

David Bazan

David Bazan was, for many years, the songwriter and driving force behind the acclaimed indie band Pedro the Lion, building a dedicated following and selling a couple hundred-thousand albums based in large part on his extraordinary melodic sense and erudite, theologically-themed songs. After a decade helming the project, he found himself embroiled in a major personal philosophical and spiritual cataclysm, wrapped in a growing drinking problem. Bazan got to work exorcizing both his demons and angels, ditching the Pedro moniker in favor of his given name and producing two incredible pieces of work in the Fewer Moving Parts EP and the 2009 full-length *Curse Your Branches* (Barsuk).

Alongside his tremendous line-by-line lyrical deftness, Bazan's greatest strength has always been his ability – a skill that runs deep in the best writers and other observers of humankind – to distill complex ideas to their essence, to connect us to his ruminations on Big Issues with an economy of language, and to communicate his conclusions (or lack thereof) with concise elegance that never loses its general human resonance.

Branches is considered by many to be a legitimate masterpiece. Charting Bazan's increasingly skeptical struggle with the precepts of the evangelical Christian world in which he was raised, the album covers some pretty serious ground. NPR called it “an album of great music and great humanity” – and we called it a masterwork by a modern American poet at the height of his powers.

While *Branches* documents an intensely personal and complex struggle, Bazan's new album *Strange Negotiations* focuses his energies toward the external, centering on his disappointment in the current state of accelerating American and global social fragmentation.

Negotiations is about delusion – or, rather, about trying to avoid the self-delusion that paves the way toward participation in mass delusion, and the deep impulse to dismiss those in ones life that subscribe to mass delusion. It's about the troubles that come from being a member of an insane culture; it's about the conflict between our love for humanity and the repulsion we all are apt to feel about so many of our fellow humans. About the frustration that comes from realizing that refusing to participate in the delusion, while not dismissing the deluded, is the only way forward.

Musically, most of *Strange Negotiations* sounds like a great rock band playing songs they're beyond intimate with – and Bazan is audibly excited by the opportunity to play with great musicians who can match his spirited vocal delivery and fiery-but-loose lyricism. Drawing inspiration from a broad group of musical heroes ranging from Fugazi to Tom Petty, the grooves sit in the pocket, the tempos are up, and, for lack of a better word, the music swings. It's the first full length he's recorded with a band – the same band with which he toured relentlessly in support of *Curse Your Branches* – and in spite of the dire messages the album delivers, the joy that he, Andy Fitts (bass), and Alex Westcoat (drums) take in playing these songs is beautiful.