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SEVEN MARY THREE

Jason Ross: Singer/songwriter/guitar

Thomas Juliano: Guitar

Casey Daniel: Bass

Giti Khalsa: Drums

“Everything I thought I wanted in this world has got me turned upside down”

Seven Mary Three’s *day&nightdriving*, their sixth album (and first for the Bellum/ICON label), represents a return to the band’s original motivation – to make music for themselves, unbound by expectations or constraints. The group, founded by singer/songwriter Jason Ross while a student at the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, VA, released *Churn* in 1994, an album they recorded in the basement. The single, “Cumbersome,” picked up local radio airplay, leading to a deal with Mammoth Records, and a platinum-plus major-label debut in *American Standard*, for which they re-recorded most of the songs on *Churn*. That instant success was both a blessing and a curse, according to Ross.

“We were under a microscope right away,” he explains. “We hadn’t even decided on who we were and we were already being identified as this grunge-rock band.”

If Jason Ross is a grunge singer/songwriter, then so are Bruce Springsteen, Tom Petty, Richard Buckner and Sam Beam of Iron & Wine. . On *day&nightdriving*, produced by Brian Paulson (Wilco, Son Volt, Beck, Uncle Tupelo and Slint’s influential cult classic *Spiderland*) Ross delivers a compelling set of songs that lives up to its dichotomous title. The album combines surging, dark, rock anthems like the first single “Last Kiss,” the ringing Gaelic guitars of “Was a Ghost” and the heavy swagger of “Break the Spell,” with the Americana roots feel of the country-flavored swamp stomp “Dreaming Against Me” and the twangy slide guitar on “Upside Down.” The album also boasts soulful contemplative songs like “Hammer and a Stone,” the after-hours drinking ballad “Strangely at Home Here” and the domestic meditations of “She Wants Results” and “Dead Days in the Kitchen.”

For those only familiar with Seven Mary Three from the hit “Cumbersome,” they will be surprised by the band’s new direction. It’s an album about reconciling a career in a rock group with home life, and balancing commitments to band mates with those of family, in a highly personal, reflective, yet raw and honest work.

Unlike past releases, *day&nightdriving* was recorded over the course of a year without label pressures or expectations. “The album started with me and my guitar,” explains Ross, who demo-ed most of the songs in his home studio in Chapel Hill, NC, where he lives with his wife, a writer and professor at the University of North Carolina, and children.

“Thomas [Juliano, Seven Mary Three guitarist] and I would work through much of the material, fleshing out parts, moments and textures,” continues Ross. “Our agenda for making this record was very different from the last few. We let the songs dictate the style. Sometimes I’d just sit down, hit the record button, play a half-hour and that would be the genesis of the song. Once we had the songs in a good place, we brought Casey and Giti to North Carolina to lay down tracks at Mitch Easter’s studio.”

Among its many themes, *day&nightdriving* deals with the contradictions of a rock lifestyle a decade-plus after the fact. “Last Kiss,” the lead-off track and first single, could just as soon be about Ross’ fellow Seven Mary Three members as another person, its lyrics wracked with guilt, self-incrimination and the need to move on.

“Music was always an outlet to express unresolved melancholy and anger,” he says. “whether misplaced or not.” “Love is easy. Relationships are hard. The first kiss is easy. Forgiving somebody for kissing someone else is hard. You can’t live in the past; you have to keep moving forward. I’ve wanted to walk away from this band several times, but there was always something bringing me back, like gravity. I can’t get away from the orbit.”

More introspective songs like “Hammer and a Stone” and “Strangely at Home Here” confront the loneliness of being away from your family, as well as how the stage can turn into a home away from home, the fans forming an alternative, if transient, substitute for the real thing.

“Can you be a great musician as well as a great husband and father?” Ross poses the rhetorical question. “Are you willing to sacrifice relationships for your art?”

The pleading histrionics of “Break the Spell” and the quietly strummed “Dead Days in the Kitchen” are stylistically different, but both are about keeping relationships, with family and colleagues, fresh and vibrant... not taking them for granted.

“From the dead days in the kitchen to the best ones in the bedroom,” sings Ross, playing again to the album’s contrasting themes of day and night, and reinventing the ordinary as extraordinary.

“I always felt there was a switch that turned on and off between me playing with the band or being at home with my family,” he says. “I’m simply trying to find within all this static and distortion, some of which I’ve created myself, something holy, natural and real. I’m not looking for sympathy. It’s more a self-examination. I want to write from where I am right now, and continue to improve. I’ve discovered more music since selling a million records than I did in the 10 years between when I started listening and when I formed the band.”

Seven Mary Three have come a long way in the 12 years since breaking out with a platinum debut and a hit single, but in many ways, *day&nightdriving* takes them back to the beginning, this time with the cumulative knowledge of a veteran band and songwriter.

“I feel liberated,” admits Ross. “I couldn’t have written these songs when I was 24. I thought I could, but I really couldn’t, having not gone through these experiences myself. I feel like I’m just beginning as a songwriter.”

For Seven Mary Three, *day&nightdriving* is the start of the next chapter, and the story is far from over.

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