José González
with special guest Bedouine

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Tue • February 6, 2018 • 7 pm
Spaulding Auditorium • Dartmouth College
**Program**

There will be a brief intermission after Bedouine’s performance and before that of José González. Titles of works will be announced from the stage.

**About the Artists**

**José González singer-songwriter** has been steadily collecting ideas for new songs since releasing “In Our Nature” in 2007. An album consisting of years’ worth of musical sketches might naturally sprawl wildly in production and style, but on *Vestiges & Claws* (2015), has created a collection of songs that cohere just about perfectly. It travels from the glowering, riff-driven “Stories We Build, Stories We Tell” via the groovy “Leaf Off /The Cave” to the anthemic “Every Age.” For those familiar with González’s earlier work there is little doubt as to who is behind these recordings.

“It was no doubt a conscious decision to work without a producer. I don’t want this to be too polished, or too ‘in your face.’ Most of all, it’s fun to be in complete control of the artistic aspect. Also, I have been inspired by and picked up a lot of tricks from the producers I have worked with in the past. I like to use distortion and let things be a little overdriven, which gives things a warmer sound. Sometimes people complain that my music is too muddled, but I really do not want a modern crisp sound. I’d much rather aim somewhere between Shuggie Otis and Simon & Garfunkel.”

He then adds: “Sonically I think it is the sound of softness and comfort that people mostly connect with my music. It happens quite often that people come up to me to tell me that they’ve used my music to calm their kids.”

González has been far from idle in the years since the release of *In Our Nature*. Besides making two Junip albums and touring the world both solo and with the band, González has been active in the studio in various contexts.

One project in 2013 was González’s input to the soundtrack of the film *The Secret Life Of Walter Mitty*, directed by and starring Ben Stiller. Besides previously released González and Junip songs, the film also contains exclusively written material as well as an interpretation of John Lennon’s “#9 Dream.”

In 2015, the AIDS awareness group Red Hot Organization released the compilation *Master Mix: Red Hot + Arthur Russell*, on which González and guests play a very groovy, sax-laden version of

“I started out thinking that I wanted to continue in the same minimalistic style as on my two previous records,” says González. “But once I started the actual recordings I soon realized that most of the songs turned out better with added guitars and a more beat-like percussion, and with more backing vocals. Personally, I think this made it a more interesting and varied album.”

The result is less purist, less strict. One can find traces of inspired protest songs and eccentric folk rock here: monotonous grooves and rhythms, frustration and optimism. It’s a collection that is simultaneously confident, free and tentative.

Like González’s previous releases, *Vestiges & Claws* was largely recorded in his home and partly in Svenska Grammofonstudion, both in Gothenburg. Chirping birds, creaking doors and off-mic chattering appear on the recordings; however, González is careful to avoid editing out these imperfections—he wants you to feel the intimacy of the setting.
of Russell’s “This Is How We Walk On The Moon.” Another of González’s cover versions, his classic interpretation of The Knife’s “Heartbeats,” has tallied an impressive nearly 50 million streams on Spotify.

Vestiges & Claws is, however, the first album on which González has chosen to include exclusively original material, largely revolving around ideas of civilization, humanism and solidarity.

“I think that might be where there is some sort of common thread on this new record: The zoomed out eye on humanity on a small pale blue dot in a cold, sparse and unfriendly space. The amazing fact that we are here at all, an aim to encourage us to understand ourselves and to make the best of the one life we know we have—after birth and before death. And also, I’ve been okay with using rhymes this time,” González said with a smile. He added, “In general I think that the lyrics are clearer this time. And a little less self-pitying.

“Every age has its turn, every branch of the tree has to learn to grow, find its way, make the best of this shortlived stay take this seed, take this spade, take this dream of a better day, take your time, build a home, build a place where we all can belong”

But there is another side to González’s songwriting on this album. The more than six-minutes-long “What Will” sounds feverish, tight and angry. “Stories We Build, Stories We Tell” focuses on a riff and the repeated line, “Ooh they’ll get to you, hope they’ll get to you,” sounding almost threatening.

“Anger is something I have dealt with on all my records, I have noticed that several of my songs have a pissed off, accusatory tone to them. It can be found in several of my older songs too,” González said.

Where González’s previous albums, Veneer and In Our Nature, might have sounded sparse and barren in parts, Vestiges & Claws has an altogether new feeling to it, at once warmer and darker than before. He talks about how he’s found inspiration in sprawling ‘70s Brazilian productions, American folk rock and West African desert blues this time. And how he’s decided to waive the principle of having everything on the album reproducible in a live context.

González sums it up, “I’ve focused more on the role of being a producer this time around, I’ve spent more time thinking of what’s best for the song and the recording.” This is González’s first engagement at the Hopkins Center.

Bedouine singer-songwriter creates music that, as her name implies, has a nomadic heart. Sweeping, hypnotic. Esoteric yet familiar. It is untethered to place because its home is everywhere.

Bedouine’s sound is for the modern cyber gypsy, dipping a curious toe in the swaying Mediterranean before caravanning for weeks across the deserts of the Middle East, and finally catching a redeye back to L.A. for a pre-dawn Southern California stroll.

“It’s in my roots,” Bedouine says. “I love exploring different places and sounds. My childhood was this amalgamation of different cultures, so I’ve never really belonged to a particular place. But being nomadic can be a beautiful thing if you’re accepting of it—not knowing exactly what you’re doing or where you’re going, but with conviction. Being experimental, even with your intentions.”

An outsider and an introvert, Bedouine prefers anonymity but loves making music enough to share hers with anyone willing to listen—even if it means confronting her fears. An aversion to the spotlight led her away from the stage for several years, where she worked from the shadows, composing music for
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independent films and art installations until something unexpected happened: she wound up in Los Angeles and experienced the opposite of the cliché.

“The joy I get from making music has nothing to do with any kind of recognition,” Bedouine says, “so when I moved to L.A., I had no intention of pursuing music as a career. But then I started meeting so many inspiring people—talented musicians who were living these double lives, going out on the road with successful bands and playing stadiums, and then coming home to this amazing scene and playing all these great little clubs and bars. It made the idea of starting over with my music less intimidating, and it made me more comfortable with the idea of performing. L.A. actually made me less jaded.”

She soon fell in with the tight-knit community of performers in her Echo Park neighborhood, spending nights trading songs and listening to records with some of LA’s best underground artists. “One of my favorite ways to hang out with people,” Bedouine says, “is to take turns listening to each other’s music, bouncing ideas back and forth.”

It was on just such a night that she met collaborator Jake Blanton (The Killers, Father John Misty, Jenny O.), with whom she would record the songs for her new self-titled EP.

The two co-wrote “The City,” and put together a short yet memorable set of songs propelled by insistent, mesmerizing beats, and anchored by chiming guitar, daydream-y piano and above all, Bedouine’s unforgettable voice. Impressionistic, her languid vocals swirl into the ether, another color in the palette, another instrument in the band. Her words roll soft off the tongue, careful brushstrokes, oil paint swept across a canvas. The music is beautiful and striking, always revelling quietly in its search for some enigmatic unknown just out of reach. There is no ego here, no filter between Bedouine’s heart and her songs. This is Bedouine’s first engagement at the Hopkins Center.