

# JOSH RITTER

**He thought he was cursed—until a mummy showed the way home**

JOSH RITTER ALBUMS HAVE BEEN FUELED BY ONE dominant emotion—and for the new *So Runs the World Away*, that emotion was terror. “For the first time in my life, I felt, ‘I don’t belong here,’” Ritter says. “I was thinking it was time for me to do something else, to move on to something other than music. I felt like a phony, and that terrified me. It was an awful feeling.”

Those are unlikely words from a man whose songwriting has been likened to that of Bob Dylan, Bruce Springsteen and Leonard Cohen. Beginning with his 1999 self-titled debut, the native of



Marcello Ercolani

16 M MUSIC & MUSICIANS MAY 2010

Moscow, Idaho, has recorded a series of albums steeped in vivid characters and literary allusions, shot through with a heartland vibe. Ironically, it was a song titled “The Curse” that lifted Ritter’s sense of gloom.

“I was lying in bed when that song came along,” Ritter explains. “After months of being unable to write anything I was happy with, the idea came to me for a story about a mummy and an archeologist who fall in love. That song gave me confidence. It became the door in the wall to the rest of the album.”

Another song that lent direction was “Folk Bloodbath,” a spooky, ambitious ballad that gathers a litany of famous folk-song characters and then kills them off. “I love the characters in all those folk songs, whether it’s Barbara Allen, or Delia, or Stagger Lee, or Louis Collins,” Ritter says. “I wanted them to all meet up. I was sort of like the puppet master, the kid who was going to crash everyone into everything.

And this album, as a whole, is about that—it’s an album where bad stuff is going to happen to people. It wasn’t always going to feel tragic, but it was going to feel like I was building things and then burning them down.”

Ritter opted to set “Folk Bloodbath” not to a standard folk guitar accompaniment, but in haunting sonic textures. Indeed, the bulk of the album features layered instrumentation that imbues the material with an epic, somber quality.

“I wanted something that felt like big ships in the night,” Ritter explains. “Those ships are amazingly quiet for how big they are. I enjoy any music that makes me feel that way, whether it’s rock ‘n’ roll, Beethoven, Count Basie or Gillian Welch. I love the feeling that you’re swimming along the top of something that’s miles deep.”

—Russell Hall

MUSIC & MUSICIANS MAY 2010 M 17

AS SEEN IN: MAY 2010 M MUSIC & MUSICIANS MAGAZINE

