

GREAT LAKE SWIMMERS
SHORT album BIO 2023

Doubt, followed by discovery. Demos that ended up as finished tracks. New beginnings, rear-view reflections, and ruminations on the fluidity of time: *Uncertain Country* captures these feelings and so much more.

This celebration, 11-songs long, follows a prolonged period of collective anxiety. Though recorded in different locales—and with a variety of musicians—a theme of questioning runs throughout. Even before the world turned upside down, singer-songwriter Tony Dekker felt mired in uncertainty: from the climate crisis and the ever-changing political landscape to deep shifts within the music industry. The “uncertain country” Dekker chose as the album’s theme is not a specific place. Rather, it’s a territory we, as humans, inhabit in the 21st century — a world that, more often than not, is confusing, unfamiliar and unsettling.

The long journey from there to here started more than three years ago, when Dekker took a 10-day trip to one of his favorite places: the north shore of Lake Superior. A pair of friends and collaborators: Adam CK Vollick (who filmed the experience) and Joe Lapinski (who co-produced *Uncertain Country*) joined him. On this immersive trip, the songwriter soaked in the beauty of the landscapes and learned the stories of the people who have inhabited them since time immemorial.

The two songs that open *Uncertain Country*, the title track and “When The Storm Has Passed,” were recorded at the Oddfellows Temple Hall in St. Catharines, Ontario in September 2020. These jubilant sessions, following five months of unease, were a much-needed release for Dekker and his band. Both songs capture the album’s themes of the elasticity of time and processing change.

Making this joyful noise together again set a tone—and direction—for the record. The music morphed from hushed and folky to a more comforting, curated listening experience, acting as a kind of salve. One hears echoes of some of Dekker’s early 1990s influences: propeller-pop and indie lo-fi bands like Teenage Fanclub, Galaxie 500, and Buffalo Tom.

The rest of the songs on *Uncertain Country* were recorded in other acoustically distinctive locations close to Dekker’s home in the Niagara Region. Locales included the Silver Spire United Church in downtown St. Catharines, Ontario and a pair of buildings in Ball’s Falls Conservation Area in the village of Jordan Station: an old chapel that featured a pump organ and a historic barn on the same property.

Long-time Great Lake Swimmers member, multi-instrumentalist Bret Higgins is featured on many of the songs, as is keyboardist Kelsey McNulty. Guests include newcomers and old friends: the group Minuscule, an all-woman identifying choir based in the Niagara Region, led by choral arranger Laurel Minnes, and JUNO Award-winner Serena Ryder, who sings on a pair of songs: “I Tried to Reach You” and “Swimming Like Flying.”

“Moonlight, Stay Above” epitomizes what Great Lake Swimmers represents. The 10-voice strong choir lifts the lonely-sounding and wistful song up. As with that addition, the band on each album is fluid and always evolving. It always starts and ends with Dekker, but the songs themselves suggest what players and instrumentation might fit best with each new recording and live touring band.

Twenty years since the first self-titled release, *Uncertain Country* shows a songwriter at the top of his craft with so much more to say. In a time of uncertainty, one thing is certain: the Great Lake Swimmers’ first collection of new songs in five years is worth the wait.