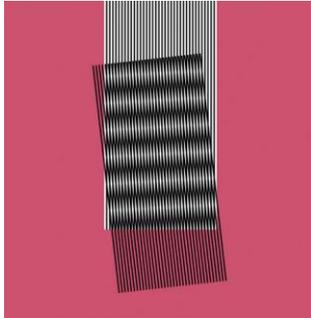


## HOT CHIP (UK)

«Why Make Sense?» (Domino Records, Release: 15.05.2015)



If you're looking for them, the clues are there in plain sight. Right there, in the glimmer and thump of opening track «Huarache Lights», a looped mantra nails Hot Chip's collective psyche six albums in. It's simple but pensive: «Replace us with the things that do the job better.» It's both a bold call to arms and a statement of nagging doubt. If they've been too long in the game, if they need replacing, somebody else better get on with it - and it better be good. Such ideas sit at the heart of *Why Make Sense?*

Alexis Taylor explains: «I was trying to capture the feeling of excitement I get when hearing Joe's new music for the first time, and collaborating with him on it. «Huarache Lights» are some trainers I love - but in the song they're a shorthand for something modern, something very London, and for the kind of escapism and fun of a Friday night at *Plastic People* - which is where we were heading to DJ when we were making that track. The record is about the excitement of choosing what you might wear, choosing which records you will play. But at the same time, it's asking whether we as a band are getting old, whether people still care. The answer is meant to lie in the music.»

The questions «Huarache Lights» posts should probably be asked by any band serious about facing the future. What do we mean fifteen years in? Is there a newer model waiting at the side of stage, readying to make us obsolete? And if there is, why do what's expected of us anyway?

Such ideas sit at the heart of *Why Make Sense?*

It's a Hot Chip album that restates the band's intentions and redefines the very things that made them relevant in the first place. Its ten tracks shun modernist dancefloor tropes in order to flick through the dusty corners of the band's teenage record collections, back when they were experimenting with music on primitive computer programmes. But the creative process behind this record could not have been more different to the one behind those early records like *San Francisco* and *Coming On Strong*. *Why Make Sense?* represents the first time the Hot Chip live band has recorded together residentially (at the rural Angelic Studios). The core five-piece band of Alexis, Joe Goddard, Owen Clarke, Felix Martin and Al Doyle were augmented by their regular drummer Sarah Jones and multi-instrumentalist Rob Smoughton (a formidable live prospect who will this summer headline Green Man and Sonar festivals, having previously headlined such venues as the Hollywood Bowl).

Joe: «When we were recording, we were getting closer and closer to the sound we make on stage. That kind of freedom makes a massive difference to a few of the tracks on the album; to how the tracks grow. Our recording process has been slightly anachronistic. It's kind of perverse. I guess a lot of the records that were an influence on the record were made in that way - with engineers and people that knew their craft. I guess I feel that that's something that's often missing from a lot of very modern records made on laptops in bedrooms.»

The result is a revelation. Alternately jarring and chaotic, pared back, thundering, then pulsating and gloriously mellifluous, the album confidently displays its influences: clattering analogue post-punk («Why Make Sense?»), Philly disco («Dark Night»), and outer-space acid dub («Easy To Get»). The crisp, snapping '90s RnB of «Love Is The Future» calls in guest spots from De La Soul's Posdnuos and Scritti Politti's Green Gartside on vocals and arrangements respectively. The record even eschews Alexis' vocals

in favour of a carefully chosen sample (from the 1983 Sinnaman single «I Need You Now») that adds huge clout to the emotionally charged core of the album, «Need You Now»

Alexis: ««Need You Now» is a bit different to anything I've previously written about – it's about the bleak reality of living in a world where terrorism exists in such a visible way. The track isn't trying to solve anything, it's just a recognition of the fact that it's there and we're helpless against it. Hot Chip songs are usually about relationships – either my own or my relationship to the music we make... «Need You Now» comes from a more pessimistic place. It's an attempt to condense down that sense of helplessness you get watching the news.»

Condensing both lyrics and music was a key technique in the making of *Why Make Sense?* – an anti kitchen-sink approach that has been gestating in the years since *In Our Heads*.

Joe: «Musically we all had a desire to strip things right down, not overload it with parts. It relates back to the idea of actually being a band – maybe just one guitar part and one live drum part rather than multiple layers added. Musically, it was an effort to bring a real directness to our music, the kind you'd get on old RnB records... Hopefully stripping things back brings more funk to the tracks.»

Funk runs deep through *Why Make Sense?* The unmistakable strutting sound of the clavinet drives «Started Right», transplanting 1970s Stevie Wonder into a futurist soul backdrop. Elsewhere, tracks are augmented by a talkbox that's as much Roger Troutman as it is Todd Rundgren.

Alexis: «It's impossible not to think of Stevie when you hear a clavinet being played. We're always into exploring possibilities of new bits of gear that we maybe haven't used before. The talkbox in the studio was just as inspiring. We spent a lot of time going back to the RnB records we were listening to from the '90s... they were records that quested after a pared down funk sound... Michael McDonald, G Funk...»

Joe: «A lot of this comes from the feeling that the RnB that's being made now is washed with these drifting clouds of reverb. Those sounds seem designed to hide the fact that a lot of the music it's drifting across is shit. I think these songs are us saying, «This is our take on RnB». You could relate it to a history of *blue eyed soul* where there's a disconnect between the music and the people making it. Driving round Putney in a Peugeot with the windows down, the music you're passionate about might not reflect who you are. Maybe at this point in our career, we've accepted who we are and that's being reflected in the music. Fuck it, we don't *make* sense, we're doing it anyway.»

It might not be an answer to the titular question but it does offer a strong a sense of purpose. A strength that sustains one of the most singular, innovative writing partnerships in British music, and ensures that one of the best live acts on the planet continues to hone a sound that's unique and unarguable, a sound that translates from nightclubs to festival stages without compromise. And it hammers home the notion that on the strength of *Why Make Sense?* – an unarguable creative peak - no one has built a machine that can replace Hot Chip yet.