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TRACK LISTING:

SIDE A

1. (tuning)
2. The Instrument
3. The Louder I Call, The Faster It Runs
4. Lifer
5. It Was Not Natural
6. Symmetry

SIDE B

7. My Signal
8. Say Hello
9. Over and Over
10. You Of All People
11. Join
12. I Know It's Real

The Louder I Call, The Faster It Runs—the triumphant fifth album by Wye Oak—begins with an explosion. For a few seconds, piano, drums, and a playful keyboard loop gather momentum; then, all at once, they burst, enormous bass flooding the elastic beat. “Suffering, I remember suffering,” sings Jenn Wasner, her voice stretched coolly across the tizzy. “Feeling heat and then the lack of it, but not so much what the difference is.” The moment declares the second coming of Wye Oak, a band that spent more than a decade preparing to write this record—their most gripping and powerful set of songs to date, built with melodies, movement, and emotions that transcend even the best of their catalogue.

Louder is the third record that Wasner and Andy Stack, who launched Wye Oak in Baltimore, have made while living in separate cities—she in Durham, North Carolina, he in Marfa, Texas. They flew to one another for a week or so at a time, hunkering in home studios to sort through and combine their separate song sketches. These shorter stints together produced less second-guessing and hesitation in their process, yielding an unabashed and unapologetic Wye Oak. They discarded past rules about using just guitar or keyboard to write a record, instead funneling all those experiences and experiments into perfectly unified statements. The result is the biggest, broadest, boldest music they’ve ever made.

Louder pursues a litany of modern malaises, each track diligently addressing a new conflict and pinning it against walls of sound, with the song’s subject and shape inextricably and ingeniously linked. The rapturous “Lifer,” for instance, ponders perseverance and survival in times of profound struggle. It is, at first, hesitant and ponderous, Wasner wrestling with her own choices. But her ecstatic guitar solo leads into a chorus that feels like a triumph over doubt, or at least a reconciliation with it. “Over and Over” finds Wasner alone at home, watching clips of violence abroad on repeat, her outrage outstripped only by her ineffectiveness. Stack’s colossal circular rhythm and Wasner’s corroded harmonies conjure a digital hall of mirrors, a place where we can see all evil but do nothing. The music—a sophisticated tessellation of pounded piano and loping bass, scattered drums and chirping synthesizer—is as complex and ponderous as the issues themselves.

For all the struggles Wye Oak confront here, *Louder* ultimately reflects a hopeful radiance, with the parting sense that human connection and our own internal resolve can outweigh even our heaviest worries. The final two tracks are tandem testaments to weakness bowing to strength. Wasner first shuffles through her day during “Join,” beset by worry until she finds a way out. “I just want a clear head,” she realizes at the end, “the sun on my shoulder.” And during “I Know It’s Real,” over twinkling guitars and a drum beat that feels like a steadying pulse, she stumbles upon a necessary credo: “Still, I’m alive, stronger than energies riding on my back.”

The Louder I Call, The Faster It Runs arrives at a time of immense doubt, when our personal problems are infinitely compounded by a world that seems in existential peril. But these dozen songs answer the challenge by radiating self-reflection and resolve, wielding hooks and musical intricacy as a shield against the madness of the moment.

MRG 615

Wye Oak

*The Louder I Call,
The Faster It Runs*



Peak LP



LP



CD

2018 April 6

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