

= Ki (Devin Townsend Project album) =

Ki (/ ˈkiː / KEE) is the eleventh studio album by Canadian musician Devin Townsend , and the first of six albums in the Devin Townsend Project series . The album was released on May 25 , 2009 , on Townsend 's independent record label HevyDevy Records .

Townsend , the founder , songwriter , and frontman of extreme metal band Strapping Young Lad and progressive metal group The Devin Townsend Band , dissolved both bands in 2006 to spend time with his family and avoid the burnout of touring and interviewing . After a period of self @-@ discovery and a year @-@ long break from songwriting , Townsend began work on a four @-@ album series to clarify his identity as a musician . Ki includes themes of self @-@ control and sobriety , and is musically subtler than much of the artist 's previous work , consisting of ambient rock music interlaced with tentative bursts of heavy metal .

The album was written , produced , mixed , and co @-@ engineered by Townsend , who also performed guitar and vocals . Townsend assembled a supporting group of Vancouver musicians including blues drummer Duris Maxwell , rock bassist Jean Savoie , keyboardist Dave Young , and guest vocalist Ché Aimee Dorval to play on the album . While some critics found the album uneven , Ki received generally positive reviews for its unexpected musical direction , along with its production , vocal dynamics , and mix of influences .

= = Background = =

After disbanding his extreme metal band Strapping Young Lad and his progressive metal project The Devin Townsend Band in 2006 , Townsend shaved off his trademark " skullet " hairstyle and gave up alcohol and marijuana . Townsend found it " disconcerting " that he had difficulty writing music without drugs , and that he had trouble identifying his purpose as a musician . He spent a year producing albums in absence of writing , but found it unrewarding and decided to " pick up the guitar and just write . " This began a period of self @-@ discovery where he learned " how to create without drugs " .

Over two years , Townsend wrote over 60 songs , and found that they fit into " four distinct styles " . In March 2009 , Townsend announced his plans for a four @-@ album series called the Devin Townsend Project , with the goal of clarifying his musical identity and being " accountable " for the persona he projects to the public . Ki , the first album of the Devin Townsend Project , is written to " set the stage " for the subsequent albums . The word " ki " represents the Japanese concept of " life force " (気 , " ki ") . Townsend chose the name as an homage to the 1981 Kitarō album of the same name , which he " loved as a kid " .

The project 's concept includes a different group of musicians for each album . For Ki , Townsend chose a group of musicians with whom he had not previously worked . He discovered Duris Maxwell , a blues drummer who has played with such acts as Heart , Jefferson Airplane , and Tommy Chong , in a blues club in northern Canada . Townsend was impressed by his energy and recruited him for Ki . Townsend also chose Jean Savoie , a music store employee who plays in a Beatles cover band , to play bass on the album . Maxwell and Savoie were ideal for the album , Townsend explained , because they had little experience playing heavy music , and had a fresh perspective that fit with Ki 's subtler sound . Townsend also brought back Dave Young , an ambient keyboardist who had played in The Devin Townsend Band , and recruited Vancouver artist Ché Aimee Dorval as a vocalist on several tracks . The album was primarily recorded , produced , and mixed from late 2008 to early 2009 at Devestate and Studio D ; the drums were recorded at Factory Studios in Vancouver .

= = Music and lyrical themes = =

Townsend channelled his new @-@ found self @-@ control and sobriety into Ki , a " restrained , melodic , and tranquil " album that is " a sharp contrast " to the heavy metal he is known for , while maintaining his " signature sound " . The album features undistorted guitar tones , live takes , no

drum triggering , and relatively quiet mastering , with a musical style combining ambient , progressive rock , jazz rock , and psychedelic blues . The album 's recurring musical theme is " tension and release " , a gradual build in intensity which suddenly stops and gives way to " something relaxing " . The album 's musical style has been compared to Porcupine Tree , Chroma Key , and Pink Floyd , with Townsend 's vocals drawing comparisons to Steven Wilson and Steve Hackett .

Ki was mixed by Townsend , and features very little compression , in contrast with his usual wall @-@ of @-@ sound production style . Townsend explained that he originally " tried doing the wall @-@ of @-@ sound with it and it just kind of ruined it ... it turned it into a not @-@ so @-@ good Strapping record . " The album deliberately eschews the loudness wars , the recent music industry practice of competitively mastering audio to seem as loud as possible . " I officially pull my hat out of the loudness wars " , Townsend told his mastering engineer . The album 's songs were primarily written in open C tuning , except for " A Monday " , " Trainfire " , and " Disruptr " in open B , " Heaven 's End " and " Winter " in open B ? , and " Quiet Riot " in standard tuning . Townsend has cited Second Nature by The Young Gods , Paul Horn , Chants of India by Ravi Shankar , and Ween as influences on the album .

Townsend described Ki as both the introduction and the moral to the " larger concept " of the Devin Townsend Project . The album 's lyrical themes explore Townsend 's inner demons , past addictions , self @-@ acceptance , and his " newfound ability to say no . " The album opens with a brief instrumental that leads into " Coast " , a quiet , bass @-@ driven track that sets the stage for the album as a " metaphor for Devin 's newfound restraint . " Townsend described it as " the intro to the story , quiet , dark , haunted and unsure " . The track builds in intensity toward the end with layers of vocals , but rather than exploding into Strapping Young Lad ? style metal , fades into " loose , bluesy guitar work " . " Disruptr " has been described as " a coffee @-@ house metal track " , contrasting light instrumentation with heavy metal ? style songwriting and vocals in a way that one critic compared to Talking Heads . " Gato " proceeds in a similar vein , but is set apart with backing vocals by Dorval . " Disruptr " and " Gato " continue the musical theme ; each song builds in intensity toward the end but " stops and takes a deep breath " before proceeding . The album then fades into " Terminal " , an atmospheric track with quiet vocals that was co @-@ written by keyboardist Dave Young .

