

In almost every respect, the alexalone that made their poignant Polyvinyl debut, 2021's *ALEXALONEWORLD*, is an altogether different band than the one that made their staggering follow-up, the new *ALEXALONE TECHNICAL RESEARCH*. During that deep pandemic daze, Alex Peterson recorded much of that first record themselves, accreting bass and guitar takes in homespun overdub sessions and collecting parts from friends. Those eight songs shaped a discursive '90s journey, with Peterson moving among touchstones like Yo La Tengo, Hum, and Low, clutching those influences tightly as if to remain afloat amid a high tide of despair.

But by the time Peterson began writing *TECHNICAL RESEARCH*, alexalone seemed to be a stable quintet, a two- and sometimes three-guitar powerhouse with a clearer—and, frankly, more compelling—vision. Surrounded now by the collaborators who had contributed to that debut, Peterson let darkness and heaviness flood the tunes, the guitar tessellations and dynamo drums suddenly invoking Slint, Sonic Youth, and Boris in epics that may last for 13 minutes. They offset that formidable sound, though, not only with a melodic sweetness but also with a lyrical tenderness, Peterson trying to deal with this damaging world rather than simply succumb to it. Imagine looking skyward on a cloudy night and spotting just enough stars to know they're still there: That is *ALEXALONE TECHNICAL RESEARCH*, a five-track album that trumpets the arrival of a mighty but vulnerable new rock band.

For a year or so, this new iteration of alexalone—Peterson, Sam Jordan, Drewsky Hulett, Mari Maurice, and Hannah Read—doubled as a kind of cousin act to Read's Lomelda, sharing members and tours. Just as they finished arranging these new songs for the stage, however, a joint tour was scuttled. Read needed a break from the road, so that well-rehearsed unit began to rupture. Still, Peterson was rightfully enthused about the work they'd built together, like the lumbering-and-surgic "All I Need" and the beautifully aching "Levitate." Why let that effort die?

The band raced into a studio in Silsbee, Texas, capturing four tracks at Lazybones Audio with engineer Tommy Read (Hannah's brother) in a session partially fueled by a tightening sense of extinction. They are all stunners, immersive admixtures of muscle and tune and tone and improvisation from a lineup with little left to lose. Written as a prescient note-to-self about not getting pushed around by other people's whims, "Full Body Learning" rises through concentric Motorik circles to empty into a slash-and-burn riff, alexalone bearing down with all the weight of doom metal before pulling up for air. "I have to accept the things I can't change," Peterson finally sings in the ninth minute, offering up a secular prayer. "Be good to people. Try to communicate." The guitars rage and whine and whisper, unspooling into oblivion in every direction.

And there's the drift of "All I Need," a response to gender dysphoria in the dual battlegrounds of Texas and oneself. At first quiet and brooding, as though Peterson were giving into self-doubt, the song builds toward a breakdown, then plows ahead like a battle hymn, its sharp riff wielded like a weapon. This is an anthem for sublimating existential anxiety into empowerment, all your pals gathered around to join in the charge. Indeed, "Angelmaker" is an extended ode to having *those* kinds of friends, ones that will help you navigate your troubles in close quarters and in real time. At turns wistful, melancholic, and hopeful, its fitful and redemptive 13 minutes suggest just

how much we can accomplish in solidarity. “I’ve got angels in my life,” Peterson sings just before the band crashes down once more, more resolute than ever. “It’ll be alright.”

It is true that, with the end of *TECHNICAL RESEARCH*’s first four songs, comes the cessation of alexalone as a five-piece. These are surviving snapshots of something that no longer exists. But Peterson, Hulett, and Jordan took that ending as the invitation for a new beginning, using the momentum from those recordings to rearrange those tracks as a trio. Jordan began to sing some, with Hulett moving entirely to Bass VI, a six-string bass that enables them to add dimension and depth beyond mere root notes.

In November 2022, that lineup (along with Maurice, two months before she too left to focus on her own music) went to Austin’s First Presbyterian Church to cut *ALEXALONE TECHNICAL RESEARCH*’s capstone, “Head in the Clouds” with engineer Evan Kaspar. They funnel all the strength and sweetness of those first four songs into a brilliant three-minute mantra about committing to one another and to this music. “Try to trust,” Peterson repeats as the light slowly fades, working to move beyond old wounds without forgetting they exist. It’s as if they are looking out over the future of alexalone and recognizing that it is only now taking true shape.