

Califone

Villagers



Tracklisting

1. The Habsburg Jaw
2. Eyelash
3. McMansions
4. Villagers
5. Comedy
6. Ox-eye
7. Halloween
8. Skunkish
9. Sweetly

Label

Jealous Butcher Records

Format

CD/LP/Digital

Release Date

May 19, 2023

Web Utilities

Artist

<https://www.califonemusic.com>

<https://www.facebook.com/califone>

<https://twitter.com/CalifoneMusic>

https://www.instagram.com/califone_timrutili

Label

<https://www.jealousbutcher.com>

<https://www.facebook.com/jealousbutcher>

<https://twitter.com/JealousButcher>

<https://www.instagram.com/jealousbutcher>

EPK & Downloads

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With 25 years of **Califone** in his catalog (not to mention a variety of other projects, including alt rock heroes **Red Red Meat**), **Tim Rutili** knows well how to find a moment of awe and bliss even when things are falling apart. The end of the world may not come in a big, unavoidable sign, furious light and impenetrable noise. The end of things might just be slow, mystic, blanketing, entropy steadily fraying everything out at the edges. Instead of a grand explosion, you, me, a flower, a dog, a musty old house, a thread-bare cassette—all revealed as composed of the same particles drifting apart and commingling. The latest from Califone, *villagers* (due May 19, via **Jealous Butcher Records**), feels like sitting on the porch swing and looking out at that entropic sunset.

And now for the group's first record since 2020's *Echo Mine*, he dials into that sweet spot with an immaculate cast of collaborators (including longtime cohorts **Ben Massarella**, **Michael Krassner**, **Rachel Blumberg**, **Max Knouse** and **Brian Deck**) spread across recording sessions in four different cities. The record's nine compositions stretch out just as far, incorporating elements of classic radio pop and electronic experimentation into the mix. And then there are tracks like the chilled and rippling "Eyelash", built out of the bones of an improvised drone, field recordings of rain run through a modular synth, and a tight rhythm section. "I wanted to make it feel like Voodoo-era D'Angelo meets The Long Goodbye-era Robert Altman," Rutili recalls of the track, as much sculpture as song.

As a musician, Rutili has always felt part poet, part score composer, part abstract painter, luring listeners through elusive lyrics, flashes of shadows and images coming together in disarming unity. That strength is redoubled on *villagers*, an album brimming with oscillating and startling turns of phrase—a trait exemplified by album highlight "Ox-Eye". There, over a lolling piano, cobweb electric guitar, and electronic percussion akin to the last few ice cubes rattling around a rocks glass, Rutili examines what it means to get lost while surrounded by modern technology. "Ghosts are only time machines/ They're just as afraid of you as you are," he offers, his low-slung delivery chased not long later by a burst of clarinet, saxophone, and backing vocals courtesy of **Nora O'Connor** and **Finom's Macie Stewart**. "This song is a catfish. Not like the fish. More like a person who pretends to be someone else online in order to possess them," Rutili explains, somehow both cryptic and intimate. "This one can't stop looking at its phone and is addicted to reality TV shows."

It's telling that Rutili refers to his songs as if they were human, even the most abstract thoughts carrying a deep soulfulness. Whether centered on aging goths retaining their identity through year-long spooky decorations ("Halloween") or an imagined conversation with an inbred monarch ("Habsburg Jaw"), Califone excel when bouncing between rough-sketched experimentalism and taut pop grooves. And by trusting the musicians would find their way back to each other in their riffed adventures, Rutili came to a new sense of himself. "I came out of this judging myself a little bit less harshly, trusting myself a tiny bit more," he smiles, confident in his empathy. Nowhere is that more clear than closer "Sweetly", a softly swaying acoustic cloud played live in the room.

"It feels comfortable to combine elements of Captain Beefheart, soft rock from the '70s, and broken digital sounds," Rutili says. "There are words that shouldn't go together and images that are smashed together that maybe shouldn't be, but it feels right."

Throughout *villagers*, the moments of eerie distortion or surprise come as quickly to the fore as they disappear behind themselves, masterful brushstrokes cast in mercuric music. Even as the world stretches into stranger and stranger shapes, Califone continues to reach newfound heights of harmony and unity beyond their already mythic chemistry. *villagers* songs are full of people coming to terms with the gaps between perception and reality, with the very concept of reality, with time slinking constantly towards an unseen cliff—an album where even songs of devotion focus on loving the other's imperfections and broken hearts. "Un-careful footsteps/ At the first blush of a hurricane/ All the cocaine happy endings/ My love remains," Rutili hushes, the quintessential, surreal acoustic pop ballad stretching off into the sunset, omens and all.