

There is a fundamental principle to all things, building blocks and equations to rely on that build out the bones of a world. Elise Okusami, the creative vision known to hearts and minds as **Oceanator**, has theories on her own trusted framework: “In the literal sense, all my songs are about apocalypse and love.” The evidence of this lives in the work she has revealed to date; her 2020 debut album *Things I Never Said* and 2022’s follow-up *Nothing’s Ever Fine*. These are collections rife with songs sung to these two ideas; apocalyptic terror and desperate love holding strong in the face of unimaginable hardship. “I think that most of the events in your life that are important can be put into either or both of those categories,” she says, “with *Things I Never Said* and then *Nothing’s Ever Fine*, *Everything is Love and Death* feels like a summation of those ideas.”

This idea became the title of her new record: ***Everything is Love and Death***, a name that came to Okusami as if it were premonition and reminder of the tether between all things. Years on the road and recorded to wax have proven that Oceanator deftly commands the elements of infectious rhythms, constructing songs built around hook-laden melodies that inspire movement in even the sturdiest of feet. Okusami’s edge for writing indelible classics has become sharpened on stone over time, hardened by the influences in her rearview; power pop, skate punk, the beautiful melodrama of pop stars and 90s alt-rock. Essential pieces that nurtured the ground of the songs on her latest and most dynamic record to date. Working for the first time with Grammy nominated producer Will Yip (Turnstile, The Wonder Years, Barteek Strange), Okusami was given an opportunity to spend a full month in the studio, longer than on previous outings, in order to take time in build out the songs she had written around the core tenants of love and death.

Lead single “Get Out” announces itself with the grandiloquent thump of a kick drum, swift and heavy like a frantic heartbeat racing to the end, making way for otherworldly guitars that trade polished and gritty chords swirling like a fire in the night. An instant sing-along classic with an anthemic chorus anchoring a chaotic tempo, close your eyes and you can picture fists as they find the air, chanting “get up, get up, get out tonight”. Album opener “First Time” rings clear and bright, familiar like a memory you never knew had been locked away, guitars ringing like fireworks and Okusami’s voice pushing and pulling you with symphonic delight, urging you through and onwards. “Be Here” opens with dueling guitars as they echo against each other, conjuring haunting synths that shine like cosmic memories. Wavelengths of the past intertwining with tones of the present.

Speaking to her love of sci-fi and fantasy storytelling, Okusami says “I like the heightened stakes in those worlds, where even the smallest thing feels like the world's

gonna end if something doesn't happen." Everything is proven to be love and death, alive even in the heaviest moments on the record. "Drift Away" (featuring Chicago-based multi-instrumentalist Nnamdi), powers through with a slow and pulsing dynamic, an earworm crafted partially from a dream Okusami had about writing songs for a hardcore band. And then, at the finale of all things, "Won't Someone" washes you out and away, gentle guitars, the brassy lull of mountainous horns and the steady, measured march of a drum. Love and death, the heart of all things.

These themes announce themselves here with bombast and static fury, a bigger and louder sound than Oceanator has delivered in times past. "The feeling that these songs were giving me was that they needed to be a big, loud rock band with shredding guitars," Okusami says. A big, loud rock band is what has grown in the soil of the record, grown from trusted vision and nurtured by Okusami and Yip's shared understanding of a collective vision. Okusami and her polymathic mastery of instruments finds her playing guitar, bass, synths and drums, alongside her brother and frequent collaborator Mike Okusami on bass and piano and paired with the dynamic rhythms of Yip on drums and other percussion. All of these components gorgeously elaborated on by additional instrumentation from Megan Siebe, Andrew Whitehurst, Eric Sherman and David Haik. With the time afforded at Will Yip's Studio 4 Recording space, demos became climatic singles, ringing big and loud and clear, instant classics that feel like beloved reminiscences.

Standing at the forefront of this cascading wall of sound are Okusami's lyrics, the strongest and most clarified of Oceanator's catalog that came to her easier than ever before. Molding punchy turns of phrases into their own instruments, taking moments in the studio to tighten and shape but never overthink herself and her vision. Trusting that she knows where all things started and where they may still lead, even when they are hard or tender. An unshakable relationship to the beautiful fragility of futile efforts, an unwavering commitment to going through them all the same.

"I feel like these songs are honing in on and parsing the same themes as previous records, more settled and clearer." Okusami says of her arrival here at ***Everything is Love and Death***, "I've gotten better at listening to the rational part of my brain, the understanding that things aren't going to work. I know better but I'm gonna do it anyway, because everything is love and death."