

Half Moon Run

Salt

TRACKLIST:

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|-------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. You Can Let Go | 7. Heartbeat |
| 2. Alco | 8. Gigafire |
| 3. Hotel in Memphis | 9. Goodbye Cali |
| 4. Everyone's Moving Out East | 10. Salt |
| 5. 9beat | 11. Crawl Back In |
| 6. Dodge The Rubble | |

Half Moon Run, formed in 2009, is a three-piece indie rock band based in Montreal. Throughout their career, they've been heavily praised for their use of three-part harmonies and the wide range of instruments they employ and play in their records. This much remains true for *Salt*, their fourth studio album. The record features a variety of instruments: acoustic guitar, electric guitar, piano, percussion, piano, pedal steel, bass guitar, harmonica, and more. *Salt* is a culmination of their over ten years of experience as a band. In their words: "across *Salt*, you'll find a deep engagement with the bones of Half Moon Run's beginnings, but the album reaches equally into the future with songs penned during the pandemic that bear the current moment's all-permeating anxieties and the deep and universal need for hope."

"Waking up to find yourself a
beacon of the whole
Waking up to find yourself a
river overflowed
Waking up to find yourself two
feet from where you start"
- 9beat



Conner Molander, Devon Portielje, and Dylan Phillips for CULT MTL

With 1.2 million monthly listeners on Spotify and 78.4 thousand followers on Instagram, they've clearly built a small but steady niche of fans for themselves. Conner Molander and Dylan Phillips, original founding members, originally hailed from Comox, BC, before moving to Montreal and connecting with third and final member Devon Portielje. While they sit more established than previous bands I've reviewed, their unique sound and musicality is not to be missed by music enjoyers.

“You Can Let Go” opens with an almost distorted-sounding guitar, grounded by a few well-placed hits on a kick drum. The lyrics are more spoken than sung, fast-paced and urgent from lead singer Devon Portielje. A second voice joins in the rapidly building prechorus, and one strong note from a keyboard bleeds into an instrumental break before the second verse. The chorus explodes into a well-crafted three-part harmony and a soaring mix of drums, rhythm guitar, and keyboard that hook, line, and sinker me completely. Catchy, fast-paced, and addictive, it serves as a perfect opener for the album. “Alco” pulls back with light but masterful guitar picking, strings, and an accompanying snare drum. The vocals are clear and sit right in the front of my ear, intense and brimming with emotion. The verse builds in rhythm as each accompanying instrument grows in volume, but when the chorus hits, it strips everything away, leaving only two notes of piano and another full-band harmony before diving straight back into the instrumentals, leaving me with full-body chills. The bridge, with swirling strings and hi-hat hits and long-held, high vocal notes, somehow tops the choruses and carries me through the in-song-mentioned river right until the last note.

“You want me to jump both feet
down into the bottom of the
river with you
It's not a question you can
answer and the second you
believe it, it's true”
- Alco

Comparable Artists:

Manchester Orchestra — Strong alt rock sound and similar lyrical style

The Arkells — Canadian, unique sound and vibe

“Hotel in Memphis” changes the vibe with a grooving bass, keyboard, and drum opening. More bluesy than its predecessors, it’s a fresh sound without being too tonally different than the pre-set sound. The choruses swoon and soar with harmonies and strings, while the verses crash back down into jumping keys and guiding guitar. The track feels almost of a different time and showcases the band’s range perfectly. “Everyone’s Moving Out East” begins with soothing guitar and stunning strings. Pensive and pandemic-referential, it encapsulates the feeling of everyone you know trying to outrun something and feeling left behind: “As one friend went down to take a lover/One friend went down and just stayed.” It’s the softest track so far, but still packed full of gorgeous melodies and well-placed instrumentals.

