Steve Marion, the critically acclaimed–and completely wordless–songwriter and guitarist known as Delicate Steve, has unveiled a new album called *Delicate Steve Sings*. Is the album title a reference to the instantly recognizable “voice” of his guitar? Does he actually sing this time? Has he not been singing all along? That’s the crux of *Sings*—Marion is the rare guitarist where you can put on any of his records and know exactly who’s playing. In an indie rock landscape stuffed end-to-end with guitars and amplifiers, nobody else sounds like this.

That unique voice has kept Steve busy in an unpredictable variety of settings. The sheer spread of his work outside his own records—collaborating with Miley Cyrus and Paul Simon, playing in Amen Dunes and the Black Keys, and being sampled by Kanye—doesn’t mean Steve’s a chameleon. It means he’s singular.

One night while on a trip to Greece, Marion looked out over the sea while listening to Willie Nelson’s pop standards record *Stardust*, a cosmic epiphany washing over him about what his next record could be. *Delicate Steve Sings* is a record centered on channeling iconic voices with his guitar. In doing so, Marion is casting himself in the role of iconic singers like Willie who make standards their own. In the process, he reveals just how singular (dare we say iconic) that voice is. The guitar sings these songs—smoothly, sweetly, boldly, and on its own terms.

Recorded with Jonathan Rado on bass, Kosta Galanopolous on drums, Renata Zeiguer providing strings, and co-writer Elliot Bergman, you can hear this team of exceptional musicians approach the album with the same smooth reverence you’d hear on something like Willie’s classic. Still, there’s a requisite subversiveness to what Marion’s doing here—this isn’t a full-on standards album. He’s got original songs with titles that suggest they might be new recordings of classics. “I’ll Be There” is smooth like a lost Bill Withers track; “Easy for You” isn’t the Elvis song of the same name, but there’s a hint of the king in there all the same.

From the record’s opening track, the mood of *Delicate Steve Sings* is immediately defined by the distinctive voice of Marion’s guitar. Going back to the feel of a classic and the writing of an original, “Cherry” settles into a similar vibe as Al Green’s *Call Me*, vocals and all. As the second track, his take on the Emersons’ “Baby” solidifies his guitar-as-voice approach by offering his own wordless “yes oh baby.” It’s a faithful rendition, cooing background vocals and all, but the voice—that guitar tone—is definitively Steve’s. For Steve, its inclusion bolstered his goal with the album: feeling over thinking. “Artists are very much overthinkers, just by trade,” he says. “But currently, everything is so totally overthought. So really, I was just resonating with these songs a lot and trying to avoid overthinking. I was listening to ‘Baby’ a lot, and that was it: I was just feeling it.”

As the album rolls on, he sprinkles in two more classics: The Beatles’ “Yesterday” and Otis Redding’s “These Arms of Mine.” Just as his overall aesthetic nods to the crooners, his cover of “Yesterday” was more inspired by Sinatra’s version than McCartney’s; Marion’s positioning himself, wryly, as an icon putting his signature on a song embedded into nearly every brain on the planet. “You’re tapping into something universal and in the consciousness of pop music,” Steve says—tacit permission for his guitar to drift into vocal expressions he’s internalized through years of close, repeated listening. Just like all the great singers.