

# KKKMO: ARE YOU LAND OR WATER

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The Barbarossa Cave is located in the Kyffhäuser region of Germany, and takes its name from a local legend. According to such lore, Frederick Barbarossa – former German monarch and Roman Emperor of the twelfth century – slumbers within these caverns in a palace beneath the Kyffhäuser hills, his beard growing in circles around the table at which he rests, until either he reigns once more over a unified Germany, or the end of the world; whichever arrives first.

“I was and still am obsessed with caves,” relates Alexander Kloster-Jensen (Alex K), main source of the creative vision behind Norway’s enigmatic Kitchie Kitchie Ki Me O (KKKMO), who was inspired by a visit to this mythic location during the cathartic period that led to their new and long-awaited album *Are You Land or Water* on House of Mythology. “The beautiful rivers of water flowing inside and through caves. There are sleeping national myths all across Europe waiting to be explored and exploited and the Barbarossa myth is one of them.”

Kitchie Kitchie Ki Me O has bloodlines in the much-heralded Madrugada, whose albums *Industrial Silence* and *Grit* remain pivotal statements in Norwegian alternative rock, sculpting brooding and emotionally charged anthems as dramatic as they were captivating. Robert Burås – the band’s main songwriter – initially broke off to pursue a more garage-rock-oriented direction with My Midnight Creeps. Yet after his sad passing in 2007, Kitchie Kitchie Ki Me O evolved from said band, taking ingredients from Dr. John the (Nite) Tripper-style voodoo and Mali-blues (Ali Farka Touré, Tinariwen) to forge the idiosyncratic rock-sound captured on their 2011 self-titled debut for EMI, which met with both considerable critical acclaim and sold-out shows for the band in their homeland.

*Are You Land or Water* arrives at the end of a tumultuous period for Kitchie Kitchie Ki Me O following this debut, one in

which they experienced both their studio being demolished and a takeover of their previous label, and in which Alex nearly quit music altogether. “Music didn’t mean anything to me anymore,” he reflects. “I started to escape on my self-built bike, cycling into the woods around Oslo and doing long rides to other cities, discovering the satisfaction of being alone and in motion through the landscape. Just fast enough and far enough to discover real adventure.” However, it wasn’t long before he was coaxed back into action, initially with studio-based jams with Bez Farazollahi and frequent Ulver collaborator Anders Møller. “It was relaxed and free floating without any meaning and purpose,” notes Alex. “It reminded me of cycling ... just getting from A to B”.

What eventually resulted inspired by not only the likes of Earth, Grinderman, Talk Talk and Gato Barbieri yet existing firmly in its own melancholic headspace, is a record very different from the band’s debut. Nocturnal rock songs like the expansive ‘Saleph’ and ‘Going Forth by Day’ – inspired by the same-named art exhibition by Bill Viola (Deutsche Guggenheim Berlin, 2002) – interweave with moments of spectral ambience such as the beautifully brooding ‘Europa’, creating a distinctly cinematic vision – richly diverse without losing the primal charge that’s guided the band since their inception.

Thus, somewhere from the anhydrite layers of the Barbarossa cave – whose location ended up titling two tracks on the album – arrived both a mythic intensity and a sense of tranquillity that have guided Alex and KKKMO through tribulations aplenty to discover new sonic landscapes to explore: “I wanted to design an experience that was warm and non-intrusive this time around. I have always been more interested in sounds and texture than making hit-songs,” reflects Alex. “*Are You Land or Water* is about tension, and describes the states of passive and active. You can not be the two at the same time, but the two states are equally important.”

– Jimmy Martin



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