

James Vincent McMorrow - 'Post Tropical'

On a pecan farm half a mile from the Mexican border, 'Post Tropical' was born – a collection of sounds and ideas brought to life in rooms where the low frequencies of passing freight trains vibrated in the studio, briefly disturbing the birds in the rafters. And like most new ideas, 'Post Tropical' is hard to describe. It requires attention and engagement. It seduces you towards hidden depths.

McMorrow's acclaimed debut album, 'Early in the Morning', reached number 1, went platinum and picked up a Choice Music Prize nomination upon its release in 2010. Along the way, there were shows everywhere from the Royal Festival Hall to Later...with Jools Holland, and a breakout hit in the charity cover of Steve Winwood's 'Higher Love'. McMorrow's first record was the formative sounds of a songwriter who suddenly found people giving a damn. "I'm so proud of that album, but I never longed to be a guy with a guitar. You play these songs live as best you can, and suddenly you're a Folk musician. But the texture of this record is completely different. This is the kind of stuff I actually listen to."

Wiping the palate of 'Early in the Morning' clean, 'Post Tropical' is a stunning piece of work. Its broadened horizons may come as a surprise to everyone but James and the people who know him best. "I found a zip drive recently, which dates back to before I made my first record, and I'd re-recorded every single part of the N.E.R.D album – apart from the vocals – just for the joy of it. I wanted to give this record the feel and movement of the hip-hop records that I love." It's a step forward that is immediately apparent on album opener and first single 'Cavalier' – a brooding twist on the Slow-Jam, which builds quietly from hushed keys and hand-claps to soaring brass, drums and McMorrow's idiosyncratic falsetto. Across the album, new sounds and textures are explored: 808s on the haunting 'Red Dust', looped piano on 'Look Out', and the waterfall-effect of 12 mandolins on 'The Lakes'. McMorrow's sometimes-surreal songwriting holds each element in place, on album which he wrote, produced, and played virtually every instrument.

The framework of 'Post Tropical' was constructed over eight months. Coming home from tour, James had hundreds of sound files, none categorised. Pages and pages of lyrics were crossed out and edited. Nothing was written on guitar, and nothing was linear. Yet the recording itself took place on a pecan farm half a mile from the Mexican border – which the likes of Yeah Yeah Yeahs, Beach House, Animal Collective and At The Drive In have all called home at one point. The constraints of three and a half weeks here offered McMorrow a surprising amount of freedom. Sounds were created and changed and painstakingly poured over. The process was up for grabs, right up to the mixing stage.

What emerged was 'Post Tropical' – complete with the paradoxical, 'wish-you-were-here postcard' artwork (juxtaposing a palm tree with a polar bear). "It's so exhausting trying to keep

up with styles of music that pop up one week, and disappear the next,” says James. “For me, ‘Post Tropical’ evokes a style of music without you having a clue what it sounds like. It’s warm and familiar, but there’s something there that’s maybe not quite what you think it is. I just wanted to make the most beautiful thing that I could imagine. And that was it.”