

WALDNER/BIOGRAPHY



Although David Waldner has lived in London for over a decade, the roots of this Canadian-born songwriter go back a long way. Not just to his childhood in Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario, but before that, to the day when his father, who'd grown up in a Hutterite colony west of Winnipeg, stole a horse from a barn and rode out to start a brand new life, never looking back. He was 17 years old. It was some time after that that he met Waldner's mother, who had previously fled war-torn Eastern Europe and travelled to Canada alone. The two arrived in Kitchener on the same day, met and then later married. At one point, both worked at a local slaughterhouse, where Waldner himself also had a job for a while. "A slaughterhouse, an office", he laughs. "Sometimes it's the same thing!"

His time there – as well as the summers he spent as a teenager working on a nearby farm – combined with his love of poetry, his "missing years", of course, his family history, influences his songwriting to this day. That sense of adventure, of limitless possibilities and the blind turns in the road that happen in life and which lead you to places you least expect, permeates his songs. But that wide-eyed wonder is firmly rooted in and mixed with a genuine love of music, old and new. From Arcade Fire to The Beatles, R.E.M. to XTC, old blues to prog rock, Bjork to Brahms, Bob Dylan to Radiohead, The Waterboys to Neil Young, world music to medieval, his record collection is vast and varied, and plays just as large a part in his music and his life as his history.

It's the combination of the two which informs his songwriting and, more recently, 'Found & Lost', his new album. Technically, it's not his first – in 1995, he released an album called 'FLICKER'. But 'Found & Lost' is a belated re-introduction to his music and world. Its ten wistful songs merge rock and folk, upbeat anthems with reflective melancholy. More than that, they brim with genuine passion and a desire to capture what he terms "the big picture" – something that not only speaks a universal truth on a personal level, but also personal truths on a universal level. For Waldner, music is a chance to ask unanswerable questions, but he also knows that it's entertainment, that

it needs to come “from the heart and hips, not only the head.”

Waldner’s music certainly strikes that balance, but remains, like the person behind it, unflinchingly honest and personal, something which he traces back to when he first heard Nick Cave’s 1992 album, ‘Henry’s Dream’. “My songwriting changed after hearing that album,” he explains. “I was a late bloomer with my first serious relationship in my twenties. Up to that point, I’d been too shy and isolated in my life. I hadn’t lived enough and as a result the writing wasn’t there. After the bad break-up of that relationship, I went into an abyss. When I came out again, my writing blossomed. And that album came out soon afterwards, so it was all part of the process.”

Having previously fronted two Toronto bands – The Frontier and The Margraves – Waldner decided to release ‘FLICKER’ as a solo artist. Although there’s been a large gap in time between that album and this one, he never stopped writing. Not only that, but he’s incredibly versatile, and has written in many different styles, from punk to art rock to tender ballads to oddball Leonard Cohen-meets-Tom Waits waltzes, all with genuine spirit and conviction.

‘Found & Lost’, then, presents just one side of him musically. From the driven self-belief and encouragement of opener ‘Going Up Against Goliath’, the delicate melody and harmonies of ‘Heaven Only Knows’, the sad, searching disillusionment of the title track through to the epic, plaintive closer ‘This Wonderful Pain’, it’s an album with a full and rounded vision. That’s perhaps the most important point – in this day and age of MP3s and short attention spans, Waldner has crafted a cohesive and coherent album, not just in terms of the narrative of the songs, but right through to the artwork, which he directed himself. Its release marks the start of what looks like a heavily prolific period for the singer.

“I was writing more and more and more,” he says, “and I was just wondering ‘What am I doing with all of this? *Why* am I doing all this? I’ve got to put something out.’ Just a few years ago, I felt I’d go crazy if I didn’t do something about my growing catalogue of songs. It was like a dam. I needed to open up the gates or something would break.” So Waldner went through the many demos he’d written and carefully selected the songs that would come to make up ‘Found & Lost’. “I felt that ‘FLICKER’ was a bit disjointed,” he explains, “so I decided on ten songs that fit together more cohesively.”

Now that those ten songs are here, the door is wide open. Waldner has already written two more albums since, and plenty more songs on top of that. ‘Found & Lost’ truly is just the tip of the iceberg. Waldner is adamant he doesn’t want to be chained to just one genre, so what comes next will probably be drastically different. But what won’t change is the passionate fire that fuels it, that desperate need to commit parts of himself – his thoughts, his feelings, his history, his roots, his emotions – to tape.

“I’ve always felt the urge to write,” he says. “I’ve spent all these years writing all these songs. I waited and waited, and now it’s time.”

written by Mischa Pearlman