



MATTHEW SWEET *TOMORROW FOREVER*

Tomorrow Forever, Matthew Sweet's fifth album of new material in this century, the first since 2011's *Modern Art* and 14th overall in a recording career spanning more than three decades, is teeming with his signature sounds and ongoing preoccupations. But the expansive 17-song work—available June 16, 2017 in CD, double 180-gram-vinyl LP, CD and digital configurations via Sweet's own newly launched Honeycomb Hideout imprint through Sony's RED Distribution—takes these familiar elements into previously unexplored territory, reflecting profound changes in his life. Essentially, *Tomorrow Forever* contemplates a knotty epistemological question: Does what is real extend beyond what the consciousness can readily grasp?

In early 2014, Sweet, his wife Lisa and their cats moved from their longtime home in the Hollywood Hills to their native Nebraska. They bought a house on the outskirts of Omaha, 40 miles from Matthew's hometown of Lincoln, where his elderly parents still lived. The 80-year-old house was spacious enough to accommodate Matthew's high-end studio—formerly Lolima Lane, now Black Squirrel Submarine—and vast array of instruments, as well the Sweets' collection of big-eyed art and Matthew's pottery-making tools.

Soon after relocating to Nebraska, Matthew's team launched a Kickstarter fund in order to crowd-fund his next album, but before he'd even gotten the project started, life happened. As he was getting acclimated to his old/new surroundings, his mother passed away, spending her difficult final days surrounded by her family. Never before had Matthew experienced the loss of someone near to him, and it stopped him in his tracks. But an extended period of grieving was followed by one of the most fruitful sustained bursts of inspiration in his prolific career.

"When I started cranking out stuff, I did as many as I needed for that time," Matthew recalls. "Before Ric [Menck] showed up to play drums, I got 10 or 15 ideas going, and then we played those. I eventually recorded 38 songs, and all of them are as pro as the ones on the record. There are things that for one reason or another didn't make it, but a lot of them go beyond what I wound up using. So in a way I was trying to bottle the essence of something that was even more sprawling and full of moodiness. The record is actually pretty simple compared to what went through my head while I was making it."

With Matthew, the creative process is never calculated; ideas fly into his headspace, he grabs them as they come and takes a ride, not knowing the destination. In this flurry, they multiplied like *Star Trek* tribbles, eventually taking a coherent form in his mind.

Purely in terms of its guitar payload, the new album is a breathtaking Fourth of July fireworks show, with axes trading volleys from the left and right channels in old-school-stereo fashion, as Sweet breaks out a lineup of killer players, each sporting a distinct style, like a modern-day Moby Grape or Buffalo Springfield. They shine on incandescent tracks like "Trick of the Light," the power-pop instant classic that opens the album, the bristling, *Zuma*-esque midtempo churning "Bittersweet" and the glorious four-guitar jangle fest "Music for Love."

Guitarists Jason Victor (Steve Wynn & the Miracle 3, Dream Syndicate), Val McCallum (Jackson Browne), John Moremen (The Orange Peels), Gary Louris (The Jayhawks) and Paul Chastain (Velvet Crush) blaze

away in various combinations alongside the rhythm section of Menck (Chastain's partner in Velvet Crush) and Sweet on bass and guitar; from song to song, he adds keys and Mellotron to his lead vocals and backing harmonies. The Bangles' Debbi Peterson drums on four tracks, and The Zombies' Rod Argent brings his elegant piano touch to "Haunted," which unfurls with a "Layla"-like majesty, and "Hello," in which Matthew straps himself into his time capsule for another journey to and from the future.

On the second song, "Entangled," he ruminates on the nature of time, a metaphysical notion he's tackled throughout his discography, the rock & roll equivalent of Kurt Vonnegut's celebrated novel *Slaughterhouse Five*. "Follow time as it flows both ways," the chorus begins, "Dreaming in another direction/In universes all around/We're meeting in another dimension/Each one unaware." The song was inspired in part by Matthew's monitoring of physics courses online. "'Entanglement' is a physics term," he points out. "Einstein defined it as 'spooky action at a distance.' It's a hard-to-understand concept, where, if you change an electron on one end, the electron it's paired with changes on the other end. They don't have to be in the same place. Because you do one thing on this end, you know another thing happens on that end."

