



# YANN TIERSEN

## NEW ALBUM, 'ALL'

*All*, the title of **Yann Tiersen**'s tenth studio album, translates as 'others' in Breton, the language spoken on the island of Eusa (Ushant in English and Ouessant in French), where the musician has lived for the past 15 years and where he's recorded since 1996. *"I like the title's double meaning, this holistic view towards things,"* Tiersen explains. *"That's what this album is."*

He's SPEAKING from his newly-constructed studio on the island, The Eskal, where most of *All* was created using field recordings from Devon, Germany's decommissioned Tempelhof Airport, California and Ushant itself. Tiersen plays every instrument on this record, from the elegantly flowing violin on 'Usal Road' to the resonant and earthy piano on 'Prad' (translated as 'meadow'). For the album's vocals, at times delivered in tender spoken word and at others sung with a colossal choral reach for the sublime, he enlisted vocalists, including Anna Von Hausswolff, who sings in Swedish on 'Koad', and Ólavur Jákupsson who sings in Faroese on 'Erc'h'. *"I think languages are the keys to our understanding of the world, and of our natural surroundings,"* Tiersen says. *"Everything is hidden in language."*

This is central to *All*, with the Breton tongue woven into the album's fabric. The language itself is closer to Welsh and Cornish than French or English. *"I think there's 200,000 speakers but it's quite difficult to preserve,"* he says. *"We're a bit behind in following the Welsh..."* Faroese, meanwhile, a language that has recently made a resurgence against the Danish that previously held supremacy on the Faroe Islands, appears on the album thanks to Jákupsson, who wrote alongside his brother Torfinurr. They and Tiersen first worked together in 2008 at Trans Musicales in Rennes, and have spent the years since on frequent tours in each other's bands. *"I have a strong connection to The Faroes,"* says Tiersen.

Von Hausswolff's particularly stirring contribution, meanwhile, reflects both Tiersen's love of the Scandinavian - *"they always speak four or five languages!"* - and his personal affinity with her body of work. *"I really like what she does with her albums, I have a strange leaning towards black metal at times! There's this strange connection somewhere, even if we're doing completely different music. I guess I can feel some connection to nature - that is really important to me - in what she's doing."*

It is that connection to nature that is fundamental to *All*, and is a recurring theme throughout much of Tiersen's work, including the soundtrack to 'Amélie', the music that first brought the composer widespread acclaim, which might be surprising to those who associate it more with the city, Paris in particular. *"I didn't write specifically for the movie,"* he says, pointing out that the music was taken from his first three albums and had already been recorded without the film in mind. *"All the tracks were about nature, a lot of them were about Ushant."*

*"When I was young I was attracted by big cities, I wanted to work in Berlin or in Paris. I did my third album [Le Phare] here in Ushant and it was a turning point,"* he continues. *"At that time it was the 100th anniversary of the sinking of [British steam ship] The Drummond Castle. The ship sank here in Ushant and 242 people died. They were buried here and on another small island nearby, Molène. One of the dead people was a really young girl and I became obsessed with her. When I was working on my third album I could feel her presence in the landscape, in the rocks. Strangely that material got used on 'Amélie', which is as far away as you can get from what that film is about!"*



Ushant's rugged beauty continues to be Tiersen's chief inspiration. His last album, *EUSA*, made extensive use of field recordings taken from specific locations there, and the same is true of *All*. Behind the bewitching musicianship, the island's birdsong can often be heard. On 'Erc'h' the birdsong was recorded in the middle of the night when a flock of lapwings, rarely seen on Ushant and never in huge numbers, were sheltering during the first snowfall on the island in 15 years. Crucially, however, Tiersen's scope on this record also stretches far beyond his home. Before this album he spent time at Schumacher College in Devon, one of the world's leading institutions for the study of ecology, nestled amidst one of England's few redwood forests. *"It is the epicentre of what the future has to offer if we choose the right path,"* he says. *"It's like a concentration of hope in a small place, from everywhere in the world there are young people going to Schumacher College to study."* He made field recordings in the forest, and Tiersen's love for the site rivals even that of his adoration for Ushant. One of Schumacher's academics, Dr Stephan Harding, gave a lecture on deep ecology as the support for Tiersen's 2017 show at the Royal Albert Hall in London.

