



The Isle of Ailynn **By Mape Of**

A couple of years ago, we came home from our very first cross-Canada tour. A melody had been sticking with me all the way through our journey, this modal, ascending melody, weaving over a static pulse. There was something about this melody that felt alien to me, like something I'd always longed for but never really could identify. I never expected it to happen that way, in such a specific musical moment, but it felt like the distinct marking of a new chapter.

My notebook was littered with words that I'd collected over the past couple of years, either archaic or invented. It's difficult to break down the exact moment when this whole idea flooded my brain, but in looking through these words, certain ones stood out amongst the rest, bringing with them 8 very particular physical environments. An enchanted estuary, a desert path to the ruins of an ancient city, a dark, mystic forest with a village of wise beings deep within it, and so on. In some cases, the words inspired the physical environments, and vice versa, but in all cases save for a single melody. They became clear before any more music was written. It's a strange way of doing things, surely, and one I might never repeat (to have a list of songs in front of you that you've yet to write can be daunting), but it's what made this whole thing feel like a new and exciting challenge, to create music for this fictional land, to be inspired by imagination.

I always had it in my head that one day I'd make a concept record. The truth is, the concept record structure has always made the most sense to me as an approach to making a collection of music. You have all of these songs you're going to package up together, it just seemed logical to me to connect them in some way. And that's nothing against an album of disparate songs, those of course lie among my favourites. The concept record is just the way that the front-to-back album listening experience found me first and hardest. Protest the Hero's *Kezia* shaped my identity early on, and the mold has only shifted slightly since, albeit my musical pursuits have changed drastically along the way.

As time went on, I dove into late 90's/early 00's progressive metal like Opeth and Dream Theater, eventually back to Genesis, Yes, King Crimson, the prog rock giants of the 70's. There was something so mythic to me about these artists, a sense of adventure in all of their music, infinite possibility and excitement. Songs could stretch over entire LP sides and be structured in movements like a classical composition (though at that time I had no idea that's where it came from). There was such freedom in it.

Then came the realization that this mentality could exist in so many other forms. Finding my love for the seminal records of the 60s from the Beatles and the Beach Boys, through the 70s prog realm as those artists evolved into the Peter Gabriels of the 80s, into Talk Talk's beautiful unified, texturally mystic compositions. This music went beyond the prog virtuosity and into another category altogether, a pursuit of unity through sonic identity and structure, rather than aesthetics or lyricism.

This record was a daunting idea, in more ways than one. The fear of lofty ambitions building too high a ladder for me to climb or the fear of seeming excessive or being seen as too pretentious. I knew that I was going to have a hell of a time explaining this to anyone. But somehow, still, it felt right. I knew what I wanted out of it, and for better or for worse, I had faith that there would be enough people out there who were looking for the same thing in music as me. I suppose it always comes back around to thinking about the 14-year-old me, listening to his Walkman in bed at night, diving headfirst into the

worlds that my favourite artists created (literally or figuratively), through their carefully crafted, unified records

Through researching mythology, it became increasingly apparent to me that the same stories have been told since the dawn of stories themselves. Joseph Campbell and Carl Jung's works showed me the intricate and fascinating weave that makes up the relationships between the most important stories in our world's cultures, not only the striking similarities (to the point of seeming supernatural), but the distinctions that make each culture unique, whether through its natural surroundings, religious beliefs, technological innovations, and so on.

Upon discovering that the same people influenced the creations of those I so admired in my youth, not only Tolkien, Lucas and the like, but all of the authors of fiction I stayed up past my bedtime to read, I started to see the patterns in all of these stories. From *The Hero's Journey* to cosmological myths, common threads began to appear in everything I consumed. It set me down an exciting path of research through mythology, linguistics, astronomy and so on, following the trails of these stories through the years and how the changing political, religious and scientific climates changed their details, yet their central themes often remained intact. Through those peripheral details came a whole other string of research, deeper into languages and how they influence our cultural and individual identities, political structures, music history, flora and fauna, architecture and so on. The best among the storytellers I admired were masterful in their incorporation of these details. They had built their own worlds by borrowing the core tenets of humanity and dressing them up with their fruitful imaginations.

During this process, I discovered a whole online community of world builders, each building their own special environments with their unique imprint upon them. What a fascinating pursuit for a person, to re-build essentially the entire universe from scratch through detailed research and immense imagination, with all of the most minute details influencing the outcome of the litany of stories that are born out of these new, exotic, often fantastical or scientifically advanced circumstances. It could bring about a whole new level of understanding of the world we live in. It's a way to ask hefty questions without hefty consequence, an opportunity to set up circumstances and watch them crumble, only for them to be set up once again. The Circle of Life, the Endless Cycle, the Wheel of Time, however it is you choose to refer to it.

Most of all, I think approaching songwriting in this way gave me the freedom to exaggerate and extrapolate the questions I'd been asking myself about the world over the past couple of years. I come from a wonderful family, a comfortable home, a beautiful country. I've faced very little in the way of adversity in my life, and that is a fact I try to remind myself of every single day. For that reason, I felt that for me to express my opinions specifically on these issues was unnecessary. There were already so many people telling their stories and speaking/writing/creating so eloquently and beautifully about them, I wasn't sure I had anything to add. However, given the opportunity to create in a fictional space, I could inject these frustrations I had into it, and explore them with a fresh perspective. I suppose, in retrospect, I felt uninspired in many ways, and to create this fictional land with such possibility became a dense source of tangible inspiration.

It's natural to be excited and nervous to release a collection of music. Although it takes place in a fictional realm, this record feels like it holds more of my identity than any work I've ever done. However, the fear is often overshadowed by the excitement that this project brings, and the hope for an opportunity to share this world with those who have followed the project thus far, and those who will be discovering it for the first time.

- Tom