

OBED PADILLA

Do You Still Love Me?

Artist Notes by Stefanie Fernández



photo credit: Dominic Cooley

Obed Padilla's latest EP, *Do You Still Love Me?* asks more questions than it answers. But when your identity is shaped by contradiction—being the rebellious son of a pastor father, a Chicano son of immigrants raised in the States, a relationship nomad in pursuit of true love—the act of questioning itself can be a more honest answer.

The vocalist, producer, and multi-instrumentalist grew up watching his father plant churches.

Plant churches, that's how he says it, from his house in Oceanside, California. He calls himself a homebody. It wasn't always like this.

Growing up, his parents moved to North Carolina, then to Denver, and eventually settled in Oceanside. From his father and mother, he grew up hearing the kind of stories from Costa Rica and Mexico, respectively—of migration, of exile, of addiction, of fear—that so many of us know we'll never experience quite the same way. He grew up playing music in the church—"Southern

Baptist,” but not exactly denominational—with protective parents, and outside, was shaped by a San Diego County of “white girls, Marines, skaters, surfer culture...everything kind of melted into one place.” And gangs.

“I had my own dirt that I did,” he says. “Never that.”



album artwork

After struggling to find purpose in his early twenties, Padilla responded to a Craigslist ad looking for a guitar player to join the band at a youth summer camp near Big Bear in 2015. “It was exactly what I needed for that period of my life—to be loved unconditionally,” he says. It would turn him into a different kind of itinerant preacher. The following year, he started producing locally in Oceanside. And in April 2023, he went into the studio with Mikky Ekko and Afterhrs, and Julian Bunetta signed him to Big Family. In Los Angeles, city of transplants, Padilla emphasizes the importance of working with protectors—people you could have gone to high school with.

On “50K” with Niko Rubio, the chorus asks: “Don’t you wish you could go back to who you were before?” There was a time before the brutal breakup, the alienating overnight virality, the world getting bigger than his pocket of Southern California. Would Obed go back?

“Damn, it kind of would be nice to have the white picket fence and work at UPS. It’s a nice thought, but I would be miserable,” he says. “I would die for this shit.”

And while in some very different contexts than his family, it turns out making music is just another kind of sermonizing. “I feel like God does certain things and places certain things in order that you can’t really explain,” Padilla says. “Telling my 16 or 18-year-old self, like, yo, you’re not gonna believe some of the shit that happens.”

That is what I get from your music when I hear it: storytelling. How did you come to want to tell these stories?

I think seeing a lot, and especially from a young age, seeing so many different walks of life. Especially because growing up in church, my folks were always so welcoming of everyone ... It’s not like what you get today, where in modern Christianity, it can be very judgmental and off-putting, and I didn’t see that, at least in their church growing up. From a young age, I just saw so many different walks of life, whether it was, you know, people who were prostitutes or drug dealers or whatever. All the people who Jesus would hang out with, you know? [Laughs]. And so I feel like [I have] my own story, but then also other people’s. I was just so interested in that.

What was your favorite music growing up?

So being sheltered, I didn’t really start listening to secular music until I was maybe 11 or 12. But I mean, the stuff that I was into was like Green Day and Gwen Stefani and Red Hot Chili Peppers as far as what was popular at that time, growing up. And definitely a lot of pop punk. But then my dad had a big influence on my music as well, because when I was at that age, we started going to thrift stores and pawn shops and digging for records. And so I was listening to all the stuff that he was into, Stevie Ray Vaughan and The Beach Boys and Eagles and James Taylor, a lot of rock, singer-songwriter stuff, reggae—kind of a little bit of everything. So I had the stuff that I was into, and then the stuff that I got into because of my dad. So I kind of had two schools of music, you know?

It’s interesting you bring up the schools of music, because listening to this EP, I just kept noticing there’s so many old-school references in the lyrics, in the production, and musically—in hip-hop, but also old-school Latin genres. Are there any particular artists or musicians that you feel you owe that sound to, in addition to the ones you just mentioned?

I would say Fania, all the salsa stuff from Fania ... Carlos Santana, obviously, who's one of my favorite guitar players and artists. War, which I feel like is such a California thing, because War as a group had so many different people in there. And it's very much Chicano low-rider culture, California, which I feel like at that time when that music was coming out, was somewhat progressive, you know? That's a big influence on it, on the music.

Now that you say it, I can definitely hear it. And you've been releasing music since 2018, is that right?

2018, yeah. My first song is called "[Someone Else](#)," and I produced that by myself, recorded it, mixed, mastered, did everything by myself, out of like... necessity, you know? [Laughs]. I didn't have the money to pay anybody, so I kind of learned how to do all these things and became obsessive with it, just out of me wanting to put out music that I thought could compete with everything else and that was just as good and sounded just as good as whatever was on the radio at that time, or people that I listened to. Especially coming from Oceanside, [where] there's a lot of local artists and rappers and stuff like that. But at that time, there were only a couple people that I felt were doing it at a high level. And that's what I aspired [to], even from the jump. I wanted it to be at a high level.

What sets this EP apart from previous projects that you've released? How has that journey been in the last seven years?

So I put out two albums by myself independently before this, and a couple EPs and songs and stuff. I feel like what sets this apart is the quality of the music and the storytelling of it, and just going deeper into that.

Do You Still Love Me? is the name of the EP, and the story of that is: I had a few videos go viral back to back about two-and-a-half years ago, and that's kind of what set all of this off—record labels reaching out and working with different producers, people who really do this shit. And it almost felt like an overnight kind of thing. Like, you've worked 10 years for overnight success. And it's funny, because this is still just starting out, you know? I haven't reached some crazy pinnacle or anything.

But the story of *Do You Still Love Me?* is: I feel like my life changed really quickly, and [I was] working with all these high-level people, and being in different places, in Nashville and going to London and LA and Malibu, and my surroundings changing, but everything that I grew up around staying the same. And it's that question: "Do you still love me?" It's to my parents: Do you still love me? I know I'm not home so much. And my friends and people I grew up with, do you guys still love me? Because things look different now, and *I'm* changing. And then, you know, I had kind of a crazy breakup during the middle of all this, and so it's, like, [to] that person: Do you still love me, even though things are different?

God. I don't know. It's such a deep, personal thing, and I feel like that's what sets it apart, all these things that happened in real time, and us writing about it. This is a real story.

I could not have expected some of these stories going into this conversation. But it really does remind me in the two very different examples [of your parents], and then in our generation, where we're just like... I don't know, making music or writing about music. The stakes are so different.

Absolutely. And it's funny, because I feel like so much of this stuff is, I guess, in my blood. Like my dad's very much a rebel, and I feel like I'm a rebel. And my mom was a fighter when she was younger, and I feel like I have that, very much so. And then addiction runs in my family.

I don't know, I feel like my story is such an *American* story. And I think that part too, of the "Do you still love me?" is to even people that listen to my music or know me, it's like, you know, not being Mexican enough or Latin enough for the Latin people, but then not being American enough. Because I didn't grow up in Mexico; my parents chose to speak English to us because we were here in America. I'm still fluent in Spanish, but that was of my own doing, not because of them. So a little bit of everything, you know?

This interview has been condensed and edited for clarity.

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