**Mighty Oaks – new album “Mexico”**

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“I never saw it coming / an avalanche of hardship“: Ian Hooper sets the stage early for Mighty Oaks fourth record, **MEXICO**, with these opening lines. They are refreshingly honest words indeed, considering we have all spent the past year living under the cloud of a pandemic, which has affected our physical health, mental well-being, and our social interactions. However Ian Hooper, Claudio Donzelli, and Craig Saunders do not wallow in the mire of Covid-desperation and self-pity. Their new record fuses an honest examination of serious issues like addiction and mental health with hope and hymns of love – love for family, friends, partners and for life. Just as we’ve come to know and expect from Mighty Oaks, but this time even more intimate and more personal than maybe ever before in their decade-long career.

Their last record, All Things Go, was released a year ago, and they spent February and March 2020 on tour through Europe. Then – silence. “Corona was on our heels the whole time”, singer and lyricist Ian Hooper recalls. “We had just returned from Norway and a few days later, boom, lockdown!” For Hooper, this was the perfect moment to realise his dream of finishing work on his home studio. “It was the first time since our debut album that I had the time to just write a whole lot of songs for this album”, he says. “And I feel like it sounds so much more like one album than say the last one did - or the one before that.”

Together, the three bandmates and long-time friends decided to record the songs in Hooper’s home studio, together with their producer Nikolai Potthoff and their drummer Joda Förster. Recording at home, in this make-shift basement studio, was a little adventure in itself. How would it sound? “It was a total shot in the dark to record at my house. I had never actually tried it out, to record drums down there, and to track people together. Everyone was nervous, myself included. But it ended up being the best thing that we could have done. There is something about recording at home that brought us back to that very beginning, when Claudio and I started making music at his apartment together”, Hooper says. “I’m the most at peace with myself as a musician than I ever have been before. Recording at home takes the pressure off: our time was our time, we didn’t have to hire a big studio, nobody was expecting anything from us, because we were in a pandemic. We just had time for us.”

And so, **MEXICO** brings together the best from both worlds: it is as intimate, personal and direct as Mighty Oaks have sounded since when the world first fell in love with them. Yet, at the same time it is a more grown-up record of these three musicians who have found their voices, who have lived life with all its highs and lows, and who do not need to prove themselves to anyone. “The past few months were not easy for anyone. Music has been my outlet”, Hooper explains. His new parlor guitar, tuned a step down and sounding dark and jangly, has inspired many songs and can be heard on almost every track. They chose to rely much less on computers, and more playing together. Fewer plug-ins, more tape, more of a live-sound feeling - back to the roots. Hooper swoons: “The saturated, analogue harmonics sound like a fuzzy blanket, warm, and just somehow more pleasing. It inspired me to keep writing and creating”

One of the examples for this sound and this feeling of immediacy is the opener of, **LAND OF BROKEN DREAMS**. A song that is dear to Hooper’s heart as an American: what’s left of the so-called American Dream? And then there’s the title track, **MEXICO**: “I wrote this song when we were just experiencing the first lockdown in Europe and in the States. People were fighting over toilet paper and I thought to myself, we have evolved so far as humans, and then this happens? Absurd. It’s an escapist song, but also a little bit tongue in cheek, a critique of this odd moment, and we of course do not believe that running or escaping from an issue will help to better a problem.” These are songs that are undeniably influenced by all of our experiences during this challenging time, but at the same time, they are timeless, discussing truths that will still be valid in fifteen or twenty years.

Another theme that keeps appearing in Hooper’s songwriting are relationships and love: on **GHOST** for example, which gives an honest glimpse into relationships and how they’re not always easy. “But once you’re in it, you’re going to hold onto it”, the singer explains. The soulful **BY YOUR SIDE** on the other hand is a hymn to being there for a loved one, even when they are going through a rough patch.

In the spring of 2021, Ian Hooper will take part in the eighth season of the German TV show “Sing meinen Song – Das Tauschkonzert“ where he will also perform with the rest of the band. “It motivated us to finish the recordings and plan a release for the new songs”, Hooper says and laughs. In a time where it is still unclear when bands can return to the stages and play live shows, Mighty Oaks will take over the stage in the middle of our living rooms – giving us a taste for all that is still to come.

Darkness and light, happiness and desperation, they go hand-in-hand on the album, as do they in life. With **MEXICO**, Mighty Oaks show once more what they do best, and where they are headed. “This is the best I’ve felt about an album of ours”, Hooper says. And if you listen to **MEXICO** once, you exactly know why.