

“I wanted to make something that’s eventually uplifting” says Will Westerman about the origins of his debut album *Your Hero Is Not Dead*. “I wanted to say in as unguarded terms as I could — there are reasons for hope.” This vision, fully realized, is an album about empathy and compassion, struggle and release, and all the ways we contradict and battle within ourselves.

*Your Hero Is Not Dead* is full of supremely crafted songs about moral, political, and ethical grey areas. Recorded alongside his close friend and producer Nathan Jenkins (aka Bullion), they find Westerman attempting to resolve external issues by looking inward. Like a young Peter Gabriel in a late capitalist world, Westerman’s music falls somewhere between artful soft rock and confessional electronic pop.

Westerman writes through his internal conflicts—songwriting is a way for him to grapple with concepts and paradoxes that cannot always be expressed with words, and in doing so he’s able to reach resolution and catharsis. “What animates me is when I feel a compulsion to express something in a way that can’t be conveyed through conversation.” Often, it’s a process of “expulsion.” He writes about his own writing process—about creativity blocks and “infinite choice”—on “Confirmation,” a rich and cerulean song and one of Westerman’s most celebrated yet, he sings - *Don’t you wonder why / Confirmation’s easier / When you don’t think so much about it?*

You can hear that struggle and release in the sound, too, which he similarly works out through experimentation until it feels right; he has arranged what he calls his “sonic palette” in order to accompany or juxtapose both the lyrics and melody of each song. “Think I’ll Stay,” began as a rumination on chronic pain, but has a jaunty, energizing, and soothing tone and beat. Westerman describes the track as “a sort of giddy affirmation of being” despite the seriousness of the topic. *Can I look the other way? / Crying hurts but it keeps me entertained*, he sings, before a sweet little synth moment. *Don’t know how I got here / but now that I am I think I’ll stay*. “The whole feel of the song is supposed to be a sort of warped celebration of existence. The initial impetus is a very specific case, but I think there’s an inevitable amount of pain that everyone goes through, being alive.”

*Your Hero Is Not Dead* is about existing as a thoughtful human being, attempting to find some kind of order and hope in a messy world of contradictions. “What made me want to make music was listening to other people’s music and feeling a kind of human, unspoken understanding,” says Westerman. “I’d like to be able to pass that on with my music, to be part of that human, creative and spiritual conversation.”