Further recordings were made at Tempelhof in Berlin, the only urban area recorded for the album, at the decommissioned airport that has since been reclaimed by nature in symbolic fashion, as well as in California, a place of personal significance for the musician. *"Four years ago I was chased by a mountain lion while I was cycling in the wilderness,"* he remembers. *"It was a matter of life and death, it changed the way I see the world and my connection to nature. I decided to go back to the exact same place, and to record there. There's a sense and a meaning to that location too."*

*All's* embrace of nature does not shy away from the primal; it does not sugarcoat. On 'Aon', which translates as 'fear', eerie and foreboding clatters of percussion and otherworldly loops of strings and chimes are joined by the distant howls of a pack of coyotes, recorded while Tiersen sat alone with his son, stranded in the wilderness beyond the borders of San Francisco. *"We were robbed in San Francisco, I lost my laptop, my passport, my hard drive, my visa, everything,"* he recalls. *"The place we were renting was in the middle of nowhere with no mobile phone coverage and my wife had to drive off for hours to call Ushant and to try and recover my work. I was alone in this house in the middle of the desert with my son, with no way to phone my wife and check that she was OK. There were these coyotes outside howling, and this certain kind of fear, a pure fear, that something bad might happen to my wife, but the coyotes became something comforting."*

Despite its focus on the richness of the natural world, this album is not detached from the human, and Tiersen takes care to embrace elements of the personal. 'Pell' was born from a song that he and his wife Emilie, who also contributed vocals to the album, sang for their son. *"We wanted to explain this island to him, living in this great community with all this nature. 'Pell' means 'far' and people might say we're disconnected from civilisation but I think it's the opposite. When you're submerged in technology and social media, that's when you're disconnected. We are far, but it means we are close."*

For all the vivid landscapes that form a part of Tiersen's new album, it is still Ushant that casts the most unshakable presence over the record. As he speaks, Tiersen has an anxious eye on the roof of his brand new studio, The Eskal; it's raining heavily and he's worried that even a drop might get through and disturb his paradise. In addition to its primary function as a studio, both private and commercial, it also incorporates a 200-capacity venue, a separate room full of modular synthesisers purely for electronic music, and a community centre offering workshops to school children and the local islanders.

*"It's a dream come true, actually. I always wanted to have my own studio here,"* he beams. *"I think being in a special place when you're recording can be very important to a band. I think*



*studios like this are something really special, something that we don't have that much anymore. I wanted to have this kind of dinosaur, a big studio in an odd place. I want to offer time and space, to bands and to people I like, the opportunity to take your time in a way that isn't really possible for anyone except the really big bands anymore."*

The studio's impact on *All* is significant, thanks in part to the presence of producer Gareth Jones behind its gigantic mixing desk at the album's final stages. *"I had a few extra takes to do after the recording was complete, and Gareth came in just to help. I always used to wonder, 'what's the point in a producer?' I'd always just do that myself, but Gareth had a bit of distance and became really important. He had lots of ideas, and for the first time I could mix for a whole month. We could experiment, and actually spend time on music and recording."*

In many ways The Eskal is a physical manifestation of deep, lasting roots that Tiersen has long since set down on the island of Ushant, the final piece of a project long in the making, and *All* bears a sense of wonder at the possibilities. *"I can't wait to just carry on working here, to collaborate and experiment," he says. "Living on a small island makes this sort of stuff possible, a place where you can do everything. We've already started doing workshops with the local schoolchildren and they've done performances. I'm definitely going to start my tour here too," he grins. "The place isn't even open yet!"*

Listen to 'Tempelhof': <https://youtu.be/mTlykINcn80>

Listen to 'Koad': [https://youtu.be/HipVtnDV\\_zl](https://youtu.be/HipVtnDV_zl)

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