



Pretty Lights

A Color Map
of the Sun



A COLOR MAP OF THE SUN

Pretty Lights are the moments that catch our eyes. They are the things that make us look twice, think twice or inspire us to create our own version of beauty. They are everywhere and all the time. During the massive musical project that was making this album, I learned of an experiment performed by Isaac Newton in the 1670s. He was conducting tests with light and prisms when he discovered that all color exists within white light. Using a prism to separate a thin beam of sunlight into all the colors of light, he witnessed the entire spectrum of visible color disperse across the room. He described what he saw, quite poetically, as “a color map of the sun”. That phrase resonated with me and eventually took on a broader meaning, a kind of a romantic description of the vibrations by which we perceive the world. Light is vibration, sound is vibration and we are beyond lucky to be able to experience and manipulate both.

With *A Color Map of the Sun* I set out to create an album that was everything I wanted to hear in an album: diversity and consistency, cohesiveness and unpredictability, beauty and sadness and optimism... but mostly, really, I just wanted to make good music. I wanted to manifest my vision of an evolved Pretty Lights style that was fresh and original with a sound that was old, warm and soulful.

In the past I would produce music by fusing live instrumentation and electronic synthesis with sampling old, obscure vinyl. I would use upwards of 25 samples from different records for a single song and through a process of chopping, tuning, stretching and a multitude of other techniques, I would make all of the pieces sound as if they were meant to exist together from the beginning in a completely new and original song.

To make *A Color Map of the Sun* I first created an entire collection of records of my own compositions. It wasn't as simple as recording a bunch of music and pressing it to vinyl though. To truly recreate the sound and feel of old vinyl, it was absolutely crucial to pay the utmost attention to every detail. Everything had to be right; the instruments, the microphones, the mixing board, the tape machine, and especially the studio and the vibe. I was attempting to compose music from so many genres and make the recordings sound like they were from several different time periods. I did this because I wanted to have as many options as possible while digging through the recordings later when producing songs for the actual album. All of the composition and sound design happened on the fly, in the moment, and with the single intention of creating amazing sounding music. I emulated the recording process of small soul record labels from the sixties by recording an entire band in the same room to stereo tape with all analog gear, no multi-tracking and no computers. By putting together different groups of musicians on a daily basis, different bands were formed with the purpose of playing styles from funk, soul and jazz, to folk, rock and classical. I searched out the most bizarre instruments and the most original instrumentalists to capture extremely unique sounds... sometimes with instruments I'd never even heard of, marxophone, koto, nyckelharpa, music boxes, toy piano, trumpet-violin, harmonium and on and on. I searched for vocalists that could take my lyrics and put their own incredible soul and emotion into them. I made beats for some of my favorite rappers in exchange for the ability to chop up the lyrics they wrote. Through all of this, I absolutely fell in love with the sound of analog. I'm not sure I could really tell the difference before this massive experiment but I most definitely learned to. Because of that, there was no way I could use anything but completely analog synthesis for the electronic sounds throughout the entire record. I built a modular synthesizer for this project and taught myself how to use it while on tour. Every electronic sound on the record was created with that modular synth.

After spending a year making vinyl, creating sounds, recording vocals and learning how to use an analog modular synth, I spent the next year crafting and producing songs. I did so in basically the same way I had before this project but I had a very different relationship to all the sounds I was using. I had forgotten about a lot of the music and sounds by the time I got around to producing with them but I always remembered how the sounds were created. Even the smallest pieces had a story and a memory I could look back on. The process was truly inspiring in and of itself. I learned more than I thought possible about music, about people, about myself and mostly about life. I really learned to appreciate slowing down and trying to enjoy every moment for what it is rather than always looking forward to the next thing, the next milestone in life. It's all life and it's all beautiful.

-Derek Vincent Smith





















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A Color Map Of The Sun

Live Studio Sessions from
A Color Map Of The Sun

Color Of My Soul	Reel 15 Break 5
Press Pause	Reel 5 Break 3
Let's Get Busy	Reel 9 Break 6
Around The Block (featuring Talib Kweli)	Reel 11 Break 2
Yellow Bird	Reel 6 Break 4
Go Down Sunshine	Reel 8 Break 2
So Bright (featuring Eligh)	Reel 18 Session 1
Vibe Vendetta	Reel 17 Break 4
Done Wrong	Reel 4 Break 3
Prophet	Reel 12 Break 2
One Day They'll Know	Reel 6 Break 5
Always All Ways	Reel 3 Break 3
My Only Hope	Reel 7 Break 1
Where I'm Trying To Go (Bonus)	
All I've Ever Known (Bonus)	
Sweet Long Life (Bonus)	