

Palehound's new album ***Eye On The Bat*** charts something that divides you into “before” and “after” – the danger of fantasy, of heartbreak, and the pain of growth. How we can surprise ourselves. It's a documentation of illusions shattering, both of yourself and of others. A tangle of raw nerves coming undone amongst swelling, propulsive instrumentation, it's the biggest – and best – Palehound has sounded on record.

From Palehound's critically-acclaimed debut album *Dry Food* (2015) to *A Place I'll Always Go* (2017), and *Black Friday* (2019) and then, *Doomin' Sun* (2021) by **Bachelor** (a collaborative project with **Jay Som's Melina Duterte**), **El Kempner's** songwriting has always been generous and personal, dispatches from a deep inner world. On *Eye On The Bat*, though, we meet Kempner anew: a guttural howl; white-hot and blistering catharsis; a feverish and visceral and painful present.

As Palehound, Kempner's guitar playing – their sinewy and off-kilter riffs – has always been front and center across the project's discography, like smoke unfurling around anxiety-laden lyrics. It's cerebral, trying to make sense of grief in a grocery store or an argument in a parking lot, plumbing the anxious depths of the interiors. Introspection, retrospection, whatever you'd like to call it, has threaded together Kempner's songwriting, the bruising aftermath of trying times, since the very beginning. Here, though, we're trapped in the immediate: witnessing the tiny details that build or break a relationship, and the flood that comes after.

“It's about me, but it's also about me in relation to others,” Kempner says of the album. *“After hiding for so long – staying inside and hiding your life and hiding yourself from the world – I was ready. I think I flipped.”*

Recorded in brief stints across 2022 at **Flying Cloud Recordings** in the Catskills, the space between each session gave Kempner more time to breathe, to revisit the songs after time away. Kempner co-produced *Eye On The Bat* alongside **Sam Owens (Big Thief, Cass McCombs)**, who was also crucial to the process -- lending assistance yet allowing Kempner to take the reins on producing, to call the shots on the session and step into their own as a producer. Kempner also credits multi-instrumentalist **Larz Brogan**, who they refers to as *“their platonic life partner”* and longtime member of Palehound since the Boston DIY days, as a vital part of making the album come together the way it did. They make Kempner feel seen - allow them to be vulnerable, to experiment, to push themselves in the studio. After playing together for so many years, Brogan and Kempner both wanted to push themselves to make a record that sounded less produced, one that simply captured the raw energy of Palehound live. Stand-out track “U Want It U Got It” was almost entirely self-produced by Kempner at home, save for Brogan's drumming, the first time anything of the sort has made it onto a Palehound record.

“In the past, I've taken myself really seriously in the studio, and I've ended up with really serious-sounding records,” Kempner explains. *“This one – it's a break up record. I wanted it to sound raw. I wanted it to sound like I was feeling – very much in control, and out of control, at the same time.”*

Opening track “Good Sex” charts trying to make a relationship work, the desperation to recapture something, in searing detail; before dissolving into “Independence Day,” its chaotic counterpart, where you realize you can't and find yourself breaking someone's heart in the glow of fireworks. “The Clutch” flies by red flags, plunging forward even though it shouldn't, even though it's speeding toward heartbreak; while “My Evil” is about being the heartbreaker, hurting someone you never could have imagined hurting. Accepting that, even if unintentional, we all act as villains in someone else's story.

The poetry is still present – full of aching and shrine-building to minutiae – but it feels genuinely diaristic and authentic. In the past, Kempner admits to hiding behind poetic notions, burying the hurt in metaphors. But here, El's at their most open and vulnerable. *“I was trying too hard to figure out who I am - what kind of musician I want to be, what kind of person I want to be,”* Kempner explains. *“And now I'm just embracing my instinct, and bucking what other people's expectations are. These songs are truly just for me. I was really intentional in processing every detail. For my own sake, frankly.”*

Eye On The Bat is not a hopeful record in content, but it's immediately recognizable as the sort of totem you come out clutching on the other side of profound change. It feels like a promise to yourself – if you made it through *that*, you'll handle whatever comes next.