

# HONNE

What do you do when you conquer the globe with two acclaimed albums stacked with soulful synthpop, after you score 1.2 billion streams (and counting) and put out a flawless run of collaborations with everyone from BTS and Georgia to Tom Misch and SG Lewis? Well, if you're steadfast experimenters HONNE, then you rip up the rulebook and start all over again.

This summer's 'no song without you' sees vocalist/producer Andy Clutterbuck and producer James Hatcher flipping the script with their first ever mixtape. Unlike their 2016 debut 'Warm On A Cold Night' and 2018 follow-up 'Love Me / Love Me Not', their latest release digs deep into their inner Beatles, with the duo taking on a more classic approach to songwriting. Working more collaboratively than ever before and bringing in a handmade, playful sound driven by acoustic guitars, the stunning 14 song offering might be their most compelling yet, making them less of a powerful production duo and more of a real life band.

Before COVID-19 was to change the face of the music industry as we know it, HONNE had been simultaneously touring the world while working on ideas for their third album. But something wasn't quite sticking. "It just felt like we were doing the same thing over again," explains Andy. "We've never wanted to rest on our laurels. We want to keep evolving and never want to stay in the same lane". So at the start of 2020 the duo upped sticks to Los Angeles, seeking a change of scene. Almost instantly inspiration came. Working out of a former porno cinema-turned-recording studio in East Hollywood, the pair started playing around with 'no song without you', a hazy sun-dappled ballad that would see them rethink their entire way of working.

"It's strange, for the last few years I've never really just sat down and written a song; it's always been about making a bit of music and then putting lyrics over the top," explains Andy. But for the first time since he was a teenager, he sat down with an acoustic guitar to form the backbone of HONNE's new sound.

Using the softly psychedelic 'no song without you' – which was written alongside Anderson Paak collaborator, Canadian producer Pomo – as its sonic jumping-off point, this more traditional approach meant the sound as well as the structure ended up feeling far more classic than any previous HONNE releases. Fresh inspiration for the unerringly positive, loved-up material came not just from Andy's 2019 wedding to his girlfriend of 12 years ("I like to think of it as a mixtape of songs that Andy has put together for his wife, like when you're a kid and you make a tape for your crush," says James) but from the contemporary artists the duo spent much of last year mainlining. "They all sound so natural and real," says James of the relaxed energy of Khruangbin, Rex Orange County and Whitney that they wanted to plug into. "You can almost hear the room they're in. It's ok for it to be a bit rough, rather than

going into the studio like you're Maroon 5 and compressing guitars over and over. The more character that you leave in it, the more the listener can dive in."

Scrapping a raft of newly written material in favour of the songs they'd been working on in California, when HONNE returned home to London they were keen to keep up the momentum and got themselves a shared studio space for the first time ever, kitting it out like a Wes Anderson fever dream, with a big pink curtain, yellow mustard sofa and green panelling. It was to be their retreat, a HONNE-shaped heaven not far from James' place in Canary Wharf and Andy in Bow. "We'd had so much success writing together for the first time, rather than writing apart like we normally do," explains James of their plans to ditch their old way of working. "So we spent all the money we'd ever earned on our amazing new place and got it all set up and then... lockdown!"

When we speak to James and Andy ahead of the release of 'no song without you', the UK is in the midst of enforced stay at home measures. Andy remembers the last time the two saw each other: "I passed James a cable through a fence about six weeks ago!" So rather than working on the release in their shiny new studio, the pair have had to hunker down at home, working on their respective parts alone, but sharing endless texts from the moment they wake up until the moment they go to bed.

Thankfully, the fact that this is the longest time the pair have spent apart since they first met at music college a decade ago doesn't seem to have hampered the very human element of the mixtape, which has seen them collaborating online with each other and a number of special guests. The up-tempo singer-songwriter soul of 'la la la that's how it goes' features an entire string section recorded by one man, the uber talented Tobie Tripp (Dave, Jess Glynne, Years and Years, Tom Misch), who laid down each instrument part one by one in lockdown. Perfect piano comes courtesy of Reuben James (Sam Smith) on the delicate 'by my side', which sees HONNE channeling peak Randy Newman in one of their most unlikely moves to date. "It's got a real Toy Story feel to it," laughs James. "When we wrote it we thought we'd written the new John Lewis Christmas soundtrack," adds Andy.

Recorded in LA with XL's Rodaidh McDonald (The XX, Adele, David Byrne) 'lines on our faces' mixes Tame Impala worthy soundscapes with Beatles-esque chord progressions to create one of HONNE's most beautiful songs so far, while 'can't bear to be without you' sees a first in the history of HONNE; James' vocal debut. "It's a painful process, but it was fun," admits James, who recorded his voice in the wrong key before pitching it down. "The idea was to make it sound like an old vinyl record, hopefully you can't actually tell that anything's been done it." The sumptuous vocoder of 'one way to tokyo' too has an undeniable warmth, detailing an emotional morning spent at Heathrow airport before Andy's girlfriend flew to Japan for a six month long work trip.

It's been impossible not to let the complex current climate come out in the music, too. A Frank Ocean-esque interlude called 'social distancing' pops up in the middle of the mixtape, with a half-joking vocal refrain of "stay the hell away from me" making it the smoothest reference to the two metre rule you're likely to hear all year.

Mixtape closer 'smile more smile more smile more' also seems like a direct response to the kind of community spirit that has come as a response to the strains and stresses of a global pandemic. A three-and-a-half-minute long pep talk layered over euphoric sonics, the song calls on people to treasure their relationships with friends and family, to respect the environment, be creative and make sure you always appreciate the feel of the sun on your face. "Look in the mirror and think positively... Pay someone a compliment; the checkout assistant, the postman, you'll probably make their day. I know it would make mine," urges Andy. "Don't dwell on Instagram. Put down your phone. See the world through your own eyes." A song about hope, happiness and seizing the moment, the message of HONNE 2.0 is clear – make your own rules and then break them. The outcome could be incredible.