

Have you ever been really high? So fucked up that your eyes started playing tricks on your mind, convincing it that you were eating plate-sized Reese's Peanut Butter Cups while watching *Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle* with a gigantic, electric-blue crow named Florence? Come on, we've all sucked on the hookah and seen some crazy shit, but even the most dedicated stoners would be hard-pressed to admit to hallucinating a glass-handed kite. But that is just what the Danish quartet Mew have dreamed up on their latest record, an ambitious concept record called, you guessed it, ...and the Glass Handed Kites.

"It's an abstract image," explains lead singer Jonas Bjerre, speaking from his apartment in London. "A kite soars majestically in the air, but it's still fragile and made of thin canvas, so it can be ripped apart in a storm. We felt that phrase related to both the music and the band." He pauses a moment. "It's difficult to explain the meaning of the lyrics. In some ways it's not a conscious decision to write them. It's more about creating images in peoples' minds that will hopefully inspire them."

Since the mid-nineties, Bjerre, alongside recently departed bassist Johan Wohlert, drummer Silas Graae, and guitarist Bo Madsen, has been crafting increasingly ambitious and elegant tunes that sound like fantastical relatives of crazy uncles Hope of the States, Radiohead, Sigur Rós, and Pink Floyd. Indeed, sometimes it feels a bit, dare we use the dreaded word, prog? "We're not really showoffs," Bjerre says as a way of defending the band's tendency to write ever-evolving songs no shorter than five minutes. "We just try and make songs that don't end up where they started; maybe try and surprise the listener a little bit. We really like the dynamic shifts between being emotional, quiet, and whispery to suddenly being powerful and explosive. One day we're going to make a rock opera." He laughs at his own joke, though it's not unimaginable.

The band grew up together in Denmark on a steady diet of indie rock like the Pixies, Afghan Whigs, My Bloody Valentine, and Dinosaur Jr. (Mew fulfilled a lifelong wet dream when J. Mascis played on the new album). For the first half of their career, they were able to live at home and work at their own pace and leisure, but when they signed to a UK label several years ago and released their breakthrough masterpiece *Frengers* (a title derived from the combination of the words "friends" and "strangers"), things started going into astral overdrive.

"We really started touring a lot," Bjerre recalls. "It was difficult getting used to being away from home and maintaining relationships with girlfriends." There was a lot of tension and ache, which almost tore the band asunder. But instead of breaking up, they fled to Los Angeles to make ...and the Glass Handed Kites at a beachfront studio. Ultimately though, it was their emotional circumstances, not their locale, that shaped the sound of the LP. ➤



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"It's not exactly a beach album," Bjerre says, with a chuckle. "You can't really sense the warm weather in the music. Bo claimed that he swam with dolphins down at the beach. Like some of the stuff we wrote, that's pretty out there."

Over an hour long, and including head-spinning titles like "The Circuitry of the Wolf," "The Seething Rain Weeps for You (Uda Prada)" and "Saviours of Jazz Ballet (Fear Me, December)," *...and the Glass Handed Kites* is a complete mindfuck, rocketing the listener off into a hallucinogenic dream world. You don't even need to be high to see the bizarre illusions. You just have to listen carefully. Listen harder still and you just might hear a band making it through to the other side. X