

Optimism Rising: Modern folk to usher in a post-pandemic summer

I write this as I'm about to head off to a concert, hopefully the first of many this summer, and it finally feels like the pandemic cloud is lifting. This month, I take a look at two compelling takes on modern folk.

Will Orchard — *I Reached My Hand Out*

It's been over three years since my profile of Will Orchard, then performing under the moniker LittleBoyBigHeadonBike. We spoke about his releasing music on Bandcamp at a furious pace, at times putting out songs every few days.

Now based in Boston, he hasn't slowed down much, making music under his own name. His sophomore release, *I Reached My Hand Out*, combines hi-fi production, experimental song structures, and Orchard's frank, observational honesty.

Orchard's website reads: "*I Reached My Hand Out documents the process of walking away from shame, learning to criticize yourself and the world with empathy, and then walking right back again.*"

Elements of dream pop and psychedelia pair well with themes of loneliness and evocative, slice-of-life lyrics. The chorus of voices behind "Alone" bolster a kind of a half spoken word song that reads like poetry:

"Driving through perfect little towns/on the edge of New Hampshire, I start to speed/The moon just sat there unmoving above me/And the headlights in the jeep trailing behind, uneasily."

I Reached My Hand Out was released by Better Company Records and produced by San Fermin's Allen Tate, which makes sense given that band's penchant for lush production. The album provides many sonic textures to unpack, including clarinet, piano, banjo, and choruses of layered background vocals, which at times remind me of a mix between the Killers and Bon Iver.

While the album does feature some of the expected stripped-down fingerpicking ("Hair Salon"), it goes in plenty of bold new directions. "October Hallways" and "Smoke Alarm" feature a cool take on the neo folk electronica sound perfected by Sufjan Stevens.

After a hazy intro, "Come Into My Fog" evolves into something so upbeat and poppy to the point of being Deadlike. The song narrates profound moments of minutiae from his life:

"I walked out of my foggy head/And got a cup of coffee downstairs/There was a cornucopia/On the kitchen table ringed with flowers."

"Rita," with its evocative lyrics ("Throwing darts at the wall/With a blindfold around my heart") and a memorable melody, is a highlight. The album's opus is "Over Blue Highways," which sounds like alt-country-era Ryan Adams interspersed with the earnest acoustics of Phosphorescent.

I commend Will on this well-thought-out record. All those Bandcamp releases were leading him to some

pretty ambitious, interesting material.

Find streaming info, lyrics, and more at willorchard.net.

Andrew Victor — *Here, honey*

On *Here, honey*, Westerly-based songwriter Andrew Victor mines the rich harmony in subtlety, with a sense of spacious noise and pathos. Adding to an impressive back catalogue of DIY releases, Victor wrote, performed and recorded everything on the album, and you can sense the homespun quality.

The acoustic “Westerly” incorporates elements that are both sad and pastoral, with haunting harmonies underneath. “Meant to Be” features sparse, moody synths.

The album features more traditional songs mixed in with more sporadic instrumental interludes. “Quilcene” has an eerily familiar piano pattern, and “South Prairie” reminds me of Vangelis’s *Chariots of Fire* score.

“Give Me The Open Field Now” is a futuristic groove set over a hazy whirl. Though it’s not super electric, he’s got a David Gilmouresque “master of effects” thing going on throughout.

Call me a normie, but I definitely could’ve used a few more verse-chorus-verse tunes among the drony instrumentals. But all in all, worth checking out.

Purchase Andrew Victor’s *Here, honey* at [Bandcamp](https://bandcamp.com/andrewvictor).