

# Oh Wonder bring about their new sense of perspective on 'No One Else Can Wear Your Crown'

By **Murjani Rawls** - Feb 7, 2020



*No One Else Can Wear Your Crown*, the third album from Oh Wonder is a shared celebration of two people who have grown individually and together as a unit. The duo comprised of Anthony West and Josephine Vander Gucht experienced the pinnacle of their sophomore album, *Ultralife*, which saw the world tour venture into 34 different countries. As beautiful as it was adventurous, the album saw the fruition of much-deserved success and recognition for

In the non-stop motion of the music business, sometimes you have to quiet the noise and find yourself. After all, you have to live a life in order to draw art from it. West and Vander Gucht took some time off for a year and enjoyed the normal pleasures of life. Within that time, they grew together, rekindled relationships with friends and family, and also found out a lot about themselves individually. Within that process came their third album which was recorded at their home studio. You can only make an album as musically and emotionally rich as this when you take a step back from everything. These ten songs show that sometimes, the best sense of home isn't in the places you go, but right next to you all along.

I spoke to Oh Wonder about what means the most to them now, the making of their new album, and where their new sense of strength and resolve comes from.

**It's 2017 and you both released your sophomore album, *Ultralife*. You experienced well-deserved success which included a massive tour. At some point, the noise stops and it's time to take a break in an industry that doesn't have many. How did you decompress from the *Ultralife* cycle and eventually get back into the mode of writing *No One Else Can Wear Your Crown*?**

Josephine: We almost like nested. You know when people have kids and they nest; we just did that for ourselves. We bought a house. We got a dog and we developed some semblance of a routine after a long time touring. We'd wake up and have to walk the dog and make breakfast. We just hadn't done those really normal rituals for two years. We had been eating takeout and living on a bus, you know?

I think we just went real hard trying to be normal and then slowly introduce the concept in writing. It was just so joyful because we hadn't been creative in so long. For example, I had like therapy for a year, which was so awesome. I've never really had it before. I took the time and the headspace to unpack and learn about myself a little bit more. I think that's where a lot of the songs on this album have come from. It's kind of like prodding ourselves and going "how do you actually feel?" This album is a result of having that decompression and to progress internally. Not just in our careers.

**The album opens up with 'Dust' and the first lyrics we get to hear at "When people try to get you down/Remember that I'm here for you." You also make a cool play on the from ashes to ashes, dust to dust saying. The album cover is of you two with each other heads on one another's**

shoulder in this beautiful, bright backdrop. With everything that's happened, how has it both everything changed you both individually and together? With these collections of songs, it sounds like you both have come back a lot stronger?

Anthony: We feel a lot more united. I think going shared trauma, whether it's good or bad, is easier as long as understand each other. You have someone who understands your life and how you view the world. All that time learning things made us closer.

Josephine: I think with strength comes from vulnerability. I think that's like vulnerability is the biggest piece of power at all, but you can't find it until you're actually really strong. I think that is what has come out in our relationship and also ourselves, individually. like where we're now. With everything, there's space to be vulnerable.

'Hallelujah' is a special song because I feel it puts a nice exclamation point on the Ultralife era. It's not only a celebration for Oh Wonder as a band, but also whoever is going after a dream and been told no. Keep pressing and keep fighting for something you love. Did you both ever foresee this success starting out and how do you feel about the song now upon releasing your third album?

Yeah, it does feel great. 'Hallelujah' is almost a song that we wrote entirely for ourselves is almost. It's almost like an acknowledgment of the perseverance and determination that we've achieved and pursued over the last I don't know, like 15 years. We both wanted to do this since we were teenagers. We've come up against so many blocks and I don't think neither of us ever thought it would turn into this. Now that it has, it's almost like anything is possible. You can't even dream this stuff. It's like beyond reality. It's insane.

'Hallelujah' is us recognizing that and we do hope that it encourages somebody else to kind aim beyond their means and wildest dreams. We just didn't give up on ourselves. Hopefully, it encourages other people to do the same.

I've always admired how descriptive Oh Wonder's lyrics are. It's like you can visualize the moment that's described in the song. "Better Now" is based on a friend who is hospitalized and you guys have given well wishes. With what comes with being in a band touring, it tends to take you away from everything that you love. Whether it be friends, family, etc. Have you both had a

**chance to reconnect with people you care about that since you've been home and writing this new album?**

Anthony: We definitely both made a huge concept this year to check in family and be part of friendship groups again. It's really hard to just be aware of who you are as a member of someone's Whatsapp group. You want to be there for your friends. You want to just be able to have proper conversations with them.

