

# SYMPHONY OF SOUND

On his new album, Andrew Bird forgoes lyrics and lets his violin do the talking. BY BRIAN GOLDEN

**W**hen Andrew Bird is improvising with, by turns, a violin, guitars, a glockenspiel, and the looping pedal that helps him construct his signature polyrhythmic tracks, he often loses himself. "You're in the middle of it," says the 44-year-old musician, "and you're just like, I don't know how I got here."

Tracing the steps of how the violin virtuoso and Lake Forest native ends up just about anywhere in his music is more art than science. For his album *Echolocations: River*, released in October, Bird took a violin and a field recorder to the Glendale-Hyperion Bridge in northeast Los Angeles, where he now lives, and improvised melodies while wading in the Los Angeles River. "It's all based on a hunch," he says. "I go in, send out sound waves, and see what bounces back."

A sweeping pastiche of sounds, *River* is the second of Bird's new five-part *Echolocations* series, in which the music is inspired by surrounding environments. The project began with *Canyon*, recorded in Utah's Coyote Gulch in 2015. Bird has also completed *Fog*, recorded on a Marin County peninsula overlooking the Pacific, and *Aqueduct*, which was captured in a 17th-century aqueduct in Lisbon, Portugal, but he has yet to release those two albums.

Wet feet notwithstanding, *River* took a decidedly smaller toll on Bird than last year's *Are You Serious*, for which the famously abstruse lyricist wrote about his wife's cancer diagnosis (she's now in remission). The album—making it, talking about it—exhausted Bird. "It felt like exploitation," he says. "I wanted to bring it back to music."

That music now propels Bird's American tour, including his annual four-night stint at Fourth Presbyterian Church—he jokingly calls it his version of a Vegas residency—which begins this year on December 11. Returning to the city is fraught for Bird. "Every corner is so familiar, and that can be comforting or really depressing," he says. Still, if *Echolocations* is an experience of rich, complex spaces, Chicago falls squarely at the heart of that notion: "It's not exactly home, but it doesn't feel like anywhere else."



PHOTOGRAPH BY AMANDA FRIEDMAN

COLDWATER



LINCOLN  
The perfect views. Si  
loggia an

Represent  
312.440.



CHICAGO  
Exquisite I  
views of th  
rare comb

Represent  
708.466.4



WILMETT  
One-of-a-l  
serene lak  
the beach

Represent  
847.275.7

COLDW

The property info  
is not warranted a  
Banker Resident  
Banker logo, Cold