

# SINESTESIEONLINE

SUPPLEMENTO DELLA RIVISTA «SINESTESIE»

ISSN 2280-6849

a. XIV, n. 47, 2025

---

## «IL PARLAGGIO» – RECENSIONI

**VICTOR KRUMMENACHER, *Silver Smoke of Dreams*, Veritas Recording, Portland, OR 2021**

The eleventh solo project of the American bassist, guitarist and songwriter Victor Krummenacher (who since 2021 has released an album of archival recordings: *The Devil Gives Me House And Home* -2024, to which an album of new materials will soon be added -*Block Out The Sun*) originates from the musician's dream journal, specifically the entries between March and April of 2020. With the context of the incipient Pandemic, this album, mixed and edited by Bruce Kaphan, is a step out of a restrictive space, a creative exit borne of a period of isolation. It is also an internal and external reflection on today's contradictory world, which we all endure. *Silver Smoke Of Dreams* is not only a testimony of a special period, but also something that transcends the moment in which it was created, making it timeless. Here, dreams take root, their immaterial aspects being removed. By materializing these dreams, they are given consistency, a

place in the universe, a place in time. This album is about humans and natural landscapes, each take at times center stage or at other moments remain in the background.

The first track, "Confirmation Bias", begins with a mystic walking in an open space ("Well Francis was a mystic/I saw him walking down the fields/He never felt as hopeless/Never felt as lonesome, and never felt as free"), and reflecting on what encompasses life and what *is* life. Some questions arise: why reaffirm over and over again what we already know? Why the eternal doubts and obsessions that put us humans in a defenseless situation? Both the mystic and the speaker (the 'I' that travels throughout the tracks) converge in loneliness, but while solitude has led the mystic to freedom, in the speaker this state appears impossible to conquer, because he is human. As such, he lives in a chaotic and upside down world. However, towards the end, it seems there is an attempt to get out of that space ("Just rearrange my expectations/Elevate me if you can/From out of this swamp of complications/Of

nuanced situations/Of this tedious last stand"). Through the world and its "swamp of complications", a hope envelops us: reinventing ourselves in the meaninglessness of today, going towards something higher, -being like a mystic? Maybe this is one answer to a better life.

We listen to this album as in an infinite loop, with its landscapes and motifs reappearing once and again, where the seconds in-between the tracks are moments of anticipation, of preparation towards what will come. "Head For The Hills", the next piece, contrasts the gravity of the first, and is light, playful. The speaker is now proposing a trip, an escape to the mountains, to a higher place: "Head for the hills/Let's hit the road/Let's pack it up/Let's close this show/Let's make a move/Let's split this town/Let's burn it down". It is, then, about traveling to a space of freedom (the space of the mystic?), and burning the old, while at the same time building the new. In leaving something behind, one leaves also all the trials and tribulations of that place. This track is about going to that new and virgin place, anticipating what will come, and questions why it wasn't done much earlier. Those of us who participate through the act of listening will also take part in this higher ground adventure.

The subtle "The Silk Road" re-introduces the mystic, in this case, as a figure of clarity. The speaker may want to transform into him to possess

the experiences and qualities that, as such, he can have: "(...) And I wish I was a mystic/With a clear and focused mind/With talisman to cling to/To see me to the other side". The mystic, though, is as important as the sailor who can provide freedom ("I wish I was a sailor/Just sailing on the sea", begins the song) and the teacher that the speaker once had ("Well once I had a teacher/Oh how he'd make me think/Put my tail between my legs/With the wisdom that he'd speak"). These three support our anti-hero, who walks the difficult human path, which is fragile and delicate like a "silk road". However, thanks to the mystic, the sailor and the teacher, (each one contributing their own characteristics of clarity, freedom and wisdom), this human path could lead, sometime in time, to what silk also is: something rich and strong, the other side of the coin. Performed with passionate restraint by Krummenacher, and featuring singers Lorelee Christensen and Kellie Atkins, this track ends in a crescendo that is both angelic and ethereal. From the walls (real and metaphorical) that we encounter, we are taken, through these voices, to an open space of hope.

"The State Of My Kingdom" is turbulent, with a terrifying opening visual image of the speaker and a companion on a violent sea, sinking in a small boat. From the hope (at least, musically) that was part of the end of "The Silk Road", we are now taken to a

landscape where there seems to be not much space for salvation. However, and within this mind frame, hope may come as long as you have a clear focus, and act, again, as a mystic: "Take my hand and stare back at the golden shore", says the speaker in one moment. Only in this way, will it be possible to get out of this ordeal and save yourself: first, collect yourself, think clearly, then touch the shore, take a breath, and reach for the mountains ("When blues skies descend to smother our will/We'll fight back ashore and head for the hills"). Later, when one is safe, reach for an even higher place, that of infinity ("Soon we will be riding a cold rock/Slowly rolling through space"), a place that is boundless, immaterial, free from any earthly attachment, -your final (mental) destination. Searching for something higher, and going towards it, seems to be a path to enlightenment or at least an attempt at it, as we heard previously in "Confirmation Bias" and "Head for the Hills". It is always about moving forward, upwards, having a plan, and facing everything the world throws at us.

