

As White Lies were working on their new album *Five*, they became aware that its release would coincide with the tenth anniversary of their breakthrough debut, *To Lose My Life*. It seemed like the right time to close one circle and open another. Over ten years and four albums, the London trio have quietly become one of the UK’s most enduring bands, a cult group who’ve experienced both mainstream success and diehard fandom, a band who make bombastic, grandiose music about the complications and intimacy of day-to-day existence. It was time to kick off their second decade with a statement of intent. *“To Lose My Life was the best possible record we could have made aged 19,”* says bassist and lyricist Charles Cave. *“Five is absolutely the best record we could’ve made aged 30. Naming the album Five gives it a bit of a glow, like a pillar coming up. It feels like a bookmark.”*

Making their fifth album was a liberating process for Cave, Harry McVeigh (vocals, guitar, synths, piano) and Jack Lawrence-Brown (drums). After the conclusion of the tour to support 2016’s *Friends*, they were without a record deal and faced with two choices: hawk themselves to labels by pitching rough sketches of where their music was going next, or drain their own finances by doing the whole thing themselves with no-one to answer to, no comfort blanket to wrap themselves in and no guarantee at the end of it that someone would want to put it out. Obviously, the second option was much harder, so they chose that.

Rather than being a fearful process, though, White Lies taking matters into their own hands lit a spark of invention and burst of creativity in the trio. *“Doing it that way gave us the impetus to make sure it wasn’t just a record we are proud of,”* says Lawrence-Brown, *“but also to make sure it was a great record.”* Having made their first three albums in the pressure-cooker environment of a major label, they felt released and reinvigorated. *“We didn’t have any of that stress or people emailing us and coming down to the studio to peer through the glass,”* says Lawrence-Brown. *“On the first album, we had major label people coming out to where we were recording, holding a sign that said, “WRITE A HIT!” up to the glass.”*

There is a steely self-assurance about the band in these songs. *“We felt over the course of the previous four records, we’d learnt a lot,”* says McVeigh. *“It’s confident, this record. A lot of the songs have pushed our sound in a new direction and we had confidence and belief in the songs. There was never a moment where somewhere someone was in the room telling us not to do something.”*

They worked writing sessions around McVeigh’s relocation to San Francisco with the frontman and Cave coming together to work on tracks in London in three-week batches, the pair well attuned to each other’s creative quirks. *“A lot of what White Lies is about during the creation process comes from the weird dynamic Harry and I have cultivated over ten years of being best friends but also having a working relationship,”* says Cave. It takes a certain amount of to-and-fro for the intuitive, instinctive Cave and the assiduous, studious McVeigh to get into their groove but, when they do, then comes the flood. *“One thing me and Harry really care about it is writing really great songs,”* says Cave. *“Long ago we gave up caring whether stylistically they fit with what else is being released or going on. We’re lucky with White Lies. To all intents and purposes, if Harry sings on something, it sounds like White Lies.”*

Armed with their broadest collection of songs yet, they assembled a dream-team of collaborators cherry-picked from across their career. First, they set off to LA to workshop the new tracks with Ed Buller, the Suede and Pulp producer who has been involved in all of White Lies’ records bar one. *“We wanted him to do some pre-production on the songs,”* says Lawrence-Brown. *“We’ve known him for long enough that we knew if he thought any of the songs weren’t up to scratch, he would say.”*

They took the freshly-honed and lean batch of tracks into Assault & Battery Studios, the recording facility owned by producers Flood and Alan Moulder, in North West London, with the studio bosses’ only all too happy to lend some friendly assistance to the process. *“It was super-exciting cos we were self-producing and self-funding, but a bunch of people like Flood and Alan wanted to be involved. We’ve got all these people who are greats of the recording industry and who are keen to work with us almost as personal favours,”* says Lawrence-Brown. “*I think Flood said to himself and others that he’s ‘semi-retired’,”* adds McVeigh. *“but he came up to the studio for a day and took over and plugged in all of his synths.”*

The emerging album, mixed by Moulder with frequent instructions for the sound to echo his landmark ‘90s work with Smashing Pumpkins, captures a band about to embark on a thrilling second act. Opener *Time To Give*, released as the record’s first single in September, is an apt taster, combining lithe grooves, rhythmic precision, a captivating labyrinth outro and soothing, melancholic melodies. These are songs about modern life in 2018, tracks about trolls and aspirational Instagram living, about broken relationships and broken lives, the twisted reality of social media, otherness and outsiderdom. Cave is a prolific observer of other people’s lives. *“I’m definitely someone that spends my life most interested and inspired by people on a very intimate, close level,”* he says. *“I’m interested in the relationship individuals have with themselves or another individual. I’m not interested in things on a global or political scale. The human condition is what interests me.”* Cave says we live in an age where nuance is being lost, but his songs are filled with them, words and themes that gently trace the delicate balance of human interaction.

The bounding *Never Alone* is about someone who has taken on a vigilante role to be “an arsehole in life” purely as a means to balance out the fake goodness of online living, all set to an electro backing that recalls the heady exuberance of early New Order. “*Charles and I have a misguided fascination with what people think our band is, especially when you frame us in terms of the influences people think we have, and this song was born out of that – we were listening to a lot of New Order and Joy Division.”* says McVeigh. *“We totally fulfilled the prophecy, basically.”*

The epic sway of *Finish Line* marks a White Lies first with the presence of an acoustic guitar, Cave eventually convincing McVeigh to agree to its use (*“for ten years, he’s been like, “It’ll sound like Christian rock!””)* by pointing out its place in key recordings by The Smiths and Echo & The Bunnymen, whilst there’s Pink Floyd-style expanse to *Kick Me* with mesmerising emotional heft in McVeigh’s sonorous croon and a tranquil piano outro. It’s a record that ventures to the outer reaches: the jubilant synth-laden bounce of *Tokyo* is their poppiest moment yet and they’ve never done anything as heavy as the barbed-wire chorus of closer *Fire And Wings*.

*Five* stretches White Lies’ sound into exhilarating new territory. *“This record has given us a lot of confidence about what we can do next,”* says Lawrence-Brown. *“Not being fearful about the no-label thing, not being fearful about writing seven and a half-minute songs. Not worrying about doing a nine-track album. We’re pushing our boundaries and we only do that when we feel confident in what we’re doing. We’ve got more control than we have ever had.”* Harry McVeigh, Charles Cave and Jack Lawrence-Brown have made the album of their lives. White Lies’ compelling next chapter begins here.

***Five* is released on 01 February 2019 through [PIAS] Recordings**