



Amigo The Devil ***Born Against***

On his new album *Born Against*, Amigo the Devil – the artistic moniker of Danny Kiranos -- has established himself as a multifaceted artist with a kaleidoscopic vision. The new record follows Kiranos' beloved 2018 debut *Everything Is Fine*, an album that was chock full of doubt, mayhem, and despair -- and one that augmented his long-gestating cult following. Kiranos' new collection of songs reveals him to be more than a one-trick pony stylistically as he opens up the creative channels and delves deeply into thematic and musical influences as august as Tom Waits, Leonard Cohen, and Fiona Apple.

"Every new record is an opportunity to sit and think about how much has changed in your life and the world around you," Kiranos says. "It's a new opportunity to bring in both new and old influences. I really wanted to dive into ideas that I'd either been avoiding or ignoring within myself and figure out ways to align them with music I grew up listening to. Influences that may have been set aside in our older recordings."

Kiranos, who lives in Austin, decamped to Dallas to record the album at the venerable Modern Electric Studio with Beau Bedford (Texas Gentlemen). This marked the first time Kiranos had explored some of the world music he had grown up with, from Eastern European folk to Australian bush ballads, all the way to both Spanish and Cuban Bolero traditions, amongst many others. Kiranos felt Bedford was the only producer who could draw those sounds out of him. Together they entered the studio with the skeletons of the songs Kiranos had written. One by one, they fleshed them out in wildly inventive fashion. To say they threw the kitchen sink at this album would be an understatement; these guys threw the whole damn shack. From tossing knick-knacks across the strings on the back of the piano to dropping heavy objects on the floor to create odd-sounding crashes, clicks and clacks, Kiranos doesn't deny there was a bit of Rain Dogs-era Tom Waits worship involved.

As for the songs themselves, *Born Against* finds Amigo the Devil embracing a more widescreen narrative form in his writing, moving slightly away from the dark-night-of-the-soul diaristic tone of the first album. Whether it's getting revenge on a daughter's murderer, a final love letter from a death-row inmate, or an ode to one's own flaws and mortality, the songs on *Born Against* pack an emotional wallop and manage to accord dignity to the darker aspects of humanity some of us would rather turn our eyes from. But at the end of the day, Kiranos understands that's it's stories – even the darkest of ones – that connect us through it all. And he's worked hard to get better at telling those stories.

"It's been a goal to become more efficient writing songs," Kiranos says, adding that "this was a very conscious attempt to promote imagery through sentiment."

Once Covid began to take root, Kiranos says the pangs of cabin fever set in. His entire professional life over the last decade has revolved around touring, and he was feeling boxed in. He was suffering creatively and having trouble tapping into the old wellsprings that had previously birthed songs. Writing in the third person allowed him to immerse himself in other characters' stories, which he presents on the record in first-person for more immediate effect. These are vivid, sepia-toned snapshots of lives on the brink. Mini movies, if you will. And they have a horrifying familiarity in the year that was 2020.

"There was a girl at the bar/ She overdosed in a photo booth/ Nobody found her body until last call/ The pictures all showed her terrified and a loner/ while everyone cried what a great friend she was," Kiranos sings on "Quiet As A Rat."

The new writing approach proved to be fruitful, and one Kiranos hopes his fans will embrace. Since he began touring nearly ten years ago (often playing sets in bathrooms at music festivals he couldn't get booked on otherwise), Amigo the Devil has steadily amassed a fanbase whose devotion to his music is unstinting. Kiranos says he knows of thousands of Amigo the Devil tattoos. There is also "The Fellowship", a Facebook group that was started by and has grown out of his coterie of family-like fans that has now become a strong community support forum for those finding themselves at a low point, whether due to depression, addiction, or simply grief. "The energy this family brings to the shows is incredible, and they are what makes the environment so exciting. Sometimes, I can't even hear myself over the system because [they're singing the lyrics so loud]."

As is the case with any artist who has great success with a certain sound or specific album, making a shift to something new can prove daunting. But it's a step Kiranos feels he has to take as an artist. "I hope this album can start to shift the lyrical expectations and people just don't consider me 'the death guy' and 'the serial killer guy,' and that people can start to see different avenues we can take together. I hope it opens up the project of Amigo the Devil so that people understand it's not a specific sound-based project, and that if we go in different directions, it's okay." The artistic strength of *Born Against* lets us know that Kiranos' new direction is more than "okay." It's a major mile-marker for a creative soul whose work will only continue to evolve and grow.

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