

# Jim Black, AlasNoAxis »Houseplant«

MUSIC EDITION  
WINTER&WINTER  
N° 910 154-2

Jim Black's new studio album »Houseplant« has the cool answer to the chaos and hecticness of our times. Jim Black and AlasNoAxis featuring Chris Speed, Hilmar Jensson and Skúli Sverrisson are musicians who grew up with rock and creative pop, but are fully engaged in the jazz fields. For the overall sound of »Houseplant«, they merge the above-mentioned influences to create an inviting, warm and grooving sound atmosphere composed, designed and created by Jim Black, one of the most multi-faceted drummers of today's music scene. – Winter & Winter

The title »Houseplant« is less about the smallish green life forms that hang near windows but instead more refers to a state of being. More pointedly, myself safely tucked away in my apartment in NY after many weeks of being on the road. Those moments where after all the traveling, playing, eating, and hanging with friends new and old... where you're just sitting there in silence, staring across the room, guitar in hand, and thinking to yourself "Ok, what just happened? How do I begin to write this out?"

This was our fifth CD, I really wanted to capture a disk that simply was about songs, whatever at least that meant to me.

"Beauty in all its forms" is a line from a Laurie Anderson song. During a lecture of hers, she described investigating the idea of beauty, and questioning what "beauty" meant to herself. Inspired by this, I asked the same question of the music I was writing for this recording and if the music held up to what I thought that idea of beauty might be, which worked well to focus my thoughts when things started to wander in all directions.

Not a traditional, sentimental, or saccharine kind of beauty... but the kind that evokes mystery, familiar yet relatively unknown, and more so, something that's inviting and attractively challenges. Where as a listener you are being told what's going on but there's enough room for the observer to add their own input to the scenario.

At the same time, many friends came to mind as I would write, having just spent time with them while traveling, now feeling their absence as I sat in my flat, having to slow myself down in my head after all the stimuli of travel. So I imagined their energies and auras as well to launch most of the songs.... an innocent enough way to start a tune, since after the hatching each song grows its own identity and meaning anyway.

In the midst of all the pondering I realized I was looking for a sound that would push the limits of an idea just to the point of breaking, where it would become something else if you went too far. On our other CD's we never hesitated to trash borders as necessary, so I was craving a different kind of approach. Searching for different types of density, more harmonic but not atonal per se. More transparent rhythms, thereby allowing to focus more on harmony and melody. Wanting long sounds, things that referenced the cry, the call, the cathartic shout.

**Inkionos:** A pretty great example of what I just described.

**Cahme and Adbear:** The first two tunes for the disc. Written over time at home between tours on my beloved Fender Jaguar Baritone guitar... tuned more or less to "C" if anyone is asking.

**Malomice:** Our take on a traditional song form where I grew up on the west coast and now live on the east coast.

**Fyr and Littel:** The type of thing that only gets written around 3-4 in the morning.

**Elight:** After gleefully finding a used 6 string acoustic Stella guitar on the road, I began writing this one where after a few weeks I developed subtle but annoying tendonitis in my left arm for half a year due to idiotic guitar technique. I can hold a guitar properly now, but I didn't feel so bad about it when Hilmar told me his arm hurt after recording this one.

**Lowers In A Nine Sense:** Typical of what happens when channeling two obvious songs of two different bands together and the information gets so butchered and mangled in the process, it becomes unrecognizable. During rehearsal the band further slapped it upside the head, returning it to an even more unexpected version of what I botched in the first place.

**Downstrum:** Scratch lyrics included references to the Velvets and a woman who thought she married somebody rich and famous, only to realize she married the wrong man because he looked the same as the other guy. After I heard the band play this tune for the first time in rehearsal, all this nonsense was immediately washed away. Thank the deity of your choice for music without words.

– Jim Black