

Rocky Votolato True Devotion

Seattle musician Rocky Votolato is a soft-spoken, very kind, very hard-working father of two, born in rural Texas and raised in the Pacific Northwest indie scene (where he fronted the acclaimed rock band Waxwing). In his decade-plus life as a songwriter and musician he has sought to articulate something essential about life, writing songs that seem to have been scratched into a boxcar wall by a worn-out and lonesome ghost. His gravelly, sandpaper smooth voice and introspective lyrics mark him as that most rare of punk-rocker-turned-acoustic-troubadours: Votolato writes graceful, understated, human, unpretentious songs, demonstrating that simplicity is still a viable option for accomplished songwriters.

His last two releases, *Makers* (2006, Barsuk) and *The Brag & Cuss* (2007, Barsuk), found him exploring and paying homage to the folk and country music that shaped his early life in Texas (Alternative Press described the former as “the disc Ryan Adams keeps threatening to make but never quite delivers,” and Harp praised his “harmonies that would make Gram and Emmylou proud” on the latter). *True Devotion*, his new album, is a passionate, stripped down, and mostly acoustic reflection on moments from his current life; showing us where he is, where he has just come from, and where he’s going.

Where he’s going has to be better than where he’s coming from: In the years following the release of *The Brag & Cuss*, Votolato’s private lifelong battle with depression and anxiety started showing up in ways he could no longer hide from or disguise. Unable to write music or keep up the busy touring schedule that he’s been known for, he cut himself off from almost all outside contact (at one point barely leaving his apartment for over a year). Spending his time reading, studying existential philosophy, history, physics, and theology, he gradually overcame his demons. He began writing again, and through the making of the new album (recorded almost entirely on his own, and then mixed with the help of longtime production collaborator Casey Foubert [Sufjan Stevens, David Bazan] and old friend John Goodmanson [The Blood Brothers, Sleater-Kinney]) found some long sought-after understanding and peace of mind.

Walking the line between autobiographical fact and fiction, *True Devotion* is deceptively simple, peppering impressionistic narratives with moments of lyrical wisdom that can knock the wind out of you. The lead track, “Lucky Clover Coin,” is about his own near suicide, written for and about his relationship with his son; the metaphysical “What Waited for Me” delivers a posthumous message from a mother – dead by her own hand - who sees the mess her absence has made of her children’s lives. “Sparklers” caps side A of the album by shifting away from dark psychology and social-critique themes as what seems like another bleak song of death reveals itself as a song of appreciation and acceptance: “Letting go is the best way to hold on / So watch the light dance in the dark until it’s gone / Sparklers only burn / For so long.”

The rest of the record shifts toward new ground, exploring a sense of enlightenment and a hopeful search for innocence and eternal truths, unexpectedly reminiscent of early Cat Stevens. On “Sun Devil,” Votolato sings, “True devotion and true virtue / Will hold you at the center / As the waves crash over,” lines that point to a turning point for him and a recognition of new priorities and a focus on what matters most in his life. The Gandhi-referential album-closer “Where We Started” drives this point home again with a philosophical upshot echoed by the sonic space that ends the track and also opens the album.

And if the future, creating its own echoes, waits with more bouts of inner torment for him or for his listeners, then Rocky Votolato has delivered on *True Devotion* a batch of intensely honest songs that may also act as a reminder and shadowy roadmap back toward peace.

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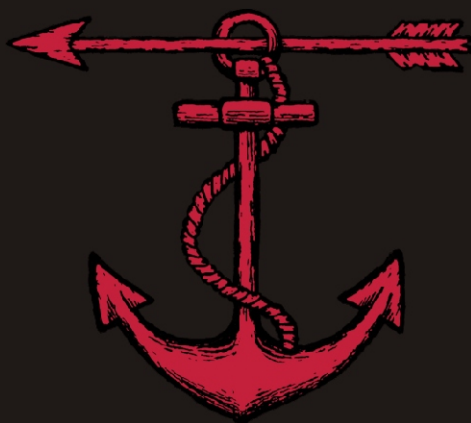
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Rocky Votolato True Devotion



1. LUCKY CLOVER COIN
2. FRAGMENTS
3. RED RIVER
4. EYES LIKE STATIC
5. SPARKLERS
6. INSTRUMENT
7. WHAT WAITED FOR ME
8. SUN DEVIL
9. DON'T BE ANGRY
10. WHERE WE STARTED



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