

WASHED OUT

All in the Family

Words by Laura Studarus | Photo by Steven Dewall

“I was actually obsessed with Nirvana and the whole grunge thing as it was happening in the '90s,” reveals Washed Out’s Ernest Greene. While having tried his hand at rocking as a teenager, the Atlanta-based musician admits that his exploits as a wannabe guitar slinger didn’t exactly prepare him for his live performances today. “Younger me, please, start practicing now!”

Greene’s previous three EPs, released under the name Washed Out, demonstrate his comfort in the studio. He’s already developed a devoted Internet following that includes *Portlandia*’s Fred Armisen, who tapped Greene to write the TV sketch comedy’s theme song. “That was amazing being such a big fan,” says Greene enthusiastically of the show that, on a recent tour, he learned has won him fans in Japan. “It’s been an amazing reception.”

Greene’s connection to the Pacific Northwest has grown stronger with the release of his debut full-length, *Within and*

Without, on Seattle-based imprint Sub Pop. The musician sees the album’s blend of pop, disco, and ambient as a natural fit for the eclectic label. “I tried to have the record be really balanced, where it wasn’t obvious that there was influence one way or the other,” he says of its layers of keys and low-mixed vocals (including Chairlift’s Caroline Polachek on sultry duet, “You and I”). “I could have gone more of a dance music route, or hip-hop, or whatever.”

Regardless of the album’s ambiguity in respect to genre, Greene feels the emotional content of his music is clear. “I think overall the message is very optimistic,” he says of his glowy pop concoction. “At the same time, with this current record I tried to cover all the range of emotions that I was dealing with. There was a period where I was writing it where I wasn’t always optimistic. It was a lot of struggle and anxiety. I guess, more than anything, [it’s about] being real and true without sounding too cliché.”

Many of those negative emotions stemmed from the pressure of creating an

album that would live up to his personal expectations. But Greene warns that specifics of his struggle probably won’t be evident to the casual listener. “I don’t think I’ll ever be able to write songs that are a narrative where I create characters that start one place and end up in another,” he says. “That’s just not in me. It’s always been just writing abstract songs about what I’m personally dealing with.”

Greene credits his wife Blair (who also plays keyboards in his backing band) as a source of inspiration and support throughout the process of recording an album—even if she’s not the best judge of his work. “This go-around, she’s pretty much been around the entire time, the entire process, so I think she might be less objective about it,” he says. “So I think it’s hard for her to step back and see it. But it’s also nice having someone there to bounce ideas with. She’s been really great at that.”

Already, Greene is seeing the potential for future familial collaborations. “Washed Out family band!” he jokes. “That’ll be nice. I won’t have to pay my kids!”



