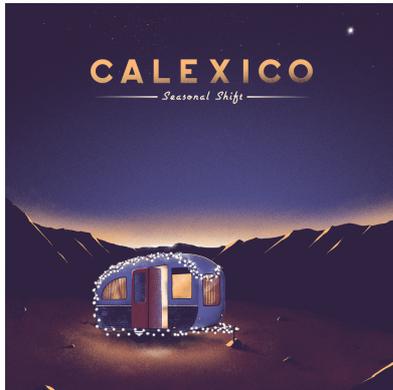




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CALEXICO (US)

Album: Seasonal Shift

Label: City Slang

Release Date: 04.12.2020

Web: <https://www.casadecalexico.com>

EPK: irascible.ch/releases/calexico/seasonal-shift

Calexico's *Seasonal Shift* is less of a Christmas album and more of a cross cultural seasonal celebration. The themes are based around that familiar end of year feeling, of reflection, of ceremony and of recognition of the year gone by and changes it brought for better and for worse. It contains a few cover songs including classics by John Lennon and Tom Petty, a few more special guests and a whole load of good will. It's heartfelt but fun, and earnest but celebratory.

Seasonal Shift features Calexico in an assortment of guises, referencing Portuguese Fado and Old Mexican Folk Songs, from the stripped back two-man skeleton to the full party of international collaborators including artists like Bombino, Gaby Moreno, Gisela João, Nick Urata (DeVotchKa) and Camilo Lara.

Reflecting on the album, Joey Burns says, "It's more of a seasonal album and like all seasons they are about change and how those changes in the world resonate inside of you. I never thought this would have gone the way that it did. We were aiming to record a 6 song EP and we kept going. I guess I never thought I would be on permanent hibernation mode either, but I'm super happy and extremely grateful."

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Seasonal Shift track by track with Joey Burns

1. Hear the Bells

When writing songs for a seasonal album, I wanted to include some of the aspects of celebrations and traditions observed in Tucson around early November. This song is about holding time and space for memories. Dia de Los Muertos and The All Souls Procession are two events that have influenced Southern Arizona and remembering those who've passed away. But it could also be about giving memories importance, too. The story could be about two lovers or two family members.

Just as it's paying homage to memories of people, it's also my way of paying respect to Tucson. There's a quote in the middle from an old Mexican folk song, "Cancion Mixteca." The song is about longing and missing your homeland. I used to hear Ry Cooder & Harry Dead Stanton's version from the *Paris, Texas* soundtrack when I was washing dishes at Bentley's Cafe on Speedway Blvd. when I first moved to Tucson in 1993. I learned how to sing and play it and love how the chorus soars way up high. It's woven into the fabric of my connection to the Sonoran Desert.

So yes, "Hear the Bells" is about reflecting. That's what I do these days, looking out my kitchen window. That's also why there's several references to the kitchen throughout the album.

2. Christmas All Over Again feat. Nick Urata (DeVotchKa)

This is one of Sergio's favorite Christmas songs and so I thought, 'Yeah, let's do it!' Plus, I was really feeling Petty's presence missing in the music world, and felt a connection to his music and path of incredible collaborations. Once we started recording this song, I immediately started hearing horn parts and extra backing vocals that echoed some of the records in my collection from the 1970's. We asked Nick Urata from Devotchka to join us on singing this song as well, which I really loved hearing.

It's interesting that during this period of quarantine there are times when you reach out to someone they immediately respond back with "Hey, I was just thinking of you too!" Working on this song and the recording project really helped ease the blues and feeling isolated. Here we were all set to go on tour in June 2020 on a coast to coast trek in the States, but instead we found ourselves working on seasonal songs around the holidays in the middle of summer. I love that. I feel super lucky to have had the chance.

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None of this would have been possible if Sergio and Chris didn't drive up from Tucson to Boise (16 hours straight) with gear and instruments to help me carve out a time and place to dive into the writing and recording of these ideas. The cover songs helped us get the ball rolling and then I just started bringing out some sketches to Sergio to record and then we would send them to John and the other band members and guests to add their parts. I realize that it's nothing new and all, but because of the confines and seriousness with the pandemic, the session brought a lot of joy to everyone. I really needed this focus and creative reunion.