Also, to figure out what kind of friends you are and what kind of people they are. We haven't done that for such a long time. So, a lot of our friendships they kind of stagnated for a while. We've had the chance to reconnect and redevelop our relationships which have been great. Saw family a lot more. The older you get as well, your values shift. Being in a band is great, but it's not the best thing about life. It's just one aspect.

**Valentine's Day is coming up next Friday and there's a song on the album called "In and Out of Love". It's the purest personification on how love can feel between two people. It starts with piano and harmonies, it goes into the orchestral arrangements, then you bring it back to you two as the song began. It's like a metaphor that when all the noise stops, you'll both have each other in the end. How did that song come about because I feel like that's a very personal song that happens to you both?**

Josephine: We wrote it just one night in our living room at the piano. We were trying to think of a love song, but approaching it from a different angle of how Anthony and I feel about each other. Even we've never met, I still have this overarching feeling that I'd date loads of people, and every single time I'd just think, "this isn't right." This isn't the thing I'm waiting for. This isn't the person I'm supposed to be with. Maybe I'd never meet him. but I'd always be waiting for him on some sort of level.

We wrote that song and it was one of the few that we were like we did that just came out in five minutes. We just looked at each other and thought, "wow, that's a really beautiful sentiment. Let's go record it." The vocal that you hear on that song, for example, we recorded that in five minutes after we finished writing it. Then, we laid down a piano demo real quick. Then, I just jumped in the booth and that is literally the demo vocal. Just one take and that was it.

We tried to record it so many times and failed to just capture that emotion that was clearly just so warm and so present after we've written it. It's a really special song for us. The music video basically the story of how we met and got together. there are loads of very intimate diary entries.

**A lot of those sentiments mold into 'Nebraska.' In the song, you mention all these places that you've gone and seen. However, even the most grandiose of them doesn't amount to the love you have for that one person. That's a very powerful image to invoke.**

Anthony: Yeah, definitely. I think it goes into what I was saying earlier about friends and family. We get the opportunity to do all these things and travel to all these crazy places. Have these experiences that people dream of or put on postcards. What we realized is all the special stuff is back home. All the stuff there is what makes you who you really are.

Josephine: I wanted to say that we've never been to Nebraska and Anthony has never been to Rome. Haha!

**When I listened to the album in its entirety, I feel like it's definitely a step forward from a musical perspective. You both play with a lot of layers and arrangements., There are even some saxophone arrangements on "How It Goes." What did you want to do on this album that was different from your two previous ones?**

Josephine: It was writing 'Dust' and producing that up with some vocals that we went, "hey, this lush sound is really cool." I think that set a precedent for feeling really musical. We knew that we wanted strings on this album because recording strings is just like Christmas. It's the best thing ever. It's just so joyous. So, we tried to use strings in a really interesting way. Something like 'Drunk On You,' we wanted something really flashy and harsh sounding. 'Hallelujah' is kind of a mixture of everything. I think we just felt like we could be a little bit more experimental and ambitious. Just with the arrangements and the lushness of the sounds.

**In speaking about the single, "Happy," the video is a hilarious take on those behind the music documentaries. It looks like you both had a lot of fun as well. With 'Happy" and I feel like healing through past lessons is a theme that is constant in these songs. You wish you didn't go through certain things, but you glad you got through them. "I won't let my demons bring me down," you say. How did the process of reconfiguration and making this music strengthen your resolve?**

Josephine: I think those experiences have always been there and are there for everyone. I think everybody has tough days, months, or years even. I think a song like 'How it goes' catches that sentiment perfectly. Some days, you wake up and you feel brilliant. Then the next day you wake up and you're like, "I'm in the biggest black hole of despair." I think we've always felt those feelings just like everybody. The difference now is that when you recognize them, firstly. Then, you accept them as being part of life. I think that's where you find strength.

That's taken me this year to learn. I think before with any nightmare or meltdowns that we were having in our personal life or on tour or being in a band or you know, all that stuff. Then when you don't really see it for what it is, it feels like a weakness. It feels like something you should be ashamed of or something that you should hide. I've realized that recognizing that it's normal. It's okay not to be okay. Being able to write so honestly and vulnerably about it, I feel so much stronger, just within myself.

As a band, I feel like Anthony and I both have this sort of resilience. I feel like what this album feels like. It's us saying, "this is what we got. This is what we're going to give you and hope you like it." It's like anything's a bonus because we're at peace with everything.

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