

The Natural Lines
2023 Bio

Following their recent *First Five* EP **The Natural Lines** announce the release of their self-titled debut album, ***The Natural Lines***, out 24th March via Bella Union. To accompany the announcement the band have shared an entertaining video for first single and album opener “**Monotony**” featuring celebrated American comedian, actress and TV host **Nikki Glaser** playing a somewhat unconventional psychiatrist. Commenting on the song and video frontman **Matt Pond** says: *“Over the last few years, I’ve tried to focus on my breathing—to try to and be a better singer, to try and be a better person. But it’s hard to sit still and slow down when the world seems so unruly. Monotony is an anthem about the daily tightrope—searching for the right path between passion and apathy. All the while, I’ve been working with Nikki Glaser. Her fearlessness is contagious. Since she never hesitates to tell me what she really thinks, I thought it made perfect sense for Nikki to portray my therapist in the video.”*

Sometimes, a change of view can transform a person’s world. On ‘Don’t Come Down’, the artist formerly known as Matt Pond PA can be found with his “shoulder on the concrete” of a pavement, scoping out the world anew. This granular realignment of perspective serves as an open door to the debut album from The Natural Lines. At once clearly Pond’s work yet a huge leap forward in its measured songcraft, melodic immediacy, collaborative detail and wryly questioning lyrics, the result is a gorgeous album of intimate reflections from a relocated, renamed, revived talent.

Recorded with close collaborators and friends over a period that saw Pond make vital adjustments to his life, its stealth emergence reflects his desire to set a fresh pace for himself and come from somewhere new, somewhere more open.

Now based in Kingston, New York, with his partner and wild dog Willa, Matt explains the album’s gestation thus. “It was something different from the start. I wanted to write as purely as I could. Instead of getting stuck in the ‘tour, write an album, release an album, tour’ cycle, which is not a natural way of writing or living, I wanted to write an album and when it was done I wanted to make sure it was done. I didn’t want this feeling of, ‘Oh, we didn’t have time’, or, ‘I don’t know whether I believe in the songs but it’s coming out anyway.’ I used to be always racing to the finish line, but I’m not anymore.”

For Matt, the call to ring the changes came with the recognition of “a certain nihilism or narcissism” involved in making music. “In some ways, you have to get in your own head and

I think I went too far with that, with drinking and shutting people out. In something that I believe is collaborative, it's not helpful."

"I quit lying," he adds. "I checked my harsher tones. I cut my drinking down. I went to therapy and figured out how to stop shouting at cars."

Car troubles inspire 'No More Tragedies', the album's standout second track, where he wryly details his desire to dampen his twinned impulses to take pictures of license plates blocking his parking space or take bricks to said car windshields. Warming melodies and harmonies soothe his rage, a balance maintained elsewhere on the album.

A need for connection underpins the lilting 'Alex Bell', where Matt's lyrics playfully reference the inventor of the telephone over a plaintive cello and bubbling keyboards – evidence of the album's carefully nurtured arrangements. With nimble sequencing, 'My Answer' follows with a question: do artists really need to get messed-up to create? Matt may not have the answer, he admits, but he articulates the question beautifully, channelling the influence of Blue Öyster Cult's 'Don't Fear The Reaper' into a song of fleet, melodic electric-folk drive.

Featuring 17-year-old MJ Murphy on misty backing vocals, the softly insistent 'Don't Come Down' is an album centrepiece, detailing a need to see things anew. Like The Flaming Lips writing a classicist piano ballad, the twinkling 'Artificial Moonlight' finds Matt writing late at night, illuminated by the lights from streetlamps. Finally, 'Mahwah' closes the album on a note of arrival. While Matt Pond PA's albums emerged from the disconnection of touring and living in vans, Pond is now happily – cruel winters aside – ensconced in Kingston. "I have found a place I love. Mercury Rev lives near here. It is a cool place to be, an artistic, mountainous, wild place to live. So – maybe this is it."

In the case of *The Natural Lines*, a sense of arrival suggests itself. For Matt, the album follows two decades' worth of Matt Pond PA records and soundtrack works. In a career he once described as "a series of benign mistakes," Matt travelled far, moving from his band's starting point in Philadelphia to Florida, Oakland and beyond while releasing 14 well-received albums. In 2017, he declared his intent to retire the Matt Pond PA name, though it lived on briefly in the reissue of *The State Of Gold* and EPs such as *Free Fall*, a tribute to Philadelphia.

Now, the name change honours his collaborators. Among a revolving cast, one constant presence in his work has been Chris Hansen, who plays guitar, bass, keys, saxophone and vocals on *The Natural Lines'* debut. Matt's partner, Anya Marina, contributes vocals. Other band members number Hilary James (cello/vocals), Kyle Kelly-Yahner (drums), Louie Lino

(keys), Sarah Hansen (horns), Sean Hansen (drums/bass), Kat Murphy (vocals) and, also on vocals, MJ Murphy, for whom Matt brims with praise: "She can do anything she wants to musically."

A heartening rebirth for Pond and his friends, the result also pays warming, witty, reflective and infectious testimony to the value of reconfiguring one's outlook. "Once I took control of my mind, I could see what I wanted to say more clearly," says Matt. "Instead of random floods of mania and panic, I felt like I was composed and composing. It has become as simple as reading the words of a sentence in the right order. As small as the pause before I hit 'send.'" A development, you might say, conducted along the most natural of lines.