

# EDITORIAL

It's happened again, folks. The news cycle, on a break from usual dourness, has taken a turn for the morbid. A slew of horrible things have taken place at once, at home, around the world, and in our collective consciousness. Among those with the luxury to do so, many have simply switched off, constructing a bubble of sensory insulation around them. In all honesty, who can blame them?

The news is there to point out the problems, the crimes and injustices in our society so we can be more aware. It's problem oriented. But in problem infested societies such as ours, they do often take a turn for the unbearable. The antidote, or rather, the "therapeutic" to this torturous existence may just exist in a shift of approach. Lately, I've found myself seeking out the solution oriented approach in my thinking, my perception of society, and even my consumption of content. I'm grateful for the existence of these ideas, but I do wish solutions, as opposed to problems, occupied my news feed and found viral popularity more often. It wouldn't alter reality, but it would definitely make it more palatable. Who could say no to that?

-- Azmin Azran, Sub-editor, SHOUT



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### ALBUM REVIEW



# THE ASCENSION OF SUFJAN STEVENS

ADHORA AHMED

For a uniquely devastating year, new music is one of the very rare good things 2020 has to offer. On September 25, prolific singer-songwriter Sufjan Stevens released *The Ascension*, his latest solo studio album under Asthmatic Kitty Records. This is Stevens' second release this year, the first being *Aporia*, a collaboration with his stepfather Lowell Brams.

*The Ascension* is probably Stevens' rawest work yet. The lyrics delve deep into despair and anger over the chaos that rules over the world at present, subject matters previously unexplored in the songwriter's repertoire. Songs of disillusionment and confusion alternate with those of innocent love, as though Stevens is trying to hold onto the rare instances of purity in an increasingly dismal world. But, in a time like this, even love is precarious. Sounds pretty much like 2020.

The album marks a departure from the minimalistic vulnerability of his 2015 critic and fan favourite *Carrie and Lowell*. Instead, the grandiose electronica is more reminiscent of *The Age of Adz*, which came out in 2010. Stevens' ethereal voice floats above layers of synths and insistent beats as he tries to figure out his way through this mess.

Lyricaly, we meet a different Sufjan. Throughout the album, he looks at his country through a deeply critical lens, far from the romantic and intimate gaze he bestowed upon nooks and crannies of ru-

ral America in albums like *Michigan* and *Illinois*. Stevens, now in his forties, wants to shed the sentimental naïveté from his earlier works, because the ugliness of the society he is a part of is too glaring to ignore.

Overall, *The Ascension* is quite compelling. It begins with the solid opener "Make Me an Offer I Cannot Refuse", where the singer pleads to God for deliverance, giving a feel of what's to come. "Video Game" is probably the catchiest song off the album, thanks to its 80s-inspired synths. Other notable tracks include "Tell Me You Love Me", "Death Star" and "Sugar". But, the best is saved for the last. "America", the final and longest track of the album, achieves everything Stevens wants to say in this album, accompanied by a swirling symphony. It announces his loss of faith in the state of things, but the shimmering synths at the end of the long, ominous outro signifies that there's still hope.

Although it isn't my favourite Sufjan Stevens album (it's *Carrie and Lowell*), *The Ascension* does not disappoint. My only complaint is that "My Rajneesh", the B-side to "America", should have been included. Otherwise, *The Ascension* is definitely worth a second listen, and maybe more.

Adhora Ahmed tries to make her two cats befriend each other, but in vain. Tell her to give up at [adhora.ahmed@gmail.com](mailto:adhora.ahmed@gmail.com)



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