

Chris Keats

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"If you already lost everything, you've got nothing to lose."

Chris Keats once was a clichéd songwriter known by a different name, playing over 100 solo gigs a year and producing a selected few indie acts totalling over 50 million online streams. Suddenly he found himself at a crossroads when a large music publishing company tried to blackmail him into signing a life-long contract with the devil.

Chris refused to sign and walked away. He burned his piano and all his bridges, stopped writing songs and deleted his online presence. With his life literally in the gutter, he was living hand-to-mouth, sweating away in windowless restaurant kitchens, occasionally sleeping in parks and busking for small change.

Years later, on a sunny day on the English South Coast, he met the love of his life. She inspired him to start making music again, this time in his own name, on his own terms. His debut album Phoenix was released in September 2024.

With a life worthy of a bio-pic, it's surprising Chris only briefly touched upon his past experiences in the song Hourglass, a six-and-a-half minute long blues eulogy over his dead career, written in poetic shorthand and bursting of symbolism. The rest of the album songs were firmly rooted in the present moment, and Phoenix seemed to be the perfect title, a mythological resurrected bird that sets fire to itself in order to be reborn.

"I'm not a negative person. I didn't feel the need to write about it. After I left the business, I literally lost everything. In a way it was a big relief."

Chris Keats grew up on the edge of the North Sea in a small town where the winters were longer than the summers and the sky rarely blue. Among the Swedish ancestors there was the rare luthier, but they were mainly fishermen and farmhands.

Having grown up with a debilitating stutter, writing poetry and later song lyrics, became Chris' way of expressing himself. He spent his childhood playing football and pounding out songs on the family's cheap organ. One day, his next-door neighbour, a recovering alcoholic and retired boxer, found a guitar in the street and gave it to Chris. Energized by the afternoons spent on his neighbour's livingroom floor listening to his complete Bruce Springsteen album collection, Chris taught himself how to play. Aged 9, he wrote his first song, a hobby he refined in his late teens with the help of a salvaged piano dumped by a local school. After leaving school, he moved to London to pursue a career as a singer, but instead ended up working as a songwriter and indie music producer. Almost ten years later he felt forced to walk away.

Only in 2022 he released his first solo single Anything We Dream. It was driven by a raw piano-and-vocals-only performance, and his second single Marry Me was a euphoric pop proposal. The third single I'll Never Let You Go presents an irresistible Motown beat behind his conversational but energetic vocals, and with his fourth single, the erotically charged Midnight Sun he takes us on an almost religious odyssey exploring the landscapes of physical intimacy. Fith single Real Thing is a ghostly look at modern society, and has Chris digging deeper into his folk-rock roots.

The songs reveal the eclectic musical inspirations from his childhood; the Clash albums lent to him aged 7 by his sister's boyfriend, his brother's vintage Beatles and David Bowie albums, the Springsteen collection of his next-door neighbour, and the introduction to Leonard Cohen songs he got from a chain-smoking school librarian when borrowing a Bob Dylan song book. Following the release of Phoenix, Chris announced the release of a cover of Bob Dylan's Make You Feel Me Love in May 2025.

Chris' unique sense of melody, harmony and rhytm also reveals the lasting influence of a secondary school music teacher who keenly lectured the class on Frank Zappa, Miles Davis, The Threepenny Opera and other musical works by Brecht/Weill.

In 2022, Chris published the book A Less Full Mind, a beginner's guide to mindfulness.

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LINKS

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