



Ordinary Elephant

“This album is the purest distillation of our sound that we’ve ever captured,” says Crystal Damore, one half of the husband/wife folk duo Ordinary Elephant. “It’s just the two of us singing and performing live, losing ourselves in each other and the songs.”

Given how raw and vulnerable the results are, it’s easy to see why the band chose to self-title their stunning new collection. Recorded in Breaux Bridge, Louisiana, with producer/multi-instrumentalist Dirk Powell (Joan Baez, Levon Helm), *Ordinary Elephant* showcases the arresting chemistry shared by Crystal and her husband, Pete, whose gorgeous harmonies and mesmerizing fretwork call to mind everything from Gillian Welch and David Rawlings to Gram Parsons and Emmylou Harris. The songs are timeless here, rooted in rich, character-driven storytelling, and the performances are similarly transportive, fueled by delicately intertwined banjo, guitar, and octave mandolin parts that wrap like vines around the duo’s captivating vocal delivery. Though the songs were born out of a period of change and deep uncertainty, the record itself is a work of profound self-assurance, one delivered by a duo whose personal and professional lives embody the limitless possibility of honest, organic collaboration. Press play on *Ordinary Elephant* and you’ll hear more than just a couple singing together; you’ll hear the sound of sincerity and commitment, of patience and gratitude, of learning to let go of expectation and revel in the simple beauty of the moment.

“I think a big part of our growth on this album came from finally having a permanent place to call home,” Crystal reflects. “After years of living on the road, we settled down in Opelousas, Louisiana, about thirty minutes from where I grew up, and it really helped us slow down and feel more grounded and appreciative of the things that were right in front of us.”

When Crystal and Pete talk about living on the road, they mean it quite literally. After walking away from established careers in veterinary cardiology and computer programming, the pair moved into an RV in 2014 and began touring relentlessly, earning widespread acclaim with the kind of riveting performances that soon made fans of luminaries like Tom Paxton and Mary Gauthier. In 2017, the duo took home the International Folk Music Award for Artist of the Year on the strength of their breakout album, *Before I Go*. Two years later, they returned with the similarly lauded *Honest*, which the *Associated Press* hailed as “one of the best Americana

albums of the year” and *PopMatters* called “one of the best folk duo records in recent memory.”

Five years of perpetual touring took its toll, though, and after the release of *Honest*, the couple began looking to plant more solid roots.

“At first we thought Opelousas would just be a place we could slow down and catch our breath between tours,” Pete explains. “When the pandemic hit, though, everything changed.”

The band was on tour in Australia at the time, and, after rushing to get home before border closures and lockdowns froze the world in place, they found themselves sitting still for the first time in recent memory. The change of pace was challenging at first, both emotionally and creatively, but thanks in part to several remote songwriting groups, the inspiration began flowing more freely and intensely than ever before.

“We realized how much we turn to stories for comfort in times of uncertainty,” Crystal reflects, “and this was the most uncertainty a lot of us had ever experienced. The songs became something we could hang onto, something to anchor us.”

In addition to songs, Crystal found herself writing poems, as well, penning dozens of pieces that were inextricably linked to the music. (A book of poetry will accompany the album’s release, and the fourth side of the double LP will feature Crystal reading poems paired with each of the record’s fourteen tracks.)

“Poetry feels like the place that a lot of our songs grow from,” she explains. “The two forms have always been closely related for me, and they end up feeding each other.”

When it came time to record, Crystal and Pete headed roughly forty minutes south to Breaux Bridge, where Powell (who’d introduced himself after catching the band at Nashville’s Station Inn during AmericanaFest) welcomed them into his Cypress House studio on the banks of Bayou Teche.

“We went into the sessions with an open mind because Dirk’s so versatile on so many instruments that we figured he’d end up contributing in that way to many of the songs,” Pete recalls. “But after he captured the two of us playing everything live over the course of five or six days, he played it all back for us and said, ‘I really don’t think it needs anything else.’ It was kind of a scary thought at first, to put ourselves out there in such a raw way, but pretty quickly we realized he was right.”

The power of those stripped-down, intimate recordings is obvious from the outset on *Ordinary Elephant*, which begins with the bittersweet “Once Upon A Time.” Like much of the album, it’s a subtle, engrossing tune, building steadily with a gentle

but relentless insistence. “Truth is not something we can choose,” Crystal and Pete sing, repeating the phrase like a mantra as they set the stage for a record built around unguarded reflections on loss and death, romance and discovery, purpose and nature. The slow-burning “Say It Loud” offers a candid look at depression and the power of human connection, while “The Prophet” explores the importance of self-love through the pages of a book, and the pensive “Hardwood” finds peace in accepting our place in the natural world.

“With all that time off the road, we got used to having the space to think, to reconnect with the Earth,” Crystal reflects. “When things started picking up again in 2021, we had to remind ourselves to intentionally slow down, to remember who we are and where we belong.”

Though several of the songs here are delivered from the perspective of outside characters, it isn’t hard to find Crystal and Pete in the lyrics: the intoxicating “Walk With You” overflows with gratitude for a lover’s companionship; the jaunty “Midlife” reckons with aging and mortality in the wake of turning forty during the first year of the pandemic; and the lilting “I See You” charts a journey of self-discovery through newfound sobriety as the singer addresses her future self. It’s perhaps the airy “Joy Has Not Forgotten Me,” though, that best encapsulates the record (and the couple), finding solace in even the most difficult of times.

“Joy is always there if you’re willing to work for it,” Crystal explains, “and it feels like that notion is at the heart of who we are as a band. We always tell people we named ourselves Ordinary Elephant because there’s *no such thing* as an ordinary elephant. Every single one is just this amazing, magnificent creature. And all of the everyday things we take for granted in life have a whole lot more to them, too, if you take the time to look.”

In the end, that’s what *Ordinary Elephant* is all about. By stripping away everything but themselves and their songs, Crystal and Pete zero in on the kind of tiny details that might otherwise go unnoticed, on the magic and the beauty hiding in plain sight. They turn the ordinary into the extraordinary.