

Quiet Friend is the first release from a new project of the same name founded by guitarist/synthesist Steven Rogers and producer/songwriter Nick Zanca of Mister Lies. The album was produced by Zanca and LA-based producer Alex Thompson between 2014 and 2017.

Wanting to approach *Quiet Friend* as an open-ended, ongoing collaboration, the three brought in about a dozen collaborators. The plurality of voices involved, both literally and figuratively, is immediately present upon first listen, but rather than feeling scattershot, the songs are unified by the tension between heavily plastic, futuristic synth programming, and vocal/string arrangements that are vulnerable and knowingly imperfect. Also audible is a deep reverence for hi-fi 80's musicians like The Blue Nile and Prefab Sprout, who similarly juxtaposed raw thematics with surgically precise production. Unsurprisingly, many of *Quiet Friend*'s contributors share an obsession with antiquated music technology and a sensitivity to space and sonic environments.

Thematically, the album is full of songs about feeling like a child navigating early adulthood, social anxiety, queer identity and the fraught, often painful experience of seeking out intimacy in urban environments. "Breathplay" is a window into fumbling, anonymous sex, with the mantric chorus "Where has your body been?" acting as a running, anxious internal question to which one would probably rather not know the answer. Still, there is optimism, and sometimes it prevails. "Name All The Animals," though peppered with familiar references to the blariness of dating in your 20s ("We drank all of the sake/we skipped out on the party/we are hungover in our hiding place..."), is ultimately a pre-relationship love song, one which, for all its swooning string arrangements, embroidery-like microbeats and lush production, stands in strong sonic contrast to its lyrical uncertainty.

Elsewhere, the instrumental interlude "Thorn From Paw" suggests the dry, unyielding patterns of Italian minimalism before slipping, heartrendingly, into an apocalyptic glitch-waltz. It's these deeply cinematic moments that allow *Quiet Friend* to transcend the sum of its parts, able to move nimbly between meticulously polished dance pop ("Breathplay," "Playgrounds") and murkier experimentation, often heavily inspired by vintage new age and ambient music. The rolling, syncopated bell-whirrs that make up the backbone of "Avalanche" are unmistakably in homage to the experimental pop geniuses of 80's Japan. Although much of the gear responsible for the original reference points is present on the album, they're revisited in dazzling hi-fi and razor-sharp production. Still, despite this obsessive attention to production, there's a clear commitment to honesty, both in lyrical content and in texture. *Quiet Friend* is just as interested in specificity as in storytelling, and it makes for an intensely personal, almost invasive listening experience—in the best way possible.

- Jen Monroe (listentothis.info)