3. Mi Burrito Sabanero feat. Gaby Moreno

I heard this song on Gaby's 'Posada' Holiday album and it instantly became a favorite for my family and I. So when it came time to compile some ideas of songs to do, I had this one at the top of my list. I was super happy when Gaby agreed to join us on our version with an incredible arrangement by Sergio. We always try to take a cover song somewhere different than an original or add a new section or element. This one has an instrumental piano bridge that Sergio wrote. Gaby picked up on the new part and added a vocal accompaniment reminiscent to the Cuban vocal group Cuarteto d'Aida with her "oohs" and "bop bop" parts. Later in the song, my twin daughters Twyla and Genevieve joined in on the chorus which was super fun to record. After three takes they were ready to do something else other than Dad's boring work. Their look was priceless.

4. Heart of Downtown feat. Bombino

One night I came up with a guitar riff and Sergio started adding some percussion and minimal accompaniment. The next day we received John's drum parts and the song felt like it had some good weight (or as our European friends say "Earth") to it, good enough to write some lyrics and send the idea to Bombino, who Sergio had met a few times. I wrote a chorus in French thinking that it would help bridge the gap from our world to his and hoping he would take whatever lines he connected with. Lyrically it is all about that bridge and compassion leading us through life changes. With the news of activist and Congressman John Lewis passing away, I was also thinking about some of the "good trouble" he embraced and the struggles he endured. The music is a celebration. I wanted to have something that reflected my sense of hope regardless of how dark these times can be. Hope is the key word.

5. Seasonal Shift

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I spent some time banging on the piano in the months leading up to this session. There was one song that sounded like one of those old holiday standards. You know the kind of songs that have that Irving Berlin style of chords and warm and fuzzy feel. So I tried it out and added some improvised lyrics as I was heading out the door one night. I was surprised at how easy it all came together and with John's drums and Scott's fine bass playing, it felt like it had a bit of The Band's swing and swagger. I added some electric guitar, Sergio layered some organ and keyboards and that was it. I went back and changed a few lines and was happy to embrace that warm, fuzzy familial "dysfunctional" aspect the holidays can bring.

6. Nature's Domain

When writing "Nature's Domain," I had to reference my kids' wintertime books to get into a cold landscape and see images of snow and animals hibernating. I chose a cold, steel string guitar as opposed to a warm, sun-soaked nylon string guitar for starters. I guess that simple choice early on can affect the direction a song can take. I know it sounds unimportant, but we tend to work in subtleties and this one early on felt like it didn't need much for it to begin to take shape.

Staring at the children's books might have helped encourage this song initially but it was the heavier thoughts about climate change and wondering what we were taught about the environment that helped realize the whole picture. I like how the first line led me into the song: "Wondering what I've been holding on to that's been causing the ice to give way," and from there you can't tell if someone is dreaming or half-dead or half-alive. There is a shift and that's all I was looking for. How do I get lost in this song? There's a couple of spirit guides like "The Deer in the dawn," "The world on the lawn," and the "owl in the barn," that took me on a winter walk around the forest outside of a barn that offer both comfort and coldness. I'm ok with not trying to figure out the songs and let the mystery be.

7. Happy Xmas (War is Over)

I love this song and I love the universality of the lyrics and the call and response sea of voices. I decided to start as quiet as possible and find out how loud and massive we could make this song build. I love how John plays his brushes in this groove. So I instantly knew that this was going to be good. I love how Martin and Jacob brought in some great horn parts and lush backing vocals from our friends Beth Goodfellow (drummer in the past with Iron & Wine) and Luke Ydstie & Kati Claborn from the band Blind Pilot, who we toured together with a few years ago. There's a touch of bittersweet added with Connor Gallaher's slow bending pedal steel that combined with the trumpets that frames this



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song in a very southwestern, familiar tradition for us, but it's the vocals that really carry this tune for me and the way the chorus keeps going. We decided to not stop as the original had and see what would happen if we kept the trance and mantra going. This is something that we would do live onstage a lot and felt really good to try it at home in our makeshift studios scattered around the globe. I love how spread out we all are. Gives a sense of pride especially in these times.

