

Review – Album “Anywhere” by Yawning Portal



I'd seen the name of Yawning Portal's album *Anywhere* pass by on my Instagram stories at the very start of December without really, let's be honest, paying any attention to it **(1)**. It's not that I wasn't curious, but simply (and that word, "simply," is already a form of evasion) that I was drowning in work, which, in practice, means: deadlines, unread emails, notifications like tiny electronic screams; in short, that end-of-year moment when everything piles up, work, fatigue, ridiculous Spotify Wrapped lists (there, a stray bullet), life assessments, and all the rest.

And maybe also, to be fair, because by that point the flood of “best albums of the year” lists was already upon us, a phenomenon that, every December, triggers in me a mix of exasperation and vertigo (2).

(1) Maybe it's because of that endless flow of images and links shared on Instagram, a stream that, if you think about it for even two seconds, resembles less a social network than a modern form of collective inner noise.

(2) How can we rank what we haven't even finished discovering? Why should early December mark the end of musical time?

Anyway, it was Jeanne who suggested I write a review of the London duo's debut album (*Jess Mai Walker* and *Joseph Ware*) (3), titled *Anywhere*. I knew, in saying yes, that it would make Jeanne happy (already a good reason), and also Fanny, a close friend of mine who handles their booking. So let's say it plainly: this review is for you both, even if, at the exact moment I write this sentence, I have no idea how to begin it, and in a way, admitting that might already be the real beginning.

(3) Assuming we don't count *Notice the Direction of Fires* as an album.

I just finished reading Pitchfork's review, good, in its informed, bird's-eye kind of way, useful for getting a general sense of the object, but probably far from what I actually *feel* when listening. There's always that gap, between institutional criticism and intimate experience, between the well-turned phrase and the soundwave that hits your gut. And really, it's that gap I want to explore here.

Yawning Portal is exactly the kind of band I like listening to: a duo mysterious enough not to be a brand, textured enough to get lost in. But to be fair: if Jeanne hadn't mentioned them, I probably wouldn't have listened for weeks (maybe never) which says something (a little sad, perhaps) about how we encounter music today: through friendly recommendation, algorithmic intercession, micro-systems of emotional trust.

So here I am: headphones on, Bandcamp open, clicking “Play.”

And I'm about to take notes, not academic ones, but traces of listening: impressions, gestures, mental images, strange associations between sounds and sensations.

And as I do, I wonder: what's the point? What am I writing for? To go where?

And the only honest answer I have right now, headphones on and half a blank page in front of me, is: *I don't know. Anywhere, maybe.*



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In my introduction, I hinted (half-consciously) that today’s musical listening is more fragmented than ever. It’s splintered, scattered, dissolved into a cloud of instances: playlists, algorithms, platforms by the dozen, formats, objects, snippets, ten-second Reels choruses. Everything circulates, recomposes, disappears again.

We don’t really listen to albums anymore; we listen to *moments*, fragments of moments, sometimes even samples of fragments. And that dispersion, by becoming invisible, ends up feeling like a norm. Playlists have become mental architectures, pre-fabricated landscapes of emotion we wander through like sonic shopping malls, where abundance and lack coexist in the same breath.

There’s something both unprecedented and deeply ordinary about it: we live in an era where music is everywhere, yet the act of truly *listening* is increasingly rare. Every song is a window, but we spend our lives scrolling between panes without ever looking outside.

And that, I think, is what I meant without quite saying it: that the fragmentation of listening isn't just a digital side effect, but a symptom of fractured attention, of our growing inability to stay, to inhabit duration, to let a piece of music move through us until silence.

And yet, *Anywhere* by Yawning Portal feels like an almost theoretical response to what I'd call an *ecology of attention*: a sonic system that doesn't merely ask to be heard but requires the listener to inhabit their own perception.

Throughout my listen, I felt a strange form of destabilization, this isn't ambient music, nor background sound, nor even the kind of hazy hybrid pop one might expect. It's a work that intentionally disorients attention, stretching it between memory, vision, and silent movement. That's perhaps the best way to describe it.

Whether you take *Anywhere* as a 15-track, hour-long whole, or enter it track by track, what matters isn't narrative progression but a kind of perceptual geometry, a terrain of listening where each track doesn't so much begin or end as lead you into the next.

To illustrate, since my phrasing might otherwise sound abstract, let's start with *Concord*, the opening track.

