

**JOSÉ GONZÁLEZ**  
**LOCAL VALLEY**

José González is in a class by himself – a sincere, artful performer whose singular musical approach and eagerness to address grand themes sets him worlds apart. Hailed by *Rolling Stone* as “someone whose subtle, carefully crafted music delivers rewards to listeners who know how to wait,” González’s stellar career can only be described as a dream. Throughout it, he has won a range of honors, performed on high-profile network television shows, headlined prestigious festivals, sold out concert venues on virtually all continents, and collaborated with Ben Stiller on his film, *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*. Recently, people have connected with González further by seeking out his music as a source of comfort during these trying times rife with chaos. As the world begins to see the light at the end of the tunnel, José returns with a welcomed salve taking the form of his fourth studio album, *LOCAL VALLEY*.

The visionary singer-songwriter/guitarist’s long awaited album, and first to contain songs in all of the languages he speaks (English, Spanish and Swedish), *LOCAL VALLEY* provides a welcome reminder of the Gothenburg, Sweden-based artist’s understated appeal and unabashed intimacy, a quality *Billboard* praised as “one of the most recognizable sounds in indie rock.” New songs like the mesmerizing “Visions” and the sun-dabbled “El Invento,” (first unveiled as part of the 2020 Nobel Prize Award Ceremonies) showcase his trademark bittersweet pastoralism, impressive fingerpicking skills, and remarkable sonic creativity while masterfully delving into epic themes and metaphysical investigation.

*LOCAL VALLEY* “is similar to my other solo albums in sound and spirit,” he says, “a natural continuation of the styles I’ve been adding through the years both solo and with Junip. I set out to write songs in the same vein as my old ones: short, melodic and rhythmical, a mixture of classic folk singer songwriting and songs with influences from Latin America and Africa. It’s more outward looking than my earlier works, but no less personal. On the contrary, I feel more comfortable than ever saying that this album reflects me and my thoughts right now.”

Recorded at Studio Koltrast Hakefjorden, which González set up in his family’s summer house north of Gothenburg, *LOCAL VALLEY* again finds the artist armed with just a handful of nylon-stringed Spanish guitars, chosen for their resonances and characters. Yet this time, technology did creep into the proceedings – a careful listen reveals the sound of his ancient laptop’s fan whirring within his home studio’s wood-paneled walls, and a number of songs (“Lasso In,” “Lilla G,” “Swing,” and “Tjomme”) are marked by González’s use of an iPad’s DM1 drum machine app, replacing the more organic percussion featured on his earlier records.

“I also allowed myself to loop guitars as I aim to do live with pedals,” González says, “and in my head I was hearing how each track would fit with an orchestra (The String Theory) or my five-piece band (The Brite Lites), with whom I’ve been touring on and off the last decade.”

*LOCAL VALLEY* is, González explains, “a metaphor for both humanity stuck here on earth – our local green valley in a vast, inhospitable universe – and also for two dogmatic tribes stuck in a

state where they're unable to see things from the others' perspective, preventing them from establishing a more harmonic state." Drawn by his partner, illustrator and designer Hannele Fernström, the album's striking cover nods to *The Elephant and The Rider*, an influential behavioral psychology model by (NYU psychologist) Jonathan Haidt, while the textiles of Josef Frank – the founder of the Vienna School of Architecture who spent later life exiled in Sweden – provided its stylistic inspiration.

Much like renowned physicist Brian Cox, whose *Human Universe* afforded a key source of insight, González continues to address substantial affairs – from ideas of cognitive dissonance to the benefits of meditation – in an accessible manner suited to his music's deceptively ingenuous nature. Doubling down on his past albums, *LOCAL VALLEY* sees him going even further to the place where, in the words of *NPR*, he's "wrestling with the big unknowables in a way that makes them seem of vital importance," with songs like "Horizons" exploring previously marginalized themes like the struggle between "fake news" and science, secularism and the environment. González's goal was not only simply to create "good music, beautiful and at times groovy," but also to be, "at closer glance, intriguing and at times provocative, depending on your worldview." Indeed, the artist is well placed to delve into complex themes: González – who studied virology at Gothenburg University – has immersed himself in a dizzying range of books by some of the world's most eminent thinkers, investigating topics like effective altruism, humanism and ecomodernism, subjects upon which he can often be found expounding amid a likeminded community on Twitter.

"Many of these songs have a crystal-clear, secular humanist agenda: anti-dogma, pro-reason," he says. "There's no political agenda, though, at least not in a classical left-right spectrum. Maybe in a globalist-secular vs theocratic-nationalist way: the focus is on underlying worldviews, and on our existential questions as smart apes on a quest to understand ourselves and our place in the cosmos."

Given that the album was recorded in a studio in his home, *LOCAL VALLEY* is very much a family affair, with Fernström both inspiring "Honey Honey" and adding her voice to the Caribbean-flavored "Swing." "Lilla G," meanwhile, was written for his young daughter, who he also credits for helping write "El Invento" – González's only publicly released song to feature lyrics in Spanish. The album also continues his long tradition of reinterpreting music by other artists with "En Stund På Jorden," originally performed by Iranian-Swedish artist Laleh, a former refugee who's topped Swedish charts multiple times after growing up in the same multicultural Gothenburg neighborhood as he did. In addition, the album includes a new rendition of González's own "Line of Fire," originally performed by Junip, the band he co-founded in 1998 and continues to maintain with co-founder Tobias Winterkorn. First featured on Junip's self-titled 2013 second album, the original version has proven a worldwide favorite in the years that followed, earning over 60M global streams and 17M video views via YouTube.

"Since my second album," González says, "I've usually gone to my own songs for reference, similar to how I sense Beastie Boys did on *CHECK YOUR HEAD* and their follow-up, *ILL COMMUNICATION*."

On “Honey Honey,” he looks back to “Music On My Teeth,” a song from DJ Koze’s 2018 album, *Knock Knock*, on which he was featured. “Can I also mention,” he adds, “that I had a jam session with Bombino, the artist from Niger, back in 2016 when he hung out in Gothenburg? That, together with his performance on his own with a guitar, was very inspiring while writing “Valle Local” and “Head On.”

Four albums in, *LOCAL VALLEY* finds Jose González, in the words of “Visions,” still “*imagining the worlds that could be/Shaping a mosaic of fates/For all sentient beings.*” Meticulously crafted and characteristically rich in compelling detail, these 13 thought-provoking songs ring out as his most nuanced, ambitious, and philosophically profound work thus far. With *LOCAL VALLEY*, Jose González once again proves that music doesn’t need to be loud to be heard.

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