

Sun Kil Moon

Common as Light and Love Are Red Valleys of Blood

Songwriter Mark Kozelek's 130-minute epic is indeed daring and self-reflective, but too often he prides long stretches of bitter humor and anger over the subtlety of his previous work.

In retrospect, Sun Kil Moon's 2014 milestone Benji was less of a breakthrough than a breakdown just before Mark Kozelek became definitively mean and petty. Even with Benji's life-flashing-before-your-eyes earnestness (the repentance! the forgiveness! the laughs! the tears!), its lessons seem to have gone unabsorbed. Common as Light and Love Are Red Valleys of Blood comes in at 130 minutes. This is after two Sun Kil Moon albums—2015's Universal Themes, 2016's Jesu/Sun Kil Moon—that left no one thinking, "I wish these were twice as long." Kozelek knows that Common as Light isn't an easy sell. In a particularly forgettable number called "Seventies TV Show Theme Song," he admits, "All I know is this reminds me of the theme to 'Barney Miller'/It wasn't intentional, just adding a song on the record for filler." It's not the only lyric on here that simply describes what the music sounds like, or dares you to stop listening. These are by-and-large the most confrontational songs Kozelek has ever put out, but strangely they're also some of the more exciting ones he's written since developing his post-Benji spoken word style.

While recent records have found Kozelek lambasting his vinyl-collecting fans and putting the fear of God in the minds of bloggers who miss his Red House Painters days, here Kozelek directs his fury more broadly. He makes three things absolutely clear: he hates iPhones, he hates Twitter, and he hates the twentysomethings who read Twitter on their iPhones. If there's a theme to this record (the way that, you know, acting in a Paolo Sorrentino film was the theme of the previous Sun Kil Moon LP), it's that the world is fucked, man, so get off your phone and respect your elders (especially Mark Kozelek). Many songs attempt to reflect Kozelek's anger following mass shootings to varying degrees of profundity. The awkwardly chipper music in "Bastille Day" creates an effect not dissimilar to Smash Mouth playing the intro to "All Star" on loop while their singer threatens the audience. This mode, as one might imagine, doesn't add up to a particularly moving collection of songs.

It does, however, make for some surprisingly great moments. In "Philadelphia Cop," which slowly evolves into a eulogy for David Bowie, Kozelek lands a bitter jab: "If you're a man in charge claiming you're a staunch feminist, then give a woman your job or shut the fuck up, Queen Bitch." In the well-meaning "Lone Star," he helps save a suicidal woman's life and tries to convince North Carolina officials to amend their transphobic bathroom laws. The slow, ominous "Sarah Lawrence College Song" finds him performing a small gig for a group of college students, which obviously leads to him berating them for how much their parents pay for tuition. He replies, "That's what Walmart pays me to use my music in commercials," but quickly changes his tone: "Maybe I can go to their school one day too, 'cause they all seem like really nice people."

Source: <https://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/22924-common-as-light-and-love-are-red-valleys-of-blood/>