

ROYAL CANOE BIO - WAVER

Royal Canoe doesn't sound anything like 'Royal Canoe'. The name elicits thoughts of pine trees, plaid jackets and stomp-clap-whoas. "We've always hoped that once people actually hear us and see all of the synths on stage that the band name can just become an empty vessel to fill with the music we make," says singer, Matt Peters.

On *Waver*, their newest collection of songs, Royal Canoe are steering that vessel into new terrain. The sun-flared polaroid life of previous albums is exchanged for a miraged-out, ominous landscape. The band still has their kaleidoscopic, beat-driven heart, but these songs play with the absurdity of modern life. When truth is optional, when the most volatile people have the most power, when reality becomes irrational - what do you anchor to?

Creating the album felt like a reset - an exercise in following the seed of inspiration to its end point before deconstructing and rebuilding. "Whenever we begin working on a new album we throw everything out, even if it worked last time, just so we have no chance to rest on our laurels," says Peters, "On *Waver* we set out to create leaner arrangements and clearer melodies - less between us and the listener." They wanted to mine new corners of their sound and find new places to go.

After all, Royal Canoe's music has already taken them a lot of places. Around the world to play over 400 shows from Kiev to California, on tours with Alt-J and Bombay Bicycle Club, to major festivals like Bonaroo, Iceland Airwaves, and Osheaga and to Atlanta to work with Ben Allen (Animal Collective, Gnarls Barkley, Deerhunter). Their records have received critical acclaim: a nomination for Alternative Album of the Year at the Junos, Best Independent Album at the Western Canadian Music Awards and love from music press and devoted fans the world over. They wrote music for and performed a musical version of Shakespeare's *Richard II* and performed their sophomore album in its entirety with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra.

But all these journeys lead back to Winnipeg, where the songs taking shape had a new tone. Sonically, *Waver* rifles through a treasure trove of sounds from pop, rock, R&B and hip-hop. There's expansive synth walls, obtuse guitar solos, beautiful organ lines, all tied together with a deep rhythmic interplay between the bass, drums and electronics. This time around, everything is centred around the vocals and lyrics, mixed at the forefront and more vulnerable than ever. "As we continued to peel back the layers, the lyrics struck a more personal tone, but the things we found ourselves reacting to were less nostalgic than on previous records," says Peters. These songs started to become the anchor - the sign-posts marking their journey through this new scenery.

There's "RAYZ", the album's lead single with a tender R&B-adjacent core struggling to find some light in the darkness. "What's Left in the River" is a tidal wave of sound that paints a picture of the world starting again. "Don't" is an attempt to find something to hold onto in a sea of anxiety and panic. And "Ashes, Ashes" is an off-kilter stroll through a dystopian world, featuring a verse from Chicago's Nnamdi Ogbonnaya.

So, what do you anchor to? When the stakes are apocalyptic, what room is left for the personal?

"Room or not, you can't stop feeling, reacting, or rejecting the urge to go numb," says Peters. "You get together with the people you care about and you find a little stability. For us, continuing to make albums and write songs is how we organize our response to this question." Royal Canoe has once again filled their empty vessel with sonic snapshots from this washed-out place. "We hope listeners might feel that odd camaraderie in these songs that you sometimes find in other people's photographs."