From the journey towards the infinite that ends "The State of My Kingdom", we come back down to earth with the folk ballad "Still I Dream, Still I Dream". Here, the speaker is depicted as someone who is going to get executed. While walking to his fate, he passes among a crowd that awaits the spectacle of his death

("Turn your head when they walk me up/Do not look from down below"). This physical action of walking to his death is contrasted with his own dreams, which takes him out from this place of doom: this track, in a sense, is a game of contrasts between something light and something heavy, between death and life, between walking to the gallows and walking in a field of flowers. In these dreams, the landscapes so familiar in this album reappears: the sea, the mountains, the fields; all places of hope, comfort, salvation and reflection. If Krummenacher has dreamed "Still I Live, Still I Dream", and has made his dream tangible through words and music, then his character also is dreaming: one dream contains the other, like Russian dolls. In these dreams the two share nature's power as a redeemer, but only one writes the chronicle and sings it, while the other suffers it (although, is there a real gap between the one who writes and the one who suffers?).

In "I Saw You Through Broken Glass", the speaker's past connection with nature contrasts to his present disconnection to others while living in challenging times. In the perfect repetition of seasons, the speaker took solace in what seemed to be a Utopian time. He got fully immerse in his surroundings in a sensory way: "In the springtime, I smelled the flowers/Come the summer I heard the birds/In the autumn I saw the

moon/In the winter I felt the snow", states the first lines. Nature brought him feelings of liveliness and freedom; the current lack of human interaction brings him to a state of isolation and dread. One can see the particular context in which this track was originally created -during the dystopia of the Pandemic. The only person the speaker is able to see is someone from a distance and in small scattered pieces ("I saw you through a window/I saw you through the broken glass", states the refrain). Is this person perhaps just the speaker looking at himself, in all his brokenness? Against the backdrop of the last verse, ("Sitting on the steps your head in your hands/Thinking of things you can't understand/(...) Sitting on the steps staring into space/Thinking to yourself get me out of this place"), "I Saw You Through Broken Glass" fades out with the voices of Krummenacher, Christensen and Atkins, providing a quiet soulful lift in this song's ultimate reflection about our burdensome position in the world. This reflection will continue to be present in us long after the song ends.

"We Were Not They Said", with its motifs of opposites, focuses on the view of "We vs. Them". On one hand we have those who believe, and on the other hand those who deny everything: "Light was not they said/Dark was not they said/The sea was not they said/The land was not they said", the first verse begins. The track

continues with the same pattern in the next three verses, to include every part of the natural world, everyone of us, and every constituent part of the universe. Within this "We vs. Them" focus, the speaker takes the side of the believers, those who still have hope in all the things he is referring to. Everything and everyone has a place in the universe, despite those who deny this and provoke chaos and nothingness. The song is measured and lyrical, softly surrounding the listener. However, in the end it reaches a crescendo of intertwined tribal, animal and nature sounds which show us that everything the speaker has been pointing out *is* among us, it does in fact *exist*, it has not disappeared, and never will, despite what others may say. "We Were Not They Said" ends suddenly, with its organic sounds being briefly resumed at the beginning of the next track, the instrumental "Silver Smoke Of Dreams".

"Silver Smoke Of Dreams", which gives its name to the album, begins calmly where "We Were Not They Said" ends. This piece embodies that lyrical blueprint that Krummenacher has been revealing to us in his songs. It is also stormy, filled with an Americana flare that returns constantly. It ends quietly as it began. The auditory roller coaster brought us to unknown paths, including the higher places of Michael Jerome's drumming. As an instrumental, the interpretation is left up to us. Though it is not necessary to

use words to say something, this piece certainly suggests and evokes plenty in the listener.

In the penultimate track, the minimalist “One Grain Of Sand”, Krummenacher’s voice is almost a murmur producing a hypnotic atmosphere. Here, he reflects once again in our position in the universe: we are neither more nor less than a small part of its complex mechanism and everything that makes it up (the sea, the sky, the sand, etc.). Though we are small, we are a part of something bigger, moving in close communion with it all: “One grain of sand/One drop of water in the sea/One grain of sand/One little you, One little me”.

“The Delta Wind” closes the album with this magnificent wind embracing everyone and everything, including the characters from which Krummenacher depicts the stories in this song. These stories are small vignettes, where some of the characters are in motion, going from one place to another, while others seem stuck in a time warp. Everyone carries a past and truths that may affect them in different ways. The vignettes portray moments of life: an elderly man smoking outside a church, someone praying for a woman in a pew, workers in a field, a woman driving out of town, the speaker, along with Johnny and the dogs, also leaving town. Is there a relationship between all these? What are the truths they know? Where are they going? Why are they leaving? What are

some of them staying? We do not know the answers. Maybe knowing the answers is not as important for us as for the characters living the stories. What is clear is that the act of leaving provides a change for some of them, so that they do not remain suspended in time, like the elderly man or the workers in the fields. This action, though, will come with a sense of risk. Within the final verse we are given an account of this: “Now we’re swimming in deep water/Swimming in deep water/Waters way up over our heads/(...) Swimming in deep water/Swimming in deep water/And we are swimming in deep water”. Musically, this track takes two different paths: the first one, lush and atmospheric, contrasts to the second, more folksy and playful, which is introduced by John Kruth’s banjo. What unites both is the omnipresent wind that runs throughout.

Dreams are volatile, and, like smoke, they disappear after taking strange forms. However, there is something that makes them real and concrete for dreamers and listeners alike: the possibility that they become songs. This is what happens in *Silver Smoke Of Dreams*.

MARIANA PENSA