

A Catapult Western

Seasonal-affective
basement country

It's hard to imagine rock or country without the influence of male loneliness. Add to that a shut-in Wisconsin winter, and the songs might come out faster, and better, than expected. At least that's what Jason Nyberg learned when his wife Renee went to Kenya for a six-month volunteer trip and he retreated to his basement studio to keep busy. With help from friends like multi-instrumentalist and songwriter James Bourne, Nyberg [formerly a drummer] cranked out the 11 songs that became the self-titled debut CD from A Catapult Western. A slight country feel comes naturally to the songs, but Nyberg's collaborators help him explore influences that range from Low to Richard Buckner. As he prepared the band's new live show, Nyberg told *The A.V. Club* how writing, home recording, brandy, and Vicodin got him through a trying season.



The A.V. Club: Did you end up seeing Richard Buckner when he played here this month?

Jason Nyberg: He's sitting at the bar by himself having a glass of wine. My wife's like, "Just go give [your CD] to him. You know you've ripped him off at least a few times." So finally I get a beer in me and I go up there and I give him the record. I tell him the story about ripping him off, and how the first song on the record was actually called "The Buckner Version of 'Moving Day,'" because the riff part of it was such a Jon Langford/Richard Buckner rip-off. So he's laughing, and opens the CD and tells me this story about when he was on tour with Eric Bachmann, he realized midway through the tour he was ripping off Bachmann.

AVC: Did you take inspiration from any drummer solo albums?

JN: No, because I didn't really have any expectation for it. Left to my own devices, I think I probably would've made, like, a bad John Denver record [laughs], but as it turned out, other people got involved. I always think of drummers that sing, like that guy from the Eagles [Don Henley], [who] I couldn't take any inspiration from.

AVC: You credit some Kenyan children with singing on the CD.

JN: I went to visit Renee in Africa in March for about two and a half weeks. She lived at an orphanage, there's about 30 kids there. The place actually didn't have any electricity until the later part of her stay there, so entertainment really consisted of playing soccer and singing and kidding around with each other and whatever. When peo-

ple come to visit, sometimes they'll do poems or singing, so the night that I left, we sat in the kitchen and sang songs and did little skits and things for about an hour, and I had a little MP3 player with me and I just recorded some stuff through the mic. There's a loop on the last song ["Where To Begin"], with this kid named Gideon—they're all beautiful, wonderful kids, but Gideon was just a standout.

AVC: This album was mostly written and recorded in the winter, right? It's got a very seasonal-affective feel.

JN: [Laughs.] It definitely has a shut-in-my-house-for-three-months kind of feel. "That Familiar Story" is a good example. Right after Renee left, I had a really severe sore throat, and I couldn't eat or sleep for three days. Finally, I went to the doctor to get some Vicodin, so that I could just eat. I got a bottle of brandy, because my grandfather used to say, "brandy kept me healthy for 40 years." So I have the brandy and the Vicodin and I'm in the middle of writing this song. I end up doing the demo at one in the morning, and there's a clap track and some crappy guitar, double vocal—the second vocal, I just end up yelling. So I e-mail it to James and all I get back in the morning is, "Jesus Christ, dude, settle down."

AVC: Did brandy and Vicodin work out for you?

JN: Um, no. I think it was the only night I combined the two. It turned out to not be a very good idea. I tried it one time. I got a song out of it.

AVC: On "Brian Died," you're beating yourself up about someone's death. Why?

JN: My father and his brother are estranged, and in general I don't have any

real close family other than my immediate family. I always thought that maybe shouldn't mean that I didn't talk to my cousins. Somehow it all translated to me not communicating with them. Then my cousin Brian had too much to drink and he drove into a tree, and he was dead. Then all of a sudden there I was at this funeral with this uncle that I don't know and this aunt that I don't know and these cousins that I don't know. I felt bad because he had died, but I had felt worse because I had never taken the time to act on what's always been sort of an impulse as an adult. It really stuck in my mind as, what a waste of a potential connection with somebody.

AVC: There's a lot of distress on the CD, but it's also got a feeling of relief to it.

JN: One of my friends said, after the first show we played, that there wasn't a single moment of optimism in the entire show, to which I disagreed strongly. It depends how you listen to it.

AVC: Now that your wife's back, is it harder to write songs?

JN: Yes, although I've been writing songs. I'm in a much better mood, which is great. The other thing is, I have way less time, and it's way easier to write a sad, moody song than it is to write a happy, joyful song and not sound cheesy. — Scott Gordon

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