

BLUE RODEO

Biography

THE THINGS WE LEFT BEHIND

The definition of a rebel is someone who goes against the grain. Damn the torpedoes! Full speed ahead! For close to thirty years now, Blue Rodeo has taken the road less traveled - and succeeded far beyond anyone's expectations. The band emerged in the early 80's as a countrified rock band in the era of hair metal and glossy pop. Despite sticking out like a sore thumb (or maybe because of it), their single "Try" became omni-present on radio across Canada and set in motion a three decade long career of headlining every club, theatre and arena in Canada. In 1993, when grunge rock was squeezing commercial rock off the radio, they recorded their quietest album, *Five Days In July*, and scored their biggest hit selling over a half million copies of that one record alone. And now, in the digital age, while everyone else is think of ways to sell single songs through the internet or snippets of songs on cell phones, Blue Rodeo has recorded a double album designed specifically to be enjoyed on vinyl. *The Things We Left Behind* is the real deal. Double gate-fold sleeve, 12 x 12 cover and two albums, four distinct sides programmed to take the listener on a trip.

"I'm becoming more of a vinyl-phile and more and more is becoming available all of the time, which is great," enthuses singer-guitarist Jim Cuddy. "How to split it up – is a B-side heavier, or more sleepy, or whatever – is a very enjoyable little conundrum for us to try to figure out."

Indeed it is a vast landscape of sixteen new songs written by Cuddy and his songwriting partner Greg Keelor that needs to be arranged and yet it wasn't as difficult to put together as one might think.

"With something of this size there aren't as many options, maybe because there is so much of it," says Keelor. "You know, there are some obvious connections between songs that work together. It sort of panned out a little easier."

"We had a sequence done in about a day and a half which for us, honestly, is miraculous," continues Cuddy. "We could make a record, and spend 6 months making it and not have one single argument and then we could fight about the sequence for the rest of our lives. I think we had a sequence that was almost right and we were prepared to go with it. Initially we had put the most dramatic song, the title track, on the record second. Once we switched it and made it the first song, then everything worked."

With dramatic tympanis leading the melody, the title track certainly opens the door to the trip that lays ahead for the listener. "All The Things That Are Left Behind" was a very difficult song," remembers Cuddy. "When Greg brought it in he played piano, which he does not play and he was plucking out this melody and singing it, it was in such a rough form."

"It was the first song I'd ever written on piano," say Keelor. "We knew that we wanted to fill it out so we sampled some tympanis, tuned them to the track, did a lot of eqing and made them nice and muffled and put those on. Jim added a piano part just hitting the chord on the

down beat. We got a mellotron and added cello. Then we used the mellotron flute and built it up from there. So it was a pretty bare bones track when it started and those are often my faves – the ones that sound ‘well, that’ll be lucky if it gets on the record’ – and then it blooms into this orchestrated little number.”

So, if that once rough but now rich dramatic song opens the album, what else does the band have up its collective sleeve? “It’s not like we’re going for a skate and just singing a whole pile of Blue Rodeo songs,” boasts Keelor wryly. “There’re a few curve balls on this record.”

There isn’t a longtime fan of Blue Rodeo that would be surprised by Keelor’s statement. After all, the band’s longevity didn’t come from repeating itself over and over. It makes one wonder though, twelve albums on, how deep is the well and how dare they record a double album at this point in their career.

When Jim and Greg sat down in April of 2009 and started playing the music they had each written, it became evident pretty quickly that they’d be making more than a single album. Blue Rodeo had made longish albums before but the band had grown bored of the format and wanted to use this as an opportunity to do something that was a throwback to the record listening experience they had in their formative years.

“We wanted to make a CD that represented the flip of a record,” says Greg.

“Whatever that esthetic was imprinted itself in our minds in the 60s and 70s and is still there,” agrees Cuddy,

Whatever that esthetic is also runs through the music. Whether it’s a tip of the hat to Jackson Browne on “Candice,” the Beggars Banquet-like romp in “Sheba” or a nod and a wink to Fairport Convention and The Who on the epic “Million Miles,” Blue Rodeo has never been afraid to wear their influences on their sleeves. Greg readily admits that his rocker “Never Look Back” sounds like it could be an Everly Brothers song when played slower on acoustic guitar. “I think I even stole a line – ‘Oh baby, I wanted you so bad,’” sings Keelor. “I think that’s an Everly Brothers line somewhere so start the lawsuits.”

To hear one of Canada’s most influential bands talk about their own influences is certainly a revelation of sorts. Cuddy and Keelor are renowned as a formidable songwriting team though each approaches the craft differently. Cuddy is the classic story-teller allowing the experiences in his life to take form in a series of characters inhabiting his songs. Keelor, on the other hand is the tortured artist who uses music to explore the depths of love and pain and then paint pastoral pictures.

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The dichotomy of their styles is most evident in comparing the tone of Cuddy’s “One Light Left In Heaven” and Keelor’s “Venus Rising.” Unbeknownst to one another, both men wrote songs about the relationship of a couple they both know.

“Mine was from the left behind,” says Jim about “One Light Left In Heaven,” “It was specifically about being in a plane having left this world (that situation) and not wanting to arrive because the situation is going to rear its ugly head again.”

“I guess it’s a little bit about how hard it is to be in relationships when you’re on the road,” says Greg simply when talking about “Venus Rising.”

Of course what the record would be, how it would flow and what moods it would convey were all taken into consideration during the recording process. One thought was to make a daytime record that you listen to in the car and a night time record of the longer jammier songs. Ultimately, the record turned into one cohesive double album winding its way through plaintive ballads, full out honky-tonk stompers and psychedelic jams. And having two records and four sides on which to program the music, gave the band even more freedom to distinguish each song as a unique entity either through instrumentation or style or recording process.

In their twenty-five year career, Blue Rodeo has sold over 4 million records, won an unprecedented 5 Juno awards as Group of the Year, been handed keys to the City of Toronto and been inducted onto Canada’s Walk of Fame. But for them, the accolades and awards pale in comparison to the good fortune of being musicians.

“I think that’s the testament – to really do it for a living,” says Cuddy reflecting on all that has happened to the band. “Not just live the life of a popular band but to actually do music for a living.”

Twelve albums on, the rebels live.