

Review: Hiss Golden Messenger delivers anthems for our times

By SCOTT STROUD an hour ago

Hiss Golden Messenger, “Quietly Blowing It” (Merge)

M.C. Taylor sounds gorgeously despondent at the outset of his band’s new album, a follow-up to his brilliant 2019 record, “Terms of Surrender.” But before he’s done he has charted his way, musically and lyrically, to a better place.

The result is “Quietly Blowing It,” a poignant, often soaring set of anthems for our times.

Hiss Golden Messenger’s previous album set a high standard, and the pandemic hit while it was still on a victory lap. So Taylor, the band’s lead singer and mastermind, holed up in his house in Durham, N.C., and wrote songs. Really good songs. By the time he brought them to his fellow band members, he had the makings of a stunning, richly-textured follow-up about navigating through dark times.

None of it comes off as wallowing because the music is simply gorgeous. The best songs blend piano and guitar-based melody behind Taylor’s smoothly soulful singing. Songs like “Hardlytown” and “If It Comes in the Morning” are majestic in different ways, with a sound that builds on Taylor’s earlier work but tacks further into rhythm and blues in ways that separate it from the Americana pack.

Lyrically, Taylor blends the personal and the political in an understated way. The only misstep, a not-especially-original song called “Mighty Dollar,” can be excused as something Taylor felt he had to include.

By the time he gets to the closer, “Sanctuary,” Taylor has figured something out.

“Feeling bad, feeling blue, can’t get of my own mind,” he sings as the song opens in a deeply groovy piano-and-bass bop. “But I know how to sing about it.”

The song feels celebratory but not unrealistic. There’s acknowledgement that this has all been hard. But the safe place for Taylor, and for listeners who travel with him on the journey, has always been the music.