

Though born and raised in Dallas, Texas, Nashville-based singer-songwriter and artist Andrew Combs can't say for certain he identifies with any one place in particular. Through years of drawing on ethereal and visceral beauty wherever he can find it, his work is more accurately a measured synthesis of a wide array of "places": the literal and the figurative, those he has been to and others he has yet to see. His newest full-length album, *Sundays* (out August 19, 2022), is reflective of those varied places that inform Combs' creative work.

Written on the heels of a mental breakdown Combs had at Christmas of 2020—amid the long, monotonous grind of an ongoing global pandemic—*Sundays* came together in Nashville in early 2021. In the wake of this debilitating psychological crack-up, Combs turned to the practice of transcendental meditation to find balance and to, in the words of surrealist director David Lynch, "catch the big fish". Alongside his collaborators, Jordan Lehning and Dominic Billet, Combs would go into the studio every Sunday, the goal being to capture a song he had penned the previous week as he plumbed the depths of his own heart and mind.

And from the album's first notes, one does get the feeling of a lazy Sunday: the pace loping along for several measures, creating the sensation of a slow, carefree morning—up until the point it suddenly doesn't seem so serene. Through the course of the 11-song collection, *Sundays* manages to capture that sense of being mentally and emotionally unmoored, the anxious tension of falling apart, of being incapacitated and grasping at whatever one can hold onto for equilibrium. As a result of his deep dive into his own fragmented subconscious, Combs' writing speaks to the absurdity of our tendency to point our fingers rather than look within ("Mark of the Man"), the naivety of youth ("Adeline"), and the perspective gained in deep self-reflection and meditation ("Still Water"). But at the center of *Sundays* is a pervasive sense of quiet hope, and a recognition of an inherent balance that's possible, succinctly summarized in the refrain of "(God)less":

*We are capable of such a mess,
But God still lives on in godlessness.*

As for instrumentation, the often bleak and completely minimal approach on Combs' newest record lies in stark contrast to his earlier work. Going away from the more traditional roots arrangements on his albums *All These Dreams* and *Canyons of my Mind*, *Sundays* leans away from the more linear Americana-inflected instrumentation

and structure and into darker and more sparse territory. Instead of lush strings and longing pedal steel behind fingerpicked acoustic guitar, we find a lonely, thumb-strummed electric being colored by brooding woodwinds—yielding a blend of hopeful lift, and a somberness that channels the dark tension of a film noir detective show.

For Combs and his collaborators, the technical side of the recording process was something of an experiment and a departure of its own:

“[Sundays] was recorded in mono, with no delay or reverberation on anything. It started as an exercise in keeping arrangements simple—adding many overdubs without the option of panning just becomes muddy, so we had to strip things down to accommodate. The mono sound ended up being the perfect match for the minimalist, meditative songs I was writing. The overall tone feels like a black-and-white short film.”

Indeed, the sense of dull ache that underpins *Sundays* feels akin to the sparse, cinematic silence of an Ingmar Bergman film; the record’s second song, “Anna Please”, was directly inspired by Bergman’s *Cries and Whispers* (1972). In its own understated way, highlighted by the minimalist sonic palette and Combs’ soft, breathy tenor, *Sundays* runs the gamut considering the absurdity of human thought and behavior. But, as we make our way through the album, it feels as though an almost-imperceptible progression is happening, a movement toward some kind of resolve, at least, if not peace.

And once we reach the end with “Shall We Go?”, a song informed by Samuel Beckett’s play *Waiting for Godot*, Combs’ invites himself and the listener to part ways. But there’s no “place” that we know we should go to, and it’s here that we realize that, even if we did, there would ultimately be no arrival. We are only asked to be patient, to look around us and especially within ourselves, to hold our anxious uncertainty in its delicate balance—while we wait for whatever is next to come up the road.