

"I wrote all these funny songs and I got sick of them. Then I wrote all these serious songs and realized they were boring. Then I broke my back writing a two minute song about Alexander Calder's miniature circus and I thought it was perfect—it was whimsical and weird but also had personal ideas about art tucked in there that gave it the depth and warmth I was looking for. So, lyrically, that was the starting point." —Walter Martin

On January 29th, Walter Martin (co-writer, lyricist and multi-instrumentalist of the Walkmen) will release *Arts & Leisure*—a collection of songs that take inspiration from Martin's years of world travel as a musician, his younger days working in art museums and what he refers to as his "shaky grasp of college art history." The inventive use of drums and percussion, conversational lyrical approach, and trademark vintage instrumentation that Martin brought to the Walkmen are employed to wondrous new effect on his first big production since the band split. Martin's years of behind-the-scenes writing seem to have been the ideal staging ground for this inspired new chapter.

Martin's solo debut was 2014's much-loved kids' album *We're All Young Together*. This unexpected departure served as a palate cleanser for Martin after years in bands and, surprisingly for Martin, the album found miraculous success. As he explains, "I was about to apply for a job at Kinko's or something and then suddenly all these great things started happening with the kids' album." The album won a Parents' Choice award and its songs were featured in two major advertising campaigns—one for iPhone and one for Android. Additionally, the album produced a longstanding #1 single for SiriusXM's family station and was embraced by national press outlets including NPR's All Things Considered, NPR's Morning Edition, The New York Times, The Washington Post, USA Today and Spin.

But most importantly, Martin credits *We're All Young Together* with helping him find a way to write songs that he himself wanted to sing. Martin explains, "Through writing songs about Rattlesnakes and Chimpanzees, I figured out how to write lyrics that express my inner self in a voice that's indistinguishable from how I naturally talk and joke around. That was a huge for me. Thankfully I was able translate it to non-animal subject matters."

After years writing for what he refers to as the "collective personality" of his previous band, Martin now finds himself writing for a personality that is all his own—one characterized by a unique blend of absurd humor and sincere emotion. "I'm no good at talking about the art I like but I feel like these songs express in an unfussy way some things that I like about certain artists and ideas." *Arts & Leisure* was originally conceived as an "art-themed comedy album" but after two years of writing and rewriting, the album developed into something far richer. Whittled down from an original count of 30, these 11 extraordinary songs convey a range of complex emotions through their deceptively simple, often hilarious narratives.

But the lyrics are only half of the story. The rich analog sounds, playful instrumentation and bittersweet melodies that fill this album are some of the most charming and original of Martin's career. Performed and recorded almost entirely by Martin at his vintage-gear-filled Brooklyn recording studio (with a few outrageous performances by Walkmen drummer Matt Barrick) and primarily mixed by producer Phil Ek (Fleet Foxes, The Shins) *Arts & Leisure's* wide-open sound serves as a showcase for Martin's true multi-instrumentalism. He moves easily between drums, guitar, upright bass, piano, trombone, organ, mandolin, xylophone, slide whistle, glockenspiel and just about every noise-maker and percussion instrument you can imagine. Martin jokes, "If you're in bands for almost 30 years, you eventually figure out how all the instruments work."

Whether he's making prank calls from the switchboard at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, admiring the high-back chairs in a tearoom in Glasgow, or casually dismissing all eighteenth century European art during a museum visit, Martin's stories have the familiar warmth of a conversation with an old friend. These songs feel as much like a collection of personal letters as they do a rock 'n' roll album. While offering a perspective that is distinctly modern, Walter Martin's *Arts & Leisure* is rooted in an old tradition and serves as a reminder that there is still sublime power in the marriage of great music and great storytelling.

*Arts & Leisure* is out January 29th on Martin's label, Ile Flottante Music.