Ted Leo

Ted Leo is one of the finest songwriters of our generation, even if it’s not entirely clear what generation that is. Starting in New York Hardcore with Citizen’s Arrest, making the ‘90s safe for power-pop and Weller-esque hair with Chisel, then singing our turbulent lives like we were smarter than we were with The Pharmacists, and most recently providing equal parts sweetness and solace with Aimee Mann as The Both, Ted never let us down. And now, seven years after The Brutalist Bricks, he has a new solo album. And it’s wonderful.

The songs on The Hanged Man, recorded at a home-studio-in-transition in Wakefield, RI, with Ted playing almost all the instruments, are some of the finest and most finely wrought of Ted Leo’s career. Ted describes the time working on the album as one of “personal desolation that felt fallow but was actually very fertile” and, indeed, lyrically, The Hanged Man is suffused with hope of sorts but crushingly heavy. The concerns addressed, whether personal trauma or the national disaster we’re all currently existing in, matched with the range and vitality of the songcraft is inspiring, even uplifting.

The Hanged Man offers the sharp bursts of skinny tie pop-punk fury one would expect from Ted—and even these feel streamlined like never before—but they are offset with an adventurousness in both tone and structure. The intention was to upend expectations but, on songs like the bookends of “Moon Out of Phase” and “Let’s Stay On The Moon,” the intention never gets in the way of the result. There’s no strain of effort in songs that are unlike anything Ted has done previously. The Hanged Man is a career high, born through industry soul sickness, nausea-inducing crisis, and a talent that feels like secular grace.