

Blue October - *Approaching Normal*

On the new Blue October album, *Approaching Normal*, Justin Furstenfeld, moves his band forward into confident new territory as a songwriter and as a storyteller. Steve Lillywhite, the producer synonymous with U2 and five-time Grammy Award winner guided the way and the result is an album that breaks the mold of whatever anyone may think Blue October is.

Lillywhite's first attraction to Blue October was *the voice*. "For me, it's always the voice that gets me first because my opinion on a voice never changes. There are singers and there are expressionists and Justin is both," says Steve, who quickly adds that just as important is the artistry, "Their music really touches people in a way that the music of great artists do. There is bond of passion and trust between artist and audience."

"Working with Steve has always been my dream and I learned so much from him...like less is more." Justin comments, "I was like a painter that did not know how to paint. It's quite a new step trusting someone with your vision...but hey it's Steve Lillywhite and I trusted him completely."

Approaching Normal is the follow-up to the band's platinum selling breakthrough album, *Foiled*. Released in 2006, the first single, "Hate Me," a song that offers a stepping stone from regret to hope, became the surprise modern rock anthem of the year spending 16 weeks in the Top 10 with five weeks at #2. The crossover success of the follow-up single, "Into the Ocean," propelled the album sales well into the million plus territory in North America alone.

Having a platinum selling album creates pressure and as a songwriter, Justin felt it. Lillywhite helped him along the way by encouraging him to work more deliberately at his craft "He pushed me as a writer. I would have a song written and Steve would say, 'that part is boring.' No one has ever said that to me before. Steve would tell me to sit down and work on it and I never did that before. I re-wrote melodies and lyrics that didn't make sense and now they are gorgeous. He pushed me to be better and that inspired me and I accomplished more than I would of on my own."

Approaching Normal is a journey; a song cycle that begins with "Weight of the World," a song that made its first appearance as a spoken word poem on the band's brilliant live CD and DVD "Argue with a Tree." The new version, fully orchestrated by the band, finds Justin, as himself, at the peak of his youthful destruction. *I blackout in the room again, a busted lip and broken skin. I wake up in the bathroom and dare not bother asking why the mirror's cracked and all I see are shards of glass inside of me. There's voices there to dare me, my father's here to scare me.*"

"*Foiled* was about all of this crap that I had to get off of my chest," states Justin, "I'm sick of being the victim. I want to be a strong, confident individual," and that is exactly what Track 2, "Say It," a song about empowerment and gaining

confidence is all about. The same confidence can be heard again and again throughout the album on songs like, "Blue Skies" and "Should Be Loved." but not before the album turns angry and vindictive with the powerful first single, "Dirt Room." The song is an all out aggro-rocker with a lyrical metaphor about not allowing yourself to be taken advantage of, protecting your family and standing up for what is yours.

"Dirt Room" also marks the point on the album, when the listener is slapped into noticing just how fierce Blue October is as a band. On this song, Jeremy Furstenfeld (drums) and Matt Noveskey (bass) lay down a metallic rhythm that doesn't quit while C.B. Hudson III adds the guitars that drive the band into alt-metal-garage-punk terrain while Justin scream-sings the vivid and graphic storyline. The surprise comes when multi-instrumentalist, Ryan Delahoussaye, kicks it all up with a violin solo that turns the hot up a few degrees more. Throughout the album the musicianship of the band never falters and always amazes...whatever pallet is required...delicate, ethereal, fiery, rollicking, dramatic, you name it and the band always delivers.

The centerpiece of the album is "Kangaroo Cry/Picking Up the Pieces." The two songs cross-faded to tell the story of a soldier's heart-wrenching goodbye to his girl on the eve of being deployed into active duty and then the how-and-why of the picking up the pieces of their broken life upon his return.

"My Never," is, perhaps, the most anticipated song on the album since it's introduction last summer during the Stephenie Meyer/Justin Furstenfeld *Breaking Dawn* Concert tour. Meyer, a Blue October fan and bestselling author of the *Twilight* saga, surprised Justin when she invited him to join her theater tour and help her introduce the release of the fourth and final book of her uber-popular series.

On the *Breaking Dawn* stage, Justin sang acoustic versions of his songs and Stephenie would talk about how they roused her writing, "As a writer, I'm always looking for music that can bring out the emotions that I need for the story. While there are many musicians that can recall to me times in the past where I might have felt sadness or rage or infatuation, it's very rare to find a song that can actually put me in that emotion, rather than just reminding me of it. There is empathetic power in Blue October's music--the listener doesn't just sympathize with the feeling of the song, the listener has no choice but to feel the song as if the emotion was his/her own."

Says Justin of the experience, "I was taken back by her invitation and I am equally motivated by her writing and her fans. It showed me that you don't have to be broken to be a Blue October fan."

Along the *Normal* journey there are songs that break the Blue October mold. The philosophically happy, "Jumprope" and the lullaby, "Blue Does," were both written

for a new life, Justin's baby girl. "I don't want to write sad songs anymore. I am a little older and I have a child and that allows me to see the beauty and the mystery of life. I want to show my fans that it is OK to be happy."

And then, just as everything seems settled into a comfortable suburban life, the *Approaching Normal* song cycle wraps with a shocker, "The End." This tale of an unstable man self-tortured by jealousy is as frightening as any song ever recorded. You won't find it on the "clean" edit version of the album...it is that scary. "It's the dark and quiet unexpected stories on this album, the explicit, the raw and, yes, it is the crazy that deserve a home also...I've just always been fascinated with what people think they can get away with...what in their brain is making them say 'that's OK.'"

"What is normal?" concludes Justin, "everyone's sense of normal is at risk over something, happiness or sadness or, god forbid, madness. Blue October is a mood. Whether you listen to the words or not, the music sets a tone and as for the lyrics, well, you either love it or hate it."

"I think that we have made an album that is an artistic statement," adds Lillywhite, "it's a journey, but it also checks the boxes of commercial potential. I really love the record."

Blue October *Approaching Normal*

Produced by Steve Lillywhite

Engineered by C.J. Eiriksson

Track Listing

1. Weight of the World
2. Say It
3. Dirt Room
4. Been Down
5. My Never
6. Should Be Loved
- 7-8. Kangaroo Cry/Picking Up The Pieces
9. Jumprope
10. Blue Skies
11. Blue Does
12. Bonus Track – The End
12. Edited Version Bonus Track – Graceful Dancing

Band Members

Justin Furstenfeld – Vocals, Guitars

Jeremy Furstenfeld – Drums

C.B. Hudson III – Guitars

Ryan Delahoussaye – Violin, Mandolin, Keys

Matt Noveskey - Bass