8. Glory's Hope

As we were almost done making this album, John and I decided to record a solo song, each of us in our garage or home studio room. A portrait. Raw and incomplete with lots of pencil-drawn lines visible to make an arc back to our first cassette album, *Superstition Highway* (not really released, but it was 1995-ish). John delivered this gorgeous 6/8 haunting shuffle that feels both icy and warm at the same time. Kind of like someone laughing and crying in the same moment. "How did he do that?" It reminds me of many things, but I can't put them into words. That's the great thing about songs without words. They help us take a breath and give pause. It felt like a great place in the album sequence to leave the words of John Lennon hanging in the air while John Convertino offers a musical bridge with a view that offers light and hope.

John writes, "When I was a kid, I remember there was a time when my mother disappeared up in the attic for three days. She got the vision and wrote a Christmas play about a disabled girl named Glory, who was there along with the wise men and shepherd boy when Jesus was born."

9. Tanta Tristeza feat. Gisela João

At the end of every year we tend to look back at what we've done or where we've gone. There is a lot of reflecting and a lot of celebrating, too. But it's in that reflecting and remembering that matches beautifully with the winter layers we burrow ourselves in. Musically I had no idea when I mapped out these chords on my piano that instead I would be recording them on my nylon guitar that goes on every tour with me. On my guitar, whose nickname is "Manny," there is an image of Portuguese Fado singer Amália Rodrigues. She is my patron saint of the minor blues and the path that leads from my musical door to the heart of the world. I recorded this tune late at night and while listening upon playback, Sergio suggested I sing a few Spanish lines of his that dealt with saying goodbye to a friend who had tragically died. They became the chorus, but still the song had no verses and finally I asked our friend Raúl to help translate some verses into Portuguese and see if Gisela João would be willing to collaborate. When we heard her vocals come back and placed in with the song, I knew this was a

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full circle kind of moment. The song came about in the most unusual way and it showed me to remember to trust the process and not worry about anything else. Keep following the heart of the musical idea that is there in front of you.

10. Peace of Mind

A song recorded in my garage at 2AM by myself with my semi lo-fi system propped up on the freezer where all the homemade tamales are kept, like jewels in a treasure chest, they are coveted and sometimes used in bartering. I'm kidding. They are gifts just like songs are. Sometimes you have no idea where they come from and that's a good thing. This song reminds me of some of the tunes from our first official release, *Spoke* (1996). Earnest and sweet, major chords, just happy to be at home with the one you love and not having to brave the crowds at the mall. It can be more fierce than anything. So yeah, this has a touch of that far away harmonica and a hint of electric guitar, but mostly it's the singer with his friends, all three of them in a 1960's sedan cruising through the night. I can see a Wim Wenders style video for this one (Let me know if you're interested, Wim)!

11. Sonoran Snoball feat. Camilo Lara

We asked Camilo to send a musical idea. We opened up the file like it was a shiny present under a tree, pure Christmas Joy. My kids' ears perked up. They wanted to know what I was doing all of sudden. So, to get into recording my vocal parts I borrowed their toy walkie talkies for that warm fuzzy tone and sent them back to Camilo in Mexico City, who sent the song to Martin Wenk in Leipzig, Germany for a dubbed out trumpet solo, and then it made a return back to John in El Paso and Sergio in Tucson to get all mixed and sorted. This is the kind of stuff that we make up at soundchecks on tour that we tell ourselves we should record sometime. So we did! Except we weren't on tour. Oh no! But it's ok. Doing this was like joining back up with friends you see on tour and a dose of good medicine. Thanks to Beth for joining us on the vocal and making it feel so much more complete.

12. Mi Burrito Sabanero (reprise)

“Give thanks from all of us to all of you, regardless of what country or culture you come from, we are all related.” That was my idea on this song: “give my friends the chance to represent their corner of the world to remind us all that the world is small.” And for the record, I love the fact that a couple of my friends said have a happy summer, because for some the end of the year is warm and bright. So there really is hope after all, if you keep it in mind.

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