STANDOUTS:
“You Can Let Go”
“Alco”
“Hotel in Memphis”



Salt album cover, courtesy of their [website](#)

“9beat” opens with a marching-band reminiscent fill before jumping into a grounding guitar riff and faraway, reverbing vocals in the intro. The drums are steady and carry the melody, which builds upwards in intensity before coming to a head in the chorus, where Portiejlle’s rasping voice perfectly captures my attention and leads me into the instrumental outro. A foreboding and melancholy guitar introduces me to “Dodge the Rubble,” where the single vocal is occasionally accompanied by well-placed harmonies that heighten the impact of the chosen lines. A far away whistle in between verses gives the song a lonesome, lone ranger feeling, and the more sparse verses give space to the strong lyrics: “Can’t trust the light, can’t trust the heat.” The song grows more desperate in the second half, and the title is well-represented with the falling nature of the instrumentals, making me feel almost as if I, too, am dodging the rubble as it crashes down into the droning outro.

GENRE:
ALT ROCK,
INDIE ROCK,
INDIE FOLK

“Salt” opens heavy on the bass guitar and bleeds into a synth and acoustic-guided melody. More low-key in its sound, the vocals sit in the forefront, gliding between slithering guitar and soothing drum hits. The track serves as a solid and sonically pleasing palate cleanser before heading into the final song of the record. “Crawl Back In” begins with two acoustic guitars running gentle circles around one another. Ballad-like in its intro, the vocals are gentle and soft, and quiet ocean sounds are overlaid in the background of the track. Strings bleed into the background as the lyrics circle back and forth between hope and hopelessness, making the track both uplifting and the opposite. Soft and soothing, it serves as a strong end to a strong album.



“Heartbeat” opens lighter with acoustic guitar and just a single vocal. Portiejlle’s vocal talent is well-represented with the more stripped-back instrumentals, just a guitar, light drums, keys, and a droning synth to accompany the chorus. The closest to a ballad as they get on this album, the track is intimate and moving as the subject battles themselves and their flaws in order to preserve their relationship.

“Gigafire” is heavy guitar, rhythmic drums, background synth, and gorgeous strings mixed together to make an apocalyptic and otherworldly sounding love song.

Cymbals crash downwards as strings pull in the opposite direction, and the outcome feels like a battle between hope and despair, with the track ultimately ending hopeful.

“Goodbye Cali” keeps up with the theme of simple acoustic guitar openings but brings in a note of twang with a dirty and grooving electric guitar layered overtop, along with a bouncing bass in the background. The vocals swing and bounce over the symphony of guitars, and the product is groovy and funky. Distorted vocals give an otherworldly sense as the subject moves back home to Montreal, declaring their failure to survive in California. An electric guitar solo and the accompanying instruments contrast the somber and panic-infused lyrics to create a track resembling a panic attack in a sonic, danceable form.



Overall, *Salt* delivers on every avenue promised. “Alco” an eleven-textured song with a drop-out chorus, is a masterful display of placement and symmetry within music. Tracks like “You Can Let Go” and “Goodbye Cali” are fast-paced and addictive and reveal new sonic secrets each time I listen. Softer folk ballads like “Heartbeat” provide heart in soul in a record that is already chalked full of both. The wide range of instruments used makes each song a treat as I discover new sounds and ways of arranging music I had never heard before. No matter what genre you normally stick to, *Salt* is a masterclass in creativity and production, and not to be missed.

“But if you set me up
I'll fall right down
Don't you know that you're my
Salt of the Earth”
- Salt



Live Concert Review:

In October of 2023, a friend asked if I'd be interested in joining her to see *Half Moon Run*, who were set to perform in Victoria a month later. I had never heard of them, but tickets were cheap, a brief skim of their popular songs proved favourable, and as a music enjoyer, I'm never one to turn down a concert. So on November 1st, 2023, I sat in a balcony seat of the Royal Theatre in Victoria, anxiously waiting to find out how the next two hours of my life were going to go. After two openers and the set up of a drumkit and other various instruments, the band stepped onstage. From the very first note of the first song they played, “You Can Let Go,” I was entranced. The music itself sounded exactly as it did prerecorded, which was made entirely more impressive when I realized that each member was playing multiple instruments. The drummer was often times playing both keyboard and drums at the same time as well as singing backup, the lead singer switched back and forth between a steel drum and his guitar, and the bassist switched between guitars, synths, triangles, and even a harmonica. Their talent was obvious, and the energy in the theatre was electric. To this day, they remain one of the best live shows I've attended.