

Bleachers

After building a devoted fan-base through a year and a half of non-stop touring behind his band Bleachers' well-received debut album *Strange Desire*, Jack Antonoff was spending time in studios in Los Angeles and Atlanta spit-balling ideas for a second album when he had a powerful realization. It struck him, as he was sitting in hip-hop producers Organized Noize's studio in Atlanta, that the records that meant so much to him growing up— are rooted in a specific place. "They came from somewhere!" he says excitedly. "There's an energy there and the artist is telling a story of how they were raised. It's a sound from a city, and they're planting a flag in that city and saying, 'This is what it's like to live here.'"

The New Jersey-born, New York-based Antonoff knew he needed to go home to the East Coast and build a studio. "It's like you have to go sit in your bedroom and hear the music on the speakers you heard *Graceland* on the first time," he says. "You gotta listen through the speakers you heard Smashing Pumpkins on the radio the first time. I had to get back to that space. So I did. I grabbed all this shit from my childhood bedroom in New Jersey and built a studio in my apartment in New York and I literally didn't leave it. I thought, 'This album is going to sound like New York and New Jersey and the actual space I grew up in, in the most specific way. And that, to me, is the most I can offer.'"

It was there in that room — surrounded by posters and flyers from punk shows he saw as a kid and his old baseball trophies and *Star Wars* figurines — that Antonoff created the epic, synth-driven anthems that appear on Bleachers' second album entitled *Gone Now*, which is set for release on June 2, 2017. As a result, the album sounds like "the way the space looks," he says. "It sounds like someone alone in their room, wrestling with their thoughts. It sounds like someone trying to create something very direct and simple amongst the chaos."

Critics praised *Strange Desire*'s modern nostalgia and remarked that the '80s-influenced songs could have served as a soundtrack to a never-made high-school-themed John Hughes film. On that album, Antonoff set emotional meditations on anxiety, depression, loss and picking yourself up after a tragedy (in his case, the death of his younger sister from a brain tumor when Antonoff was 18 and his struggled with a panic disorder in the aftermath) against a backdrop of earworm melodies and shouty choruses on songs like the gold-certified "I Wanna Get Better" (which topped *Billboard*'s Alternative chart) and "Rollercoaster."

"The songs were about growing up and still sort of existing in the past," Antonoff says. "The crux of the new album is my desperately trying to find a way to become some version of an adult, and not just be a giant child. I thought a lot about things like, 'Where do I want to go from here? Do I want to be a person who has this extremely vibrant relationship with their art, but their life suffers in a million other places? Where do I want to go with my life?'"

Antonoff sought to answer those questions on every song on the album. On "I Miss Those Days," he pines for a simpler time when "I knew I was fucked up and didn't know why I was fucked up," he says referencing the years he spent as a high-schooler touring with his first punk band, Outline, "driving around in a van and playing to no one. I was lost, but I miss those days because there's a weight to having a purpose in something." On "Hate That You Know Me" Antonoff realizes that when you build a life with someone and make plans for the future, "it makes you really exposed to the ways in which you're a disaster," he says. "There's this accountability that is so intense. But it's also about how amazing that can be if you're willing to go there with someone." Then there's "Let's Get Married," which Antonoff wrote the day after Donald Trump was elected. "Marriage is such a wild, absurd concept, but the world was falling

down into flames around my eyes, and I wanted to write this absurd celebration song that could play at weddings for the next hundred years.”

On each track, Antonoff searches for ways to illuminate humanity’s communal emotions, like the fact that no one is exempt from the experience of loss. “I think everything I do is always going to be rooted in that,” Antonoff says. “After my sister died, I started writing lyrics that weren’t just angsty teen stuff. That’s when I started talking about very intense things. Fourteen years later, I’m still reflecting on that loss but through a different lens.” Antonoff’s current vantage point resonates on the song “Everybody Lost Somebody.” “At my worst moments, I see people on the street and think, ‘Which one of you motherfuckers voted for Trump?’” he says. “At my best moments, I see people on the street and I think, ‘Everybody has lost somebody.’”

On the album’s first single, “Don’t Take The Money,” Antonoff laments how our society has culturally lost the concept of what selling out means. The song was inspired by his buying a cut-rate phone charger at a Rite Aid when his phone died as he was running late to a meeting. “I got there and plugged the phone into the charger and I had this out-of-body experience where I could not believe how cheap the material was,” he recalls. “And I thought to myself, ‘That’s the real problem.’ Whether you’re making art or making a sandwich, you know when something could be better. Don’t make it cheap. That’s the last thing people need.”

As far as what Antonoff feels like people need from him as artist, he says: “I feel like they just need me to somehow capture the lightning in a bottle of what it’s like to be me, to grow up with loss, and then to try to move through the world within that. All I’ve wanted to do my whole life with my work is just take another step closer to myself.”