

David Wax Museum || *You Must Change Your Life*

In the presence of the strange digital drone of hospital machines, David Wax's thoughts turned to 13 songs and the changes they give voice to.

After suddenly and inexplicably collapsing, Wax—half of David Wax Museum alongside wife and bandmate Suz Slezak—was headed for a heart catheterization in his hometown of Columbia, Missouri, his doctors suspecting a heart attack. At a moment with more questions than answers, he hurriedly signed his name to a waiver—and was struck by a revelation.

“Lying there on that stretcher the thing that kept running through my mind was: at least we made *You Must Change Your Life*,” Wax recalls. “Whatever else happened, I felt at peace because this record exists.”

The album, out May 5 on Nine Mile Records, is an openhearted manifesto – a collection that embodies, then transcends bedrock elements of the band's 15-year recording career.

For Wax, music has guided every step he holds sacred; he's followed its palpable power, abiding by its requisite unpredictability. After graduating at the top of his class at Harvard, he wandered off an academic path to southern Mexico, finding what he calls “a clear before/after moment in my life.” There, he studied folk music “at the feet of the masters” and internalized structures and rhythms that continue to drive the band today. He and Slezak fell in love on their first national tour, setting in motion a future full of vivid waking dreams. Together (now with their two children in tow) they've logged 1,500 shows in every corner of the globe. From the back of a pick-up truck in Nome, Alaska at a solstice parade, to a surreal moment in a tent filled with a thousand Czechs hollering along to their iconic song “Harder Before It Gets Easier,” these dreams continue to unfold for Wax and Slezak.

Their latest effort encapsulates this wildly winding spirit and delivers the past-, present- and future-tense promises Wax and Slezak consider their shared purpose as musicians. To borrow lyrics from early highlight “Luanne,” the duo's life—just like the album—is a *shape-shifter*, *fate-twister*, *truth-sifter*, *dream-drifter*, *seam-ripper*.

In this way, the album is fit for a world tilted off its axis, colored by a collective resistance to old norms. Wax and Slezak give listeners permission to answer the whispers around and within them—*Be patient / Don't tell me that you're unworthy*—affirming and exhorting the pursuit of new ways of living.

During this season of oddly borrowed time, Slezak crafted her NPR-praised solo debut, *Our Wings May Be Featherless*, and initiated what she calls a “rebalancing” of her own creativity. The result—her power—is undiluted. On *You Must Change Your Life*, Slezak is a choir, a conscience, an instrumental trailblazer. And when she takes the lead on “Go Break Some Hearts,” she delivers a dazzling, dreamy innocence, evoking a kinder, gentler likeness of David Lynch's iconic Twin Peaks soundtrack.

David Wax Museum blends the ancient and ever-relevant rhythms of traditional Mexican music with amber pop hues, their unabashed rock riffs emanating an air of AM radio circa 1975, all tethered together by seductive harmonies. It's a seamless tapestry of boundless curiosity, an artful display of what Wax frames as "the lines blurring and dissolving between musical cultures and eras." As it humbly beckons listeners to fulfill its title, *You Must Change Your Life* sounds out a thousand minor- and major-key ways one can do just that.

Producer Dan Molad (of Lucius, Coco, JD McPherson) brings a particular brilliance to David Wax Museum's makeshift orchestra, an array of instruments bewildering on paper but perfectly intuitive to the ears. The album features everything from electric guitar and bass clarinet duets to the large-bodied Mexican huapanguera; tubular bells à la *Pet Sounds* to Jagger-esque heavy breathing; fiddles and marimbas adventuring through effects; and a saxophone "pitch-shifted several octaves into a helium state of excitement," as Wax puts it. He credits Molad's instinct with making the songs "3-D," each tune inching toward pop glory.

You Must Change Your Life refracts the light of a band whose vibrancy has been globally recognized by the highest tier of tastemakers. Since their early breakout as a buzz band at the revered Newport Folk Festival, Wax and Slezak have transmitted their kinetic energy in platforms including *CBS This Morning: Saturday, Tiny Desk Concert*, and NPR's *World Cafe*. They have soundtracked love stories on and off screens, from the Netflix #1 show *Firefly Lane* to the wedding of US Secretary of Transportation, Pete Buttigieg.

Throughout *You Must Change Your Life*, Wax and Slezak convey how a single response to the heart's cry—returning a stolen glance, ripping off a bandage, stepping out in faith—can make our world over. Pain and peace attend every shift. After all, *Changing your life ain't like changing clothes*, Wax sings on "Your Heart's a Pinata." The band has held tightly to this truth, attending to Wax's ongoing health journey and reshaping their career with intention. The album boldly testifies: Your life will change with deliberation, but also in the mere act of living.

The album is a celebration and an invocation, pure and infallible: *It's never too late. What are you waiting for? You must change your life.*