



# HELLER MASON

## MINIMALIST & ANCHORED

*A modern heartbreaker in the style of a youthful Neil Young.* ~ Brian John Mitchell, Remora

Sparseness is both brick and mortar of daydreams. Big worlds are cobbled from the fragments of smaller ones: notions, longings, stupefying ideals. Life is always out of reach, but that's precisely what makes it worth living. No one understands with more aching accuracy than Heller Mason's Todd Vandenberg. Based in the obscure alcove of Little Chute, WI, Vandenberg's songs are packed with references to places distant and unknown. But at the same time, there is an inability to strike ahead; it's simpler to slink about on home turf, and dwell on the bygone and unknowable. "There's an ocean inside all of us," he sings on *Packing My Bags for Hell*, only to paddle back into himself on the title track, "Some drinks and I'll get on with my story / Once I've regained my composure and the color in my eyes." Notion upon notion with no escape.

It took three years for the songs on *Minimalist & Anchored* to bloom from mere and distant thoughts into the unified collection you are now holding. That time was rife with technological doom, stints abroad, homecomings, loves built and dismantled and built anew, sporadic tours in support of a half-finished album, excess thumb-twiddling and a whole bunch of other broke-ass shit that we'll just refer to here as mixing sessions. But all told, the hands that were sat on did not go numb in vain. Vandenberg's personal growth branched out into the songs, giving them a vibrancy that three years ago would have been impossible.

Initially, *Minimalist & Anchored* was recorded in a way that mirrored the isolation of each song's lyrics - it was just Vandenberg's voice and a hollow guitar. But over time, the whole affair was stratified, and the record now includes a delegation of nine musicians playing a spectrum of instruments including electric guitar, drums, bass, cello, female vocals, wurlitzer, piano and trumpet. The presence of others often works to amplify one's sense of solitude, and that is what's at work here. The layers of accompaniment are like treacherous bedfellows who you intuit will leave at first light. In their presence you're utterly distilled: Your loneliness has at long last been justified.

Vandenberg allies himself with monoliths: Nick Drake, Mark Kozelek and Mark Eitzel—he's internalized their inwardness, their inflections, their hums and their buoyant strums. But with *Minimalist & Anchored*, he's struck out on his own. Soft combustion in confined spaces. Hand drawn emotional road maps. To big worlds. To smaller ones. To his heart. To yours. Listen up.



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