



Hiss Golden Messenger - *Terms of Surrender* Biography

Describing the Durham-based **Hiss Golden Messenger** is like trying to grasp a forgotten word: It's always on the tip of your tongue, but hard to speak. Songwriter and bandleader M.C. Taylor's music is at once familiar, yet impossible to categorize: Elements from the American songbook—the steady, churning acoustic guitar and mandolin, the gospel emotion, the eerie steel guitar tracings, the bobbing and weaving organ and electric piano—provide the bedrock for Taylor's existential ruminations about parenthood, joy, hope, and loneliness—our delicate, tightrope balance of dark and light—that offer fully engaged contemporary commentary on the present. And then there's an indescribable spirit and movement: Hiss Golden Messenger's music grooves. There's nothing else quite like it.

For over ten years, Taylor has spearheaded this prolific, perpetually evolving group. He's toured and recorded relentlessly, earning devotees along the roads, deep in festival pits, and across the seas, delivering earnest performances that morph from jammy freakout to private prayer in a matter of measures.

"The work that I do requires me to be in a certain emotional place," says Taylor. "My music depends first and foremost on being in a heightened emotional state and putting my vulnerability on display."

This vulnerability is also central to Taylor's steadily growing fanbase, which continues to discover universal themes in his deeply personal work. The critical acclaim and attention for Hiss Golden Messenger—including features in *The Atlantic* and *The New Yorker*, glowing album and live reviews in *Pitchfork*, *Rolling Stone*, and *Consequence of Sound*, and barn-burning performances on *Late Show with David Letterman* and *Late Night with Seth Meyers*—affirm the emotional power of Taylor's work.

This raw emotion is especially apparent on Hiss Golden Messenger's new album, ***Terms of Surrender***. Out September 20 on Merge Records, *Terms* follows Taylor's journey through a tumultuous year of trauma and psychological darkness, hoping and working towards redemption and healing, and the conflicting draw of home and movement. "Another year older," Taylor sings on album opener "I Need a Teacher." "Debt slightly deeper. Paycheck smaller. Goddamn, I need a teacher."

Later, Taylor tracks the complex dynamic between father and grown son on "Cat's Eye Blue," singing, "Is this wicked word too bad to be spoken? You let the heart attack in. One taste and it's broken." He later pivots towards his relationship with his own daughter on "Happy Birthday, Baby."

*Happy birthday, baby
Go love your brother now
It's a strange gift, maybe
Girl, you know me better—better than I know myself*

*I'm trying to repay you
All these miles that I roam
And when I'm far away, baby
Know that I love you and sing this little song*

Taylor says that he wanted to make *Terms of Surrender* “a wandering record. I wanted where we recorded it to mirror the searching spirit of the music.” Having written upwards of 40 songs—in motel rooms, his studio in Durham, and a secluded cottage outside of Charlottesville, Virginia—Taylor winnowed them down to the ten works that comprise *Terms of Surrender*. With regular collaborators—including Phil and Brad Cook, Josh Kaufman, and Matt McCaughan—and new friends like Jenny Lewis and Aaron Dessner (of The National), the crew decamped to Dessner’s Long Pond studio in upstate New York, Sound City in Los Angeles, and producer Roger Moutenot’s Haptown studio in Nashville to create the most fully realized and genre-defying Hiss Golden Messenger album to date.

Hiss Golden Messenger songs create *feelings* to which devoted listeners attach their own meanings and memories with each repeated spin. Throughout *Terms of Surrender*, those feelings range from fearful to celebratory. But perhaps the title track—with its refrain of “I’m gonna give it/ but don’t make me say it/ It’s one thing to bend it, my love, but another to break it”—best summarizes the nature of Taylor’s work as a musician, father and spouse, and cultural communicator on this album. He explains, “*Terms of Surrender* is part apology, part plea, part love letter. It’s about how much of the most important parts of ourselves we can sacrifice and still feel like we’re living the life that we thought we wanted.”

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