

stephen chopek.



Stephen Chopek has always been a bit of a restless soul. But finishing his most recent recordings – the EP series *Things Moving*, *On Their Own*, and the album *Things Moving on Their Own Together* – was a lesson in patience.

The experience of making his previous album had been focused and concentrated. Recorded in five days, just Stephen and an electric guitar, he called it *See Through* – an homage to completing his first LP as a singer and guitarist, but also a nod to the naked transparency of being a songwriter, sharply felt by the seasoned drummer who'd spent most of his musical career up until that point seated behind a drum kit with Charlie Hunter, John Mayer, Jesse Malin, The Alternate Routes, The Everymen, and many others.

In contrast, the songs that would become the two EPs and full-length album he'll release throughout 2015 were recorded over the course of five months and several hundred miles. As Stephen found time between session gigs, tour dates, and a move from Jersey City to Memphis, he would spend a few days here and there in Virginia, recording with Chip Johnson at Alpine Red; then mixing and mastering in Connecticut with Mikhail Pivovarov. The process breathed a bit more, Stephen says, and every song was a work in progress. The time and distance between recording sessions kept his perspective fresh.

"With these songs, I didn't premeditate the finished products at all," he says. "This was a very different experience from the making of my other record, *See Through*. That album was recorded exactly as I had written it. This time around, none of the songs were done until they were finished being recorded. I knew that I wasn't going to complete everything at once, so I surrendered to the process."

When it came to recording drums, Stephen found himself oddly in two worlds: that of the writer, intimately familiar with each song, and the session musician, imagining the rhythm for a new piece for the first time. "Each time I laid down a beat, things started to take shape," he says. "An intro might get rearranged, a verse might get shortened, a chorus might get lengthened, or a solo section might appear where it didn't exist before. Those decisions would plot the course for the other instruments. So things were evolving as every piece was added."

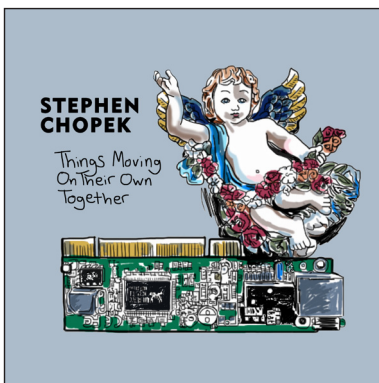
Stephen allowed himself to be more spontaneous and open to the creative process, willing to experiment and let the songs suggest where they wanted to go. "I played all the instruments, so I had the freedom to explore ideas as soon as they presented themselves," he says. "I'd run to the guitar and try something out, then back to the drums to experiment with a different feel, then over to the microphone to change some words or a vocal phrasing. The process was very energetic and liberating."

Surprising to some will be that drums aren't the focus of music created by a drummer. But somewhere in the midst of Stephen's evolution as a musician, he became a student of great songs. His attention shifted away from the individual pieces to an appreciation of the whole.

"My listening habits began to change," he says. "I started to hear music from a non-drummer's perspective, spending time listening to songs with no drums – lots of Billy Bragg and Nick Drake. I became interested in beautiful songs for what they were, not just for the parts that they were made of."

In sequencing this series of releases, Stephen focused on the fit of sonic puzzle pieces rather than lyrical themes – and yet, they bubble up. Where he shies away from the traditional first-person narrative, he dives deep into the pop form. A deceptively simple guitar line grabs your attention ("*Systematic Collapse*"), a chorus floats into your consciousness and follows you ("*Staying*").

The drummer-turned-songwriter has fused folk and punk, in aesthetic and attitude, with masterful pop melodies on the full-length album *Things Moving On Their Own Together*, out September 29.



things moving on their own together.

1. Hurry
2. Systematic Collapse
3. Staying
4. Answers
5. Alright With Me
6. Love is a Negotiation
7. Falling Apart Again
8. Back Track
9. Action Speaks
10. Nothing Happens
11. Only Here
12. Forget About Familiar
13. Slower You Go
14. Rant

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