project grew into a timely and urgent contemplation: how do we truly relate to these spaces that we inhabit, habitually, unconsciously; that hold us in our most fragile moments and challenge us in their monotony? Play host to our deepest fantasies and fears, joys and strifes, creative workings, personal successes and failures? How do we love in these spaces, find connection, grieve, and grow? How are houses like a skin—a mind, a body—in which we must live and leap, finding the strength to risk a more complex life? Or as the song “A Full Day Spent (Between the Worlds)” puts it: “how does one find themselves in the house / when on every door comes a ceaseless knocking / that refuses to stop?” The world calls us out into its churning energy, its wide space, its communal atmosphere, and yet—as so many of us have been forced to endure these past years—sometimes we must remain turned inward, in contemplation, held in the house of mystery, sometimes against our will.

While *At Home’*s songs were for the most part collected to tape in solitude, the album’s texture came alive with the help of a group of collaborators recording their parts at a distance. Featuring contributions from Yaara Valey (Antiquated Future), Zach Burba (Iji, Mega Bog, Dear Nora), Jem Marie (The Ghost Ease), Julian Morris (Layperson, Post Moves), and mastering from Kevin Christopher (Oh Rose, Ancient Pools), these songs emerge in vivid technicolor. While retaining their humble core, these acoustic visions spiral out in echoes of droning violin, bellowing orchestral flugelhorn, glittering synth, and choral waterfalls of multitracked voices. These are joyful, eclectic song-collages, that embrace the experimental and environmental songwriting tradition of the Pacific Northwest while enfolding an array of more canonical art-voicings. Think ‘Venus in Furs’ crossbred with Sade, played back on Brigitte Fontaine’s stereo with Robbie Basho’s detuned guitar dancing in rivulets over the Raincoats-esque free violin phrasing. Sounds are familiar but somehow altogether unanticipated and revivifying; trance inducing, luscious. Could this music-landscape be a new home?

Half Shadow reveals a world surviving on the edge of the known and generously offers it to the tortured ears of the day-sleepers. A piscean dream-vision shining through silver branches into the bedroom of every seeking soul. *At Home* opens the curtains and collects these lunar sound rays in a tea-bowl for drinking up; a sense of poetic nourishment in sonic form. By its close *At Home With My Candles* has induced a surreal clarity and continued the work begun with Half Shadow’s 2019 album *Dream Weather Its Electric Song*: engaging listeners in a process of seeing our world, our selves, and in this case the homes we haunt, with new, uncanny vision. *At Home With My Candles* is out April 8, 2022 on Bud Tapes and Dove Cove Records.

***Single / Video Releases:*** “Song for the Garden,” January 7, 2022. “I Practice Dying (in the Spare Room),” February 4, 2022. “Moonless (Unmoored),” March 4, 2022.

*RIYL*: Mount Eerie, Mega Bog, Little Wings, Jonathan Richman, Velvet Underground, Ruth Garbus, Six Organs of Admittance, Yves Jarvis, Brigitte Fontaine, John Frusciante, Robbie Basho, Marisa Anderson

*Key Points*: Independent, DIY artist from the Pacific Northwest, lo-fi collagist sound, deep poetic inclinations, experimental lyricism, dream music, genre defying, homemade videos and artwork inspired by surrealism (Man Ray, Leonora Carrington, Maya Deren, Federico Garcia Lorca), working with multiple community-oriented DIY labels, intends to make a healing music, psychology and mythology are essential parts of the milieu, black and white, psychedelic, incantatory, unexpected, dreamlike, mesmerizing, ephemeral, psychic, beautiful, natural, flowers

***Half Shadow Bio***

For the better part of a decade Half Shadow, the midnight-blue songwriting moniker of Portland’s Jesse Carsten, has been unfurling an enigmatic, windswept music: equal parts earthen folk and cosmic rock and roll, with a primal pop experimentalism seeping from the edges. Wedding an expansive, transcendent poetics to a fiercely home-spun aesthetic, Carsten creates joyful, eclectic song-collages that embrace the experimental singer-songwriter tradition of the Pacific Northwest while enfolding an array of more canonical art-voicings. Half Shadow’s songs range from abstract finger-picked poems to heart-tugged acapella treaties and repetitive art-rock incantations. Genres blend with a subtly psychedelic grace, with Carsten’s gentle voice delivering dream-laden lyrics always at the center of the sound. Half Shadow’s performances—joining quiet song-spinning with performance art, poetry recitation, and instrumental guitar improvisations—are recognized as strange, dazzling, immersive events, inspiring a passionate following in the Northwest. The Portland Mercury has praised Carsten’s shows as “invariably powerful, full of wonder, and unlike anything else." Following a string of cassette and CD-R releases on smaller labels, Carsten birthed the first fully fledged Half Shadow LP in 2019, *Dream Weather Its Electric Song*, which was hailed by Antiquated Future as “a carefully thought-out work...of poetic devotionals to the natural world, the subconscious, other realms.” The record was celebrated for its ability to work tangible magic: as Queen City Sounds put it, Dream Weather deconstructs “familiar songwriting styles, bringing the logical mind into alternate pathways of operating.” Having been called “one of Portland’s best kept secrets,” it is paradoxically Half Shadow’s mystery-inspired, DIY ethos that spirits Carsten’s ever-evolving project out of the home-recordist’s cave and onto more illuminated stages. When it does, Half Shadow is ready to wrap listeners in the dark, sparkling hues and mossy undergrowth that have become the poetic trademark of this singular undertaking. Half Shadow’s third LP *At Home With My Candles* is due out April 2022 via Bud Tapes and Dove Cove Records.

*Praise for 2019's* ***Dream Weather Its Electric Song***

“Long one of Portland’s best kept secrets, Half Shadow makes dream narratives into softly psychedelic minimalist dark-folk anthems. The long-running project of Jesse Carsten, *Dream Weather Its Electric Song* is a carefully thought-out work (dare we say masterpiece?) of poetic devotionals to the natural world, the subconscious, other realms.” ***Antiquated Future***

"Dream Weather Its Electric Song" offers a unified, compelling, and fully realized vision of a poet exploring his own new, windswept landscape, blending realism with a lyrical, cosmic- language experimentation. Carsten brings an animistic, tactile quality to his songs, woven throughout drawing from dreams to celestial visions, blending spiritual and physical modes of perception. Lyrics slip between being sung to being spoken, dissolving definitions of form and meaning.” ***Goat Palace Zine***

“Half Shadow’s underlying bohemia gives a more contemporary breath to an otherwise psychedelic dwelling in the pietism of yore. There’s moments of Mark Kozelek and Brigitte Fontaine in the poetic cadences; the eastern influence of John Frusciante in his dark age ring in the drones.” ***Thrd Coast***

“It is refreshing to hear this concentrated thoughtfulness and tenderness in a stark, folk package.” ***Tome To The Weather Machine***

“Carsten strives to find meaning in the mysteries of the natural world and the subconscious mind across the eleven songs of the record... deconstructing familiar songwriting styles, bringing the logical mind into alternate pathways of operating.” ***Queen City Sounds***

“The album feels as much like poetry as it does music, with the lyrics taking center stage. While the words have an undeniable hippie aesthetic throughout, Half Shadow isn’t talking about crystal energy or dreamcatchers, but rather a universal wisdom.” ***Slow Breathing Circuit***