To the wandering soul, the promise of travel, the motion of the road, and necessary transience instils a love of the novel experience and fortifies the restless spirit. But when travel is no longer possible, when ‘the road’ becomes the familiar paths around your town and home, is there the time and space to create a new kind of journey? When else would we go inward, by choice or practice, then when the world shuts down around us and we are left with the thoughts and melodies in our heads?

You’ve heard Scott Hirsch’s work already even if you didn’t know it. He’s been the magic man behind so many records over the last couple decades-as producer, engineer, and multi instrumentalist. He is the ‘other half’, the Yin to Mc Taylor’s Yang in Hiss Golden Messenger and their previous group, The Court and Spark. He helmed the grammy nominated record by legendary folk singer Alice Gerrard. He’s worked with iconic California outsiders like the Mother Hips’ Greg Loicano and Orpheo McCloud. He’s also a master of film sound, doing the mixes on a number of lauded indie releases including Hannah Jayanti’s documentary “Truth or Consequences”, with a score by Bill Frisell. Hirsch is finding himself the nexus point of a burgeoning recording and arts scene in Ojai, California, the small mountain town where he and his family call home now.

I am biased. Scott is not only a great friend, but my favorite and most trusted collaborator. When I was asked to compose the music for Kelly Reichardt’s oneiric Western ‘First Cow’, I knew Scott was the only one that could help me get it right. His sense of aesthetics, technique, trust, and decisiveness is frankly pretty rare to meet in someone. One of the things I have loved most about living in Los Angeles has been the knowledge that if I ever have the budget and the time, I can drive two hours north to Ojai and the cozy confines of Hirsch’s Echo Magic studios, and we always come out with ‘something.’ I see his studio and scene as almost a kind of Muscle Shoals West, at least for those of us inspired by the hazy canyon music of seventies weirdoes.

One of the great gifts of the last few years has been hearing and observing Hirsch evolve and flourish as a solo artist. His songwriting and singing chops are every bit as warm, familiar and eccentric as his longtime collaborator MC Taylor, and his albums, both under the moniker Blue Rider Songs and lately his own name, evoke that kind of ‘tastes just right’ insularity and micro universe  that heads old and new seek out in the catalogues of JJ Cale, Curtis Mayfield, Ry Cooder, Lee Perry  and Harold Budd.

With his latest, “Windless Day”, Hirsch takes that inward journey I touched on. This isn’t a ‘quarantine’ record per se- and as I have discussed with Scott numerous times over the last year, he and his family might have been positioned a little better than some for the Covid shutdown- living in a small bohemian arts town, close to nature and both essentially working from home. But the psychic toll of the last few years, the fatigue, and the need to imagine something different and more hopeful all emerge in the songs on this record.

      ‘You’ve been wasting precious time in the shadows of your worried mind/If you want to ride that endless highway, you’ve got to leave this world for a little while” he intones on ‘Wolves.’ The highway here might be those infinite trails inside your head, and even though this album works brilliantly as a late night road trip companion, I like to imagine it fitting just as well in the static cradle of a living room stereo with the lights turned down just so.

These songs live together like a quirky inviting extended family- the almost old time spiritual incantation of album closer ‘Love is Long’ with the Hi Records tension grooves of ‘Much Too Late’, and two evocative instrumentals “Redstone” and “Drummer of Shiloh” that act as perfect intermissions.

The track ‘Redstone’ in particular is an interesting pivot point for some unexpected connections in the fibers of this album. It refers to the Redstone Rocket, the first American ballistic missile, built and developed in Huntsville, Alabama. The gorgeous marbled orb that adorns the front cover is in fact an atomic bomb explosion photo taken by legendary Harold Edgerton. And those Redstone missiles built in Huntsville, the self styled ‘Rocket City’? Well it’s just an hour from Muscle Shoals and the birthplace of so much iconic homegrown American music. It’s down in those bends of the Tennessee River that Bob Dylan chose to record his first album of ‘born again’ music, “Slow Train Coming” which featured the backing vocals of Carol Dennis. Through a few kismet simple twists of fate, Dennis is one of the backing singers on ‘Windless Day’, along with her god daughter Jade Hendrix. The family affair vibe of ‘Windless Day’ reaches out to include some of Scott’s other trusted Ojai compatriots like multi instrumentalist Jesse Siebenberg and Daniel Wright, along with a few cameo drop ins from the likes of Greg Loicano and MC Taylor.

Scott is used to pulling double duty, hell sometimes triple. I love sitting behind him in the control room as he adds percussions and guitar overdubs while still operating the console with whatever spare appendage he might have. He is one of those cats who just emanates great music and wisdom shaded with world savvy humor. On ‘Windless Day’ he seems totally at home and in himself, analyzing dreams, talking to loved ones, sending melodies into the vast night sky, and all the while searching for the Spirit True.