J Mascis

Several Shades of Why

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 It’s all but inconceivable that J Mascis requires an introduction. In the

quarter-century since he founded Dinosaur (Jr.), Mascis has created some of the era’s signature songs, albums and styles. As a skier, golfer, songwriter, skateboarder, record producer and musician, J has few peers. The laconically-based roar of his guitar, drums and vocals have driven a long string of bands–Deep Wound, Dinosaur Jr., Gobblehoof, Velvet Monkeys, the Fog, Witch, Sweet Apple–and he has guested on innumerable sessions. But *Several Shades of Why* is J’s first solo studio record, and it is an album of incredible beauty, performed with a delicacy not always associated with his work.

 Recorded at Amherst Massachusetts’ Bisquiteen Studios, *Several Shades…* is nearly all acoustic and was created with the help of a few friends. Notable amongst them are Kurt Vile, Sophie Trudeau (A Silver Mount Zion), Kurt Fedora (long-time collusionist), Kevin Drew (Broken Social Scene), Ben Bridwell (Band of Horses), Paulo Zappoli (Black Heart Procession), Matt Valentine (The Golden Road), and Suzanne Thorpe (Wounded Knees). Together in small mutable groupings, they conjure up classic sounds ranging from English-tinged folk to drifty, West Coast-style singer/songwriterism. But every track, every note even, bears that distinct Mascis watermark, both in the shape of the tunes and the glorious rasp of the vocals.

 “Megan from Sub Pop has wanted me to do this record for a long time,” J says. “She was very into it when I was playing solo a lot in the early 2000s, around the time of the Fog album [2002’s *Free So Free*]. She always wanted to know when I’d do a solo record. [*Several Shades of Why*] came out of that.

 “There are a couple of songs that are older, but the rest is new this year. And it’s basically all acoustic. There’s some fuzz, but it’s acoustic through fuzz. There’re no drums on it, either. Just one tambourine song, that’s it. It was a specific decision to not have drums. Usually I like to have them. But going drum-less pushes everything in a new direction, and makes it easier to keep things sounding different.

 “The album comes out around the time of South by Southwest, so I guess I’ll play there. It would be cool to have a band, but I don’t know. Some of the songs have a lot of musicians on them. I might start out solo then add people as it goes along. I don’t like playing solo so much. It’s weird. You have to try and keep the show going. If you break a string you have to come up with banter, like Richard Thompson does. He’s the master of the one man show. For me it’s stressful.”

 There is little evidence of stress on *Several Shades of Why*. The title track is a duet with Sophie Trudeau’s violin recalling Nick Drake’s work at its most elegant. “Not Enough” feels like a lost hippie-harmony classic from David Crosby’s *If I Could Only Remember My Name*. “Is It Done” rolls like one of the Grisman/Garcia tunes on *American Beauty*. “Very Nervous and Love” has the same rich vibe as the amazing ruralist side of Terry Reid’s *The River*. And on and on it goes. Ten brilliant tunes that quietly grow and expand until they fill your brain with the purest pleasure.

 What a goddamn great album.

—Byron Coley