Concord unfolds like a promise of continuous movement, a wide fabric of reverberations and cyclical motifs, before collapsing inward with Jess's voice (introspective, luminous) guiding the energy toward a kind of controlled disintegration. It prepares the listener not for satisfaction, but for passage. Then comes *Meridian Drift*, a brief interlude acting as a hinge, a point where listening must readjust its own threshold of attention.

In a typical album, you'd say "track A leads to track B." Here, it's not succession but continuity, an unbroken perceptual field where sonic motifs act as vectors, and near-silent moments become spaces of cognitive waiting.

Musically, it recalls certain strands of contemporary composition that study the space *between* sounds (think spectral music, where silence is structural), but applied here to a pop/ambient electronic flow. It's a work about the *interval of perception* rather than the traditional verse-chorus-bridge form.

Pitchfork described *Anywhere* as inspired by American road trips, Midwest landscapes, aimless drives around Des Moines, Iowa, and so on. But to me, rather than *producing* a landscape, the duo turns the idea of a journey without destination into a cognitive metaphor: what matters isn't the scenery but what the journey does to perception.

In electronic music we often speak of trance, groove, or floating ambience. Here, *Anywhere* subverts all three by layering contradictory cognitive states: the calm of an empty landscape, the telescoped memory of a half-recalled place (*My City*), or that subtle emotional fracture between movement and stillness that runs through the album.

This layering creates the uncanny feeling of being both everywhere and nowhere. Each track is a node in a perceptual fabric; the listener becomes not a spectator but an explorer of this inner Midwest.

Where in conventional listening a motif functions as a recognizable sign, *Anywhere* dissolves that reassurance. Motifs do return (familiar synth tones, distorted melodic lines, vocal microsamples) but always obliquely. That slippage gives the record its internal dynamic: everything feels at once known and oddly displaced.

This repetition maintains an *axis of listening*, but Yawning Portal introduces what I'd call a form of *sliding attention*: motifs (4) don't just repeat, they glide between perceptual states, making you uncertain of what you're actually hearing. In *Silver Plated* (with Oli XL), for instance, the tranquil loops take on a metallic tint, as if the sonic fabric itself were becoming rough, not dissonant, but unfamiliar, creating tension in the listener's memory.

(4) The idea of the "motif," which I often return to, is also widely used in film writing and direction, it's a beautiful way to inscribe symbolic resonance within structure.

Another crucial point: the use of voice as texture rather than narrator. When Jess sings, it's never to *tell* a story. Tracks like *My City* or *Eternity Sunrise* showcase a voice devoted to timbre, color, and atmosphere rather than meaning. This practice erases any explicit narrative line, replacing it with a non-linear affective one. And that shift matters: by removing clear narration, Yawning Portal asks us to listen to *how* we listen, not merely *what* we listen to.

Many critics have mentioned the "road-trip inspiration" of *Anywhere*, but few have explored how the album actually works on thresholds of attention, not as an aesthetic of relaxation, but as a perceptual experiment, a space where the listener must negotiate their own awareness while moving through evolving sound. It's a kind of journey too, an excursion inward.

Anywhere is, without rhetorical exaggeration, a genuine ecology of attention: a shifting configuration where motifs, voices, silences, electronic breaths, and transitions form perceptual zones to be consciously inhabited. It's not merely an album we listen to, it's a territory that listens back, measuring our capacity to stay present.

In that sense, *Anywhere* isn't just a musical voyage, it redefines the very notion of travel, applying it not to space or time but to attention itself. Every sound, every absence of sound, becomes a micro-experience of focus. You don't follow the tracks; you remain in them, glide through them, breathe with them.

And in that progressive immersion, something shifts: you realize the music isn't trying to *capture* attention but to *enable* attentiveness, to make us capable of listening differently.

That's a rare, almost anachronistic quality in the electronic music of 2025, where attention has become the most fragile and most exploited resource at once. In our age (saturated with content, notifications, endless white-noise streams), listening has become an accident.

Maybe this album functions as a kind of re-education. *Anywhere* reminds us that paying attention isn't a constraint, it's a form of love. And that to relearn how to listen is, perhaps, already to begin saving ourselves from the flood, to find again the thread, the inner direction that makes us travel back toward ourselves, so that we never end up "anywhere" again.

Listen to "Anywhere" here : <https://www.deezer.com/en/album/823543381>