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WORD OF MOUTH

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## OWEN PALLETT PERFORMS SHOELESS AND FLIRTS WITH FAILURE

BY SPILIOS GIANAKOPOULOS



With its baroque arrangements and candid lyrics about heartbreak and love, **Owen Pallett's** third effort *Heartland* makes you cry for everything that makes you happy. I first heard *Heartland's* "Tryst with Mephistopheles" on my morning walk below the BQE. Half way through the track I noticed flowers growing on the rusty highway beams and felt the urgency to run. I had a smile larger than my sprinting feet's span

The album is Pallett's biggest in scope, and his live shows are just as ambitious. He performs without shoes to control a series of pedals that loop live segments into lush, orchestral backing music as he plays his violin and keyboard. The morning after his sold-out show on Monday at The Bowery Ballroom, a fresh-out-of-bed Pallett talked to PAPERMAG about dropping his Final Fantasy moniker, relationships, humiliation and failure.

**Your other albums have been recorded as Final Fantasy, but your new album Heartland is released under your name. Are you giving up Final Fantasy?**

It was through the advise of my lawyer, basically. It is the first time I was getting a proper release in the US and because [record label Tomlab] is distributed in the US but doesn't have a US office. And it's the first time that my record is coming out in Japan [where the Final Fantasy video game is produced], so we were kind of anticipating unwanted legal hassles.

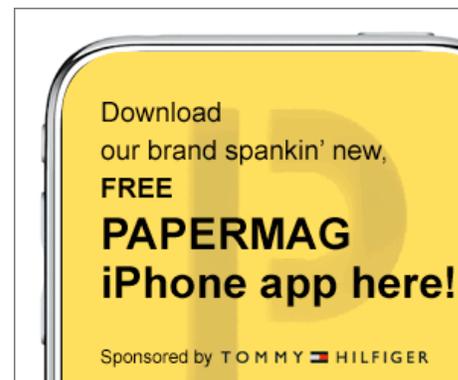
**Heartland is a continuous orchestral piece recorded with a complete symphonic orchestra. How different was this process than making your earlier albums, which were all solo efforts?**

When I went in the making, I just thought 'Oh, it's just another album' but it actually became kind of a big hassle. It was tricky to make. I've always read those interviews with Brian Wilson when he talks about Smile. It's kind of a bit of a smirk on my face, I guess. When people asked him 'When are you going to finish Smile?' he just frowns and says, 'The world doesn't need this music.' But it's really hard to transfer the sound of an orchestra and actually turn it into a pop record. It's hard! It was more of a challenge than I was anticipating

**Listening to the album, the orchestration sounds similar to electronic music. Was that intentional? To marry classical music with modern electronic?**

I didn't really think about it conceptually so much. There was one moment when I was doing "The Great Elsewhere" where I did think, 'I want this to sound really electronic and then have it turn into symphonic by the end.' But most of the time it wasn't all that conceptual. It's more of a product of the records I've been listening to a lot, which is primarily a lot of '70s and early '80s synth-pop.

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### Is Heartland your 'love' record?

Yeah, it is, but it's the dark love. That part of love that contains the will to power something, to be able to have something be in your control and also to be controlled. And the record uses a fictional relationship as a metaphor for both a real relationship and the entire artistic process, which is also I think born of a sort of a humanistic love.

**There are songs on this album sung to you. Your name is mentioned in "Tryst with Mephistopheles."**

This song is meant to be sung by someone who loves me, or, more precisely, sung from the perspective of someone that I love. It's meant to both signify an actually romantic relationship, my own fascination with that which I cannot understand and also the artistic relationship that I, as a musician, feel that I have with music listeners out there.

**Three of your song titles carry the name 'Lewis.' Is Lewis an actual person?**

I definitely had two, three or four people in mind for who Lewis was when I wrote the album and none of them were my boyfriends. They were all other people that seemed kind of mysterious or alien to me and people that I was attracted to. Some of them sexually, some of them not. My younger brother was one of them, who I love and I think he's really amazing, but I also kind of don't understand him.

**You often source inspiration from the idea of failure. In your live shows you layer loops recorder by your violin to make a song, something that immediately exposes any possible mistakes. Is that your way to flirt with failure?**

Yes! I feel the route of entertainment is humiliation. People would rather see somebody fall on their ass than see somebody fly through the air with grace. And certainly I would rather see somebody fall on their ass. When I make records and when I put on a live show, certainly I have the desire to create something beautiful but I also want to make it very difficult for myself to do so. There isn't much success in trying to attain the unattainable as there is in actually attaining it. Which I think is a little bit out of step aesthetically with a lot of music that is being made right now. Certain people really like safe music, which isn't the thing that I'm interested in.

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