

JOSE LOBO *In All Good Hope*

In All Good Hope, the debut album from singer, songwriter, and musician Jose Lobo, is a masterclass in intimacy, everything about it exuding a sense of closeness. From the highly personal lyrical themes and sparse, delicate instrumentation, to the singing, which sounds like a friend whispering a secret into your ear, the experience of listening to *In All Good Hope* is akin to entering an inner sanctum, or what Lobo aptly refers to as “a reverie of the quotidian”. Originally hailing from Venezuela, Lobo has spent the better part of the last decade in a somewhat nomadic mode, splitting his time between his current homebase of Montreal, San Francisco's Mission District, Paris, and also Hamilton, Ontario, where much of the album was recorded.

Tellingly, *In All Good Hope* opens with a creak, perhaps an old chair or some well-worn floorboards, and easily maintains this relaxed, cozy sense of presence as Lobo weaves through these hushed, multi-lingual songs. The bulk of the album is centred around his nylon-string guitar and mellifluous vocal style, which is always mixed right up front, capturing every breath and nuance. The astute listener may pick up a strong scent of bossa nova, which is no accident, as Lobo developed a great love for the '60s Brazilian genre while living in the city of Belo Horizonte during his teenage years. There are also shades of Tropicalia, bossa nova's slightly more adventurous younger sibling, and to that end, one might recall the similarly inspired singer Devendra Banhart and the warmly psychedelic “freak folk” movement of the '00s, Brazilian legend Caetano Veloso, fellow nylon-string player Jose Gonzales, Toronto-based singer and producer Sandro Perri, and contemporary Brazilian artist Rodrigo Amarante, whose solo and band work has provided deep wells of inspiration for Lobo.

And though the album is a veritable linguistic bouquet – sung in Portuguese, Spanish, French, and English – its themes create a cohesive through-line. “The album is sort of like a book of short stories,” Lobo says, “made up of day-to-day moments and observations of my surroundings.” The opening track ‘se deter pra entender’ acts here as a prologue of sorts, asking the listener to stop and “understand that the syllables count”, while gentle cascades of harp, synth, and softly strummed guitar float beneath. For Lobo, the song – and indeed the album as a whole – is about “the weight of our words, words that remain inside us and those that exist in the world.” Written largely over the course of 2020, the songs were Lobo's “attempts to find some magic in my day-to-day life, as it became more and more routine and closed off by the pandemic.” A perfect metaphor here is the song “agujeros”, which paints a picture of Sasha the family dog, whose daily quest for little slivers of sunlight around the house “was a fundamental part of keeping my family sane.”

In All Good Hope is largely a solo affair, but there are key collaborators at play throughout. Lobo became familiar with Hamilton-based singer-songwriter Scott Orr through mutual appreciation and the magic of Bandcamp, and the core elements of the album were recorded at his studio, largely through a vintage 1950s ribbon microphone. Alongside Montreal-based producer Victor Zhang, Lobo fleshed out the rest of the album in his bedroom with warm, hazy synth pads, and judicious sprinklings of hand percussion, bass, flute, harp, and string arrangements. Many of these elements were recorded remotely by guest musicians from around the world, and their international provenance speaks to Lobo's years of travelling and connecting with like-minded artists. After graduating from university, Lobo lived in San Francisco's Mission District for a spell, and his time there was fruitful, leading to work in theatre penning the music for Andreina Maldonado's *Our Work Our Dignity*, a play exploring the realities of immigrant workers in the city. But it was his friendship with songwriter and social activist Diana Gameros that initially drew him there, and in a neat full-circle swoop, she contributes the elegant second vocal on the track 'lista pa la carrera'.

Lobo says that many of the songs were written as “an homage to the morning, my favourite time of day,” and like those slivers of sunlight that Sasha chased around the living room each day, *In All Good Hope* will warmly illuminate whatever situation it may occupy, making good on its title (borrowed from poet Ralph Waldo Emerson's sign-off in his letters), and Lobo's vision of “holding hands with the present”, an image he found “so soothing, but also really hard to attain”. This album will make that just a little bit easier. *In All Good Hope* is available _____ on Victory Pool Records, wherever you stream or buy music.

(Chris Dadge, 2023)