This interactive relationship could serve as a metaphor for the way *Tomorrow Forever* came together: Much of this interaction was done long-distance, 21st-century-style, as song files flew back and forth between Matthew and his collaborators over the Internet. After he and Menck finished a basic track, typically consisting of drums, bass, rhythm guitar and a scratch vocal, he sent it to each musician he'd asked to contribute to the song in question, with the open-ended instruction, "Play whatever you want." When the finished part arrived, Matthew experienced the cyberspace equivalent of "Look what came in the mail today." He then wove the part into the track, building it piece by piece, while adding his multitracked backing vocals, any additional instrumentation he felt was needed and a lead vocal—although in several cases he wound up sticking with the original scratch vocal.

As the ideas swarming in his head were coalescing into batches of songs, Matthew's fans were coming through big time. In the end, their donations to the Kickstarter fund would enable him to optimize every aspect of the project, from the elaborate gatefold packaging featuring harlequin cover girls painted in the early '60s by Maio from his own collection to the album mastering by Abbey Road's Sean Magee, best known for his nuanced remastering of 'The Beatles' and John Lennon's catalogs.

"Because of the generosity of the people who contributed, I wanted to make sure that everything on the record was really good and solid," Matthew says. "They've been waiting for it for a long time, and I feel like I owe it to them."

Matthew's reward to those donors who were originally promised a set of demos (as it turned out, he didn't cut any) is *Tomorrow's Daughter*, a 12-song LP culled from the sessions; longtime fans will draw parallels between this limited-edition satellite record, as he describes it, and the previous companion pieces *Goodfriend* and *Son of Altered Beast*. When that one arrives, 29 of the 38 songs will be in circulation.

Matthew doesn't know where this flood of inspiration came from, but he has an inkling. "Maybe it came from being in a new place, getting to recreate my studio here," he speculates. "Also, I feel connected to being here in a way that I haven't felt before—the feeling of having two feet on solid ground. But having said all that, after my mother died, I couldn't even think about writing songs or starting to record for months and months. And in the end, I'm pleased, because I feel like I do get close to dealing with my feelings about her death at certain spots on the record. So that does inform it, but at the same time it doesn't completely overtake it being a rock & roll record, or enjoyable rather than purely depressing. I had a lot of feelings about her death, and dying, but then I just sat down and wrote a bunch of songs. Some of them are connected to emotional stuff for me, obviously, because the songs aren't devoid of feeling."

That's an understatement. "Haunted" is laced with mortal dread, while "You Knew Me" digs deep into the complicated nature of blood ties, concluding with a hard-earned epiphany: "You knew me/I knew you too/Afraid of yourself/Afraid of me/Afraid of myself/Afraid of you." The penultimate "Hello" ponders the possible existence of multiple universes and parallel dimensions, opening into the climactic "End Is Near," which closes the album on a note of unvarnished directness and gut-punch poignancy. A thorny contemplation of the finality of life, the song burrows down to the raw nub of the human condition.

"I had a lot of different feelings, but I didn't necessarily sit down to write a song about this feeling and that feeling," Matthew recalls. "I just wrote batches of songs, and then it became clear what they might be about. For as long as it took to make the record, I didn't agonize over writing, or rewrite songs; it was all quick and mysterious, like always. It's just that I was dealing with moving for the first time in 20 years, and dealing with my mom—just the shock of it all in general was what made it take as long as it did. What I mean is, I don't think any of it was overwrought; most everything is just the first thing anyone played."

When an uncommonly gifted artist trusts and follows the lead of his intuition, the results can be magical. In terms of its musical density, thematic depth, emotional immediacy and sheer scale, *Tomorrow Forever* could be described as Matthew Sweet's *All Things Must Pass*. That wasn't the plan—there *was* no plan. It just turned out that way.

"Right after we moved here," says Matthew, "I made this video for Kickstarter, and in it, if anything, I was promising myself that I was going to make a really heartfelt record."

Mission accomplished.

Bud Scoppa
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