

# jonathan rundman **LOOK UP**



*Look Up* is the anticipated return of Jonathan Rundman, power-pop craftsman. Following a 10-year hiatus with significant personal and musical detours, he has re-emerged in midlife more artistically focused, energized, and dynamic than ever before.

Inspired by long-term career role models such as Todd Rundgren, Bruce Cockburn, Annie Lennox, and Marshall Crenshaw, Rundman's *Look Up* navigates the uncharted spaces between midcentury heartland twang, '80s New Wave, and archaic Euro-folk.

It's been a decade since anyone heard an album of new songs from Finnish-American, Midwest native Jonathan Rundman. His 2004 record was *Public Library*, a tight and

rollicking Americana slam-dunk, backed by **The Silos** rhythm section and produced by indie-roots pioneer **Walter Salas-Humara**. Rundman's DIY-conditioned listeners were surprised and delighted by this hi-fidelity sonic departure, and *Public Library* found its way onto the Top 10 Local Albums of the Year list in Minneapolis' venerable **City Pages**. National raves followed in **Paste** and **Performing Songwriter** magazines and across the blogosphere.

Despite the rousing launch of *Public Library*, Rundman chose not to actively support the record. Instead, he stopped touring and stayed home full time to care for his newborn son. Any remaining creative moments were spent archiving his musical history. The following years produced a series of chronological retrospective albums, as well as a baby daughter. As his children entered their school years, his newly-open schedule coincided with an unforeseen musical opportunity.

In 2008 Rundman was asked to perform for a series of cultural events hosted by Minnesota's active Finnish community. Fascinated and inspired by his ancestral traditions, Rundman toured Finland in January of 2010 and by that summer had plugged into a network of Finnish musicians. He began composing and performing with new Finnish-American instrumental folk project **Kaivama**, collaborating with visiting Scandinavian artists, and touring and recording with **Arto Järvelä**, one of Finland's leading folk musicians.

Rundman's unexpected side trip into traditional Nordic music culminated in the 2013 nomination of the **Arto Järvelä & Kaivama** recording for **Folk Music Album of the Year** in Finland. Back in the USA, the **Minneapolis Star Tribune** took notice, too: "Over the past three years, no Minnesota folk group has proven more ambitious or accomplished than the Finnish-American duo Kaivama. It has released exceptional CDs and toured the United States...often in the company of Finnish fiddler Arto Järvelä, their partner on a gorgeous new instrumental album."

Operating in a totally unfamiliar and exciting musical universe, these adventures as a newbie Finnish *pelimanni* offered Rundman much fresh perspective. After decades as a rock & roll guitarist, he fell back in love with the keyboard, his first instrument. Serving as piano and harmonium accompanist for Kaivama and Järvelä, Rundman approached the traditional Nordic repertoire shaped by his disparate childhood soundtrack of arena rock and church hymns. This keyboard-centric mindset was setting the stage for a new collection of songs, and what would become the *Look Up* album.

By 2014 Jonathan Rundman was back in the studio as a solo artist, with a renewed sense of purpose and a previously untapped emotional vulnerability. Rundman sought producer **Matt Patrick** (John Mark Nelson, Greycoats) at The Library Recording Studio in Minneapolis to help realize his vision for an hi-tech, anthemic pop record. Upon hearing Rundman's ambitious goals, Matt Patrick perceptively asked "Is this your midlife crisis album?" Rundman's quick answer was "Yes, I think it is."

Patrick expertly juggled the roles of technician, coach, multi-instrumentalist, and editor, establishing a healthy and inspiring creative environment. Rundman pleaded "Don't let me play guitar," abandoning his long-serving Gibson J-50 to focus on the Library Studio's staggering arsenal of analog keyboards. With Rundman busy on vintage Hammond organ, Wurlitzer electric piano, MemoryMoog synthesizer, and random Casiotones, Patrick called in a crew of Minnesota's finest young session players to provide a rock-band foundation. Drummer **Steve Goold** (Sara Bareilles), bassist **Ian Allison** (Jeremy Messersmith), and guitarists **Tyler Burkum** (Leagues, Butterfly Boucher) and **Jasper Nephew** (Owl City) brought virtuosity and a contemporary pop sheen to Rundman's intricate new compositions.

With great affection for the musicians of his formative years, Rundman reached out to some of his '80s-rock heroes to make guest appearances. Power-pop legend **Parthenon Huxley**, who was passing through Minneapolis with the current touring incarnation of Electric Light Orchestra, stopped by the studio to contribute electric guitar. **Brent Bourgeois**, known for his work with Todd Rundgren and synth-pop hitmakers Bourgeois Tagg, sang exquisite multi-tracked harmonies. **Pat Tomek** of stalwart Kansas City rockers The Rainmakers played thundering drums. Major influence **Walter Salas-Humara** of The Silos co-wrote a song. Even best-selling author (*This is Your Brain on Music*), neuroscientist, and record producer **Dr. Daniel Levitin** sang on the thematically appropriate "The Science of Rockets."

Jonathan Rundman's critically acclaimed wordplay supports the record's optimistic title. Lyrical references to aircraft abound—helicopters, planes, rockets—and appear throughout the album artwork. Traces of Finnish folk melodies, instrumentation, and history draw the listener's ears and eyes Northward on the globe. There are *Look Up* allusions to technology, linear time, education, and GPS directions. A lover looks up from a screen, a mummy looks up from the grave, an immigrant looks up at the horizon, a driver looks up at a freeway sign, a painter looks up at an archway, a couple looks up to a new beginning. The music soars with confidence, maturity, joy, and precision.

Look Up!

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