Townsend 's restraint reaches a breaking point on " Heaven 's End " , which Jon Wiederhorn of Revolver described as " a groovy pop song that morphs into a violent , acid @-@ drenched nightmare . " It is followed by " Ain 't Never Gonna Win " , a live studio jam by the album 's four musicians which was described by David E. Gehlke of the online magazine Blistering as " trippy " . " Trainfire " , a classic country ? style song inspired by Elvis Presley 's cover of " Mystery Train " , addresses Townsend 's former addiction to pornography , which he described as " this crazy , crack cocaine on the internet that nobody wants to talk about . " The song continues the album 's theme of honesty and self @-@ acceptance , both about pornography and musical tastes . Townsend explained the song 's musical style , saying " yes , I like heavy music and am good at making it , but that is not all that I listen to , and that is not all that I want to play . "

The album 's climax is found in the title track , described by the artist as " a personal breakthrough " and is initially born out of a Grey Skies demo , " Soft , " previously released on Ass @-@ Sordid Demos II . " Ki " builds into a cyclical progression of arpeggios which Martin Popoff of Brave Words & Bloody Knuckles described as the album 's " proggiest " moment . It leads into " Quiet Riot " , an acoustic version of " Cum On Feel the Noize " with new lyrics . " Quiet Riot " , Townsend explained , " basically sums up the idea that , although I am ' damaged , ' I 'm fine , and have chosen to make my life better . "

= = Release and artwork = =

Ki was released on Townsend 's independent record label HevyDevy Records on May 25 , 2009 , in Canada . It was released May 22 , 2009 , in Germany , May 25 , 2009 , in the rest of Europe , and June 16 , 2009 , in the United States by distributor InsideOut Music . A Japanese release on

Marquee / Avalon was released on August 26 , 2009 . When all four albums in the series are completed , Townsend plans to release an eight @-@ disc special edition box set , including a DVD and various bonus material .

The album art was created by artist Konrad Palkiewicz , who created the art for Townsend 's ambient album The Hummer (2006) and directed the video for Strapping Young Lad 's " Almost Again " . The album art was designed to be viewed with a pair of 3 @-@ D glasses . The album cover is an image of " two faces in one " . Though " not authentic " , it is based on Native American and Chinese art . Palkiewicz directed a music video for the song " Coast " , which was released on Townsend 's website on July 28 , 2009 . The InsideOut releases come with an extra lyrics sheet and feature a green slipcase bearing the Devin Townsend Project logo , designed by Travis Smith .

= = Sales and critical reception = =

Ki reached number 26 on the Finnish Top 40 and number 179 on the French Top 200 , and appeared on the UK Indie and UK Rock charts . It sold 800 copies in its first week of release in the United States , and debuted at number 69 on the Billboard Top Heatseekers chart . Critical reception of the album was generally positive . Jon Wiederhorn of Revolver said the album is " well worth a listen " and praised the heavier tracks such as " Disruptr " and " Heaven 's End " , saying , " Townsend mostly contains his rage , but he 's at his best when he loses it . " Martin Popoff of Brave Words & Bloody Knuckles found the album to have an " odd identity " , with " all sorts of things going on just under the surface " that rewarded multiple listens . David E. Gehlke of Blistering was less impressed , and found the album inconsistent . Gehlke described " Winter " as " lush and gorgeous " , but felt that the album " fails to hit the mark " at other points , such as " Ain 't Never Gonna Win " and " Trainfire " . Tyler Munro of Sputnikmusic said Ki showed Townsend " at his loosest and most dynamic " , and praised Townsend 's and Dorval 's vocals , but felt the album was held back by musical repetition and its extended guitar jams . Greg Prato of Allmusic gave the album a moderate review , admiring Townsend 's unpredictability but feeling the album was not " the most gripping or groundbreaking album " in Townsend 's collection . Daniel Cairns of Chronicles of Chaos praised Ki as " a difficult , unusual collection of music " that " also might just be Townsend 's best yet . "

= = Track listing = =

All songs written and composed by Devin Townsend except where noted .

= = Personnel = =

= = = Musicians = = =

Devin Townsend ? vocals , guitar , fretless bass guitar , ambience , programming , production , mixing , engineering

Duris Maxwell ? drums

Jean Savoie ? bass guitar

Dave Young ? keys , piano , ambience

= = = Additional musicians = = =

Ché Aimee Dorval ? additional vocals

Ryan Dahle ? additional vocals (" Gato ")

Bjorn Strid , Peter , Christopher , Grant , Corey , Jeremy , Ryan ? additional vocals

= = = Production = = =

Adrian Mottrim ? recording assistance
Mike St. Jean ? preproduction assistance
Brennan Chambers ? mixing assistance
Sheldon Zaharko ? recording
Ryan Dahle ? production , mixing (" Quiet Riot ")
T @-@ Roy ? mastering

= = = Release = = =

Konrad J. Palkiewicz ? visual consulting , layout , artwork
Erich Saide ? photography
Omer Cordell ? photography
Jeff Cohen ? legal , management
Mike Mowery ? legal , management

= = Charts = =