

The Howl & The Hum

“This is deathbed songwriting, everything you’d only express when you know you’re about to die,” Sam Griffiths says. “It’s what you wish you might have said, without worrying about the consequences.”

As **The Howl & The Hum**, Griffiths has spent the best part of the last decade honing this capacity for raw, vulnerable storytelling combined with music that artfully traverses everything from finger-picking folk to indie, country and electronica. With the release of his second album, **Same Mistake Twice**, Griffiths confronts the pain and chaos of recent tumultuous years across 12 tracks of his most direct songwriting to date. Surviving the breakup of his band, the global pandemic and reckoning with his future in music, Griffiths opens with the lines “I never make the same mistake twice/ I always aim for a third time,” before spiralling into finely-spun tales of dread, anxiety and self-destruction. “It took me a few years to get back to writing,” he says. “I wanted to be able to look back and laugh at my anxieties at what I was going through, to fill that pain and difficulty with words and melodies.”

Griffiths’ musical journey began with picking his way through pop punk and indie rock as an angsty teen, before finding his voice after an accidental discovery of **Bob Dylan’s** *Blonde on Blonde* in his dad’s record collection. Inspired by Dylan’s poeticism, Griffiths started gigging at open mics most nights during his time studying at York University and gradually built a following drawn to his knack for recounting tales of the curious figures he’d met amid the city’s nightlife. By 2016, he had joined forces with a trio of fellow open mic night regulars to form The Howl & The Hum and the following year the group released their debut EP, *Godmanchester Chinese Bridge*.

Developing a reputation for charismatic live shows that embodied soft balladry as much as explosive self-expression, the group went on to release their debut album, *Human Contact*, to critical acclaim in 2020. Produced by **Jolyon Thomas** (Slaves, Royal Blood, Daughter), the record pushed the boundaries of guitar music across 13 tracks of driving drums, synthesised guitars and atmospheric electronics. “We spent eight years building up to our debut, developing different ways to express what we were writing,” Griffiths says. “We were listening to everything from **Radiohead** to **New Order**, **Robyn** and **Burial**, creating moments between the electronic and acoustic where it felt like the music was breathing.”

Yet, after the Covid-19 pandemic nixed plans for touring or any onstage fanfare around the release, pressure began to build in the group. With financial demands mounting and few outlets available for their creativity, the band gradually crumbled, leaving Griffiths as the last remaining member. Solo once more, he took to the drawing board to dismantle this recent chaos of debuts and disappointments, channelling a maelstrom of emotion into a remarkable sophomore record that marks a new guise for The Howl & The Hum.

Joining forces with songwriters **Elanor Moss** and **Matthew Herd**, as well as producer **Joseph Futak**, Griffiths drew inspiration from music by the likes of **Big Thief**, **Phoebe Bridgers** and **Randy Newman**. “I wanted to make music that’s quieter but that still holds loud things,” Griffiths says. “There’s an incisiveness and sharpness to the lyrics that cuts through. You don’t need bombast to make someone feel something.”

Travelling from his home in Leeds to Futak's Hackney studio most weekends from April to November in 2023, Griffiths penned his expressive, soul-searching lyrics before setting them to an expansive range of music. The opening title track sets the tone, with Griffiths singing in a forlorn baritone of whether we would change our mistakes if given the chance, before drums and strumming melodies erupt into an explosive chorus that sits somewhere between **Bruce Springsteen's** saxophone-driven euphoria and the dark introspection of **The National**.

As the record continues, the exposing songwriting never falters. On the finger-picked country influences and sweeping strings of "Pale Blue Dot", Griffiths is quietly devastating, admitting that "I just want to be loved/ By everyone all the time," while the thundering guitar riffs of "No One Has To Know" revel in the pleasure that can come from allowing ourselves transgressions. "It's asking what love means when you're not feeling good about yourself," Griffiths explains.

Staring shame directly in the face, Griffiths directly addresses periods of self-destruction that have accompanied the pain of the past few years in the foot-stomping "No Calories In Cocaine", while the menacing electronic tinges and atmospheric melodic of "The Wheel" confront the trauma of relationships breaking apart and how one person always finds it harder to let go than the other.

The album traverses the raw harshness of **Neutral Milk Hotel** as much as the unblinking self-reflection of country pioneers like **John Prine** or **Townes Van Zandt**. Throughout, Griffiths' voice is acrobatic and powerfully emotive, even while singing about the most vulnerable of topics. Effortlessly veering between gravelly introspection to soaring falsetto, it is a unifying counterpoint to his themes of anxiety and dread, reaching an apex on "Echo". Gently building from whispered intimacy to yearning entreaties, here Griffiths touches on the incisive lyricism of Phoebe Bridgers as he sings, "I'm not afraid to die/ I'm afraid of the terms and conditions." "It was the last song to be written and I'm really proud of it," he says. "It's trying to make sense of the story of the band breakup and working out if I've been a good person through it all. It's a question that sticks with you."

Ultimately, *Same Mistake Twice* is a joyous and immensely brave new chapter for The Howl & The Hum, one that will also be taken on the road throughout the UK later this year. Encompassing the free musical range of the open mic nights Griffiths started out in, while turning his lived experience inwards to address the pain that comes through personal growth, it is a full-circle progression. "The lyrics are almost too direct, which is what I wanted," he laughs. "It's finding the beauty in the pain and looking for forgiveness through it all."

In being honest - in singing fiercely of those deathbed songs - Griffiths finds solace in the imperfections that make us all human. Sometimes, we have to make the same mistake twice.