***Jump for Joy***, the new record from **Hiss Golden Messenger** out August 25, 2023, finds songwriter M.C. Taylor facing the unknown. “I knew that I wanted this record to be full of joy,” he says, “because if we’re standing at some kind of finish line of human civilization—and I’m not saying that we are, but some days it sure feels that way—then I want to go out dancing. That’s what I wanted *Jump for Joy* to feel like: Dancing at the end of time. Laughing in the face of catastrophe.”

*Jump for Joy* was composed in the brief snatches of time Taylor found in 2022, a year in which Hiss Golden Messenger was on the road more or less constantly. The album captures the dance of a Hiss Golden Messenger live show in part because Taylor was riding a wave of energy that necessitated a different outlet than 2021’s *Quietly Blowing It*, which was written and arranged in the sanctuary of his 8’ x 10’ home studio before recording with a Hiss band that’d been forced to stop touring.

*Jump for Joy* finds Taylor and guitarist Chris Boerner, bassist Alex Bingham, drummer Nick Falk, and keys player Sam Fribush in an altogether different mood. Back on the road and in high spirits, Hiss decamped to Sonic Ranch, 40 miles outside of El Paso, Texas, where they lived and recorded for two weeks, playing frisbee or riding the studio four-wheeler when they weren’t in the studio. The result is an album that feels big and fresh, no less personal but consciously uplifting, like being in a room full of long-separated friends sharing stories and good news after a long struggle.

“Shinbone” begins with Taylor singing, “Woke up this morning, my God, I felt happy—what a strange sensation” over a killer synth hook; written by Taylor after abruptly snapping out of a prolonged bout of depression, it moves quickly from the relief of surfacing to pondering one of the questions at the heart of *Jump for Joy*: “If you take the big gamble and lose it all, can you survive with whatever’s left?” When Taylor sings, “Guess what? I don’t know the answers,” it is not with skepticism or fatalism, but rather with the resolve of a man setting out to explore the unknown with his experiences as a compass.

“I’ve spent a lot of time on the interior,” Taylor explains, “and I was on a quest to find another way to sing about vulnerability and tenderness and *the search* that felt more outward facing.”

Lead single “Nu-Grape,” named for a sugary grape soda found mostly in the Southeast, is at ease with that unknown. Taylor calls it “a song about the futility and strangeness of trying to create something permanent.” Thinking of the way some people leave gravestones with doves and marigolds carved in them as a final, solemn testament to the life they led, he imagines his saying “Don’t cry, it’s only a joke,” his life “just a nail in the house of the universe.”

Even when contemplating futility, *Jump for Joy* soars, finding love and beauty in the fact that we are small figures cast against an impossibly vast universe. Prompted by his friend Anaïs Mitchell asking what people missed from their childhood, Taylor spun up “The Wondering,” which sees him joined on the chorus by Fruit Bats’ Eric D. Johnson. “I had to think about it for a while,” he explains, “but eventually I figured out what I missed most from my own: The wondering. The not knowing. And the having to live with the not knowing.”

He continues, “I think, in some way, I’ve arranged my life in such a way as to always be in touch with the unanswerable wondering. Also, this notion of being ‘still here’—still at it, still chasing my ghosts and dreams—is a particularly potent one for me right now.”

The life that led M.C. Taylor to *Jump for Joy* is a tumultuous one, one without much in the way of security, but it’s ultimately the kind of life he’d dreamed of when he set out on this journey nearly 30 years ago.

“If you decide to live by love,” he concludes, “the kind that gives all and asks for nothing in return, you roll the dice. If you’ve ever stepped out the front door searching for a feeling you couldn’t even put a name to, and if you’ve kept chasing that shadow through the alleys—be they literal or figurative—because you hope it has something worthwhile to show you, then *Jump for Joy* is also about you. Sometimes the game ain’t worth the gamble, but sometimes it really, really is. It’s pretty fucking romantic, actually.”