

# INTRODUCING SAM BURTON, THE LA SCENE'S TAROT-READING RHINESTONE COWBOY

**B**ACKSTAGE AT London's Roundhouse, Sam Burton is preparing for the latest show on a European tour as main support to Weyes Blood. How, MOJO wonders, did the low-profile 32-year-old singer-songwriter land such a prestigious gig?

"I read tarot cards for people and I did hers," Burton says. "I've been doing it for myself for a while, I find it really therapeutic, and during the pandemic I started doing it for other people. Honestly, I feel that every tour I've gotten on was because of that. It always ends up being like, 'Hey, do you want to go on tour?'"

Not to cast aspersions on Burton's tarot-reading abilities, but those breaks also might be down to the calibre of his music. Coming out later this year, Burton's second album, *Dear Departed*, presents him as a classic LA country troubadour, and one who can harness a melancholic beauty redolent of Glen Campbell. It's a comparison helped no end by producer [and Roger Waters' touring guitarist] Jonathan Wilson wrapping up Burton's tales of lost love and hitting life's lonely highway in lush orchestrations.

Burton maintains he didn't set out to make a retro-sounding record. But he was drawn to some well-worn songwriting tropes, reframing them to fit his own circumstances as he found himself after a break-up, without a job, apartment or record deal, working on a farm to make ends meet. "I definitely tried to play with some cliché. I didn't shy away from it," he says. "To me, it feels like holding hands with the past and acknowledging it. We're not reinventing the wheel. It's about having a kinship with these things but also trying to make it personal. The analogy I would use would be like a director making a

genre movie, you can make it about yourself."

Burton's own story began in a small conservative town outside of Salt Lake City. Snooping around in his stepfather's closet one day, he came across a guitar and was promptly forbidden to touch it. "So I snuck it out when he was at work and taught myself to play a few chords," Burton recalls. "As a kid, I was a rebellious little asshole. When I showed him, I think he was impressed that I was actually interested in something and had shown some application, so he bought me my own."

Burton's first band, The Circulars, produced a decent enough, Mazzy Star-influenced debut, 2016's *Are*

*You Waiting For The Setting Sun*. But it wasn't until he relocated to LA that Burton really hit his stride as a songwriter and released his debut solo LP, 2020's *I Can Go With You*, via a one-album deal with Tompkins Square. Now signed to Partisan, the shimmering Nashville skylines of *Dear Departed* feel like the perfect setting for Burton's songs, so it's surprising to hear he's not sure how his future musical endeavours will manifest. "I want to keep it open. The shit I'm writing is so simple you could dress it up a lot of ways," he shrugs. "For me, songwriting is kind of mystical. You have to create music that is just there. It's like chasing something in the dark."

Chris Catchpole

"I read tarot cards for Weyes Blood."

SAM BURTON

**FACT SHEET**

- For fans of: Glen Campbell, Scott Walker, Jackson C. Frank
- While he was writing *Dear Departed*, Burton spent his days fixing the roof of an old friend's house in Utah ("The more boring the work was, the more meditative I found it"), before moving to a farm owned by another friend's grandmother in upstate California. "I'd work in the fields to earn my keep," he says.
- Burton was one of the musicians who contributed to Ben Schwab's 2022 project, *Sylvie*, an album that had a similar approach to connecting with the past as Burton, having been inspired by demos found by Schwab that his father had recorded in the '70s. "We influenced each other a lot."

**KEY TRACKS**

- Maria
- I Don't Blame You
- Looking Back Again

Playing his cards right: Sam Burton chases something in the dark.



Attention! It's the month's best grooves, riffs and jazz-drone.

**1 PULP LIKE A FRIEND**

As MOJO went to press, the passing of Pulp bassist Steve Mackey (above, centre) was announced. Until next issue's tribute, a poignant 1998 reflection on closeness which gear-changes into a celebratory rock-out. **Find it:** streaming services

**2 TINARIWEN KEK ALGHALM**

With producer Daniel Lanois on pedal steel, the Tuareg Dinosaur Jr explore the shared roots of desert blues and country. **Find it:** streaming services

**3 HORSE LORDS BENDING TO THE LASH**

Pulverising quadratic math-funk, plus circular breathing rituals and a drum solo, from the Baltimore noiseniks, live in Leipzig. **Find it:** Bandcamp

**4 SUEDE BECAUSE THE NIGHT**

From Radio 2's Piano Room with the BBC concert orchestra, a full-bore cover of Patti/Bruce's epic of ecstatic foolishness. **Find it:** YouTube

**5 NATURAL INFORMATION SOCIETY STIGMERGY**

Josh Abrams expands his Chicago jazz-drone collective into a stately big band. As if Mingus's 1964 *Town Hall Concert* setlist included Terry Riley's *In C*, roughly. **Find it:** Bandcamp

**6 OLIVIA JEAN TROUBLE**

If you're looking for trouble, former Black Belle and Jack White's better half is in exactly the right place on strident garage-glam nugget, a foretelling of May's *Raving Ghost LP*. **Find it:** streaming services

**7 DURAND JONES LORD HAVE MERCY**

Jones parks the soul ballads for this invigorating, Springsteen-goes-to-church solo track. Grace and groove in equal measure. **Find it:** streaming services

**8 DRAAG MIDNIGHT PARADISE**

Los Angeles shoegazers plunge into the electric smog and find transcendence and release. **Find it:** *Dark Fire Heresy* album, streaming services

**9 BILL ORCUTT SOME HIDDEN PURPOSE**

Orcutt's solo guitar sound can be thorny and dissonant. But here's a gorgeous entry point into an astonishing soundworld; tender acoustic improv, radical kin of John Fahey. **Find it:** Bandcamp

**10 CASINO BURNING LOVE**

Neo-Northern soul reanimators take on Elvis's song of exploding passion. Stomping! **Find it:** streaming services