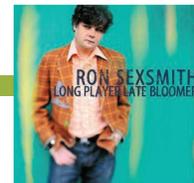


INDIE SCENE



RON SEXSMITH

Getting his career back with the help of an unlikely collaborator



RON SEXSMITH DOESN'T COME across as your typical rock star. Cherubic and looking perhaps half of his 47 years, he's notoriously shy and insecure. So what is this sensitive soul doing hanging around with Bob Rock, a guy best known for producing the hard-and-heavy likes of Metallica and Mötley Crüe? "When Bob came on board, I started to get excited again," Sexsmith recalls. "I told my manager, 'We have to make this happen.' I just wanted to do it Bob's way—whatever musicians, whatever studio." Rock came to produce Sexsmith's 11th and latest album, *Long Player Late Bloomer*, after a chance meeting at the Canadian Juno awards. "Know any good producers?" Sexsmith asked Rock, and the two were off and running.

Still, few expected a singer and songwriter with a love of pop music who embraces crooners like Bing Crosby, Harry Nilsson and Charlie Rich to find common ground with a producer whose résumé is heavy on the metal. But this seemingly odd couple bonded over their mutual admiration for the Kinks, Deep Purple and other icons of '60s British rock. "That's

where my head was," Sexsmith says. "The album is not all doom and gloom, because the songs are up-tempo. I like when that happens—when the lyrics are at odds with the music and it creates that tension. Most of this record is very disillusioned, and yet it was cathartic. I felt that my career had gotten away from me, and I didn't know how to get it back."

Sexsmith knew what he was getting with Rock—and it's precisely what he wanted. "Producers at that level tend to make records that are slicker than some would like, almost airbrushed or something," he observes, "but that's exactly what I wanted. I felt the songs would benefit from that powerful production and bigger approach." Still, Sexsmith didn't exactly hand over full control of his music to his new collaborator. He remained scrupulously dedicated to making certain his songs would stand up well no matter what production was applied to them. "I'm obsessed with it," he says. "I don't want to go into the studio unless I know I have good songs. I try to keep up the quality control!"

Sexsmith has been hailed for the quality of his songwriting ever since the

release of 1995's *Ron Sexsmith*—praise that he says only adds to his anxiety. "I put a lot of pressure on myself," he admits. "When the first album came out, I didn't know what to think. Because the label hated it at the time, I expected everyone would hate it—so when the critics got on board with that first one, it put pressure on me. I've tried to stay ahead of myself ever since, so when it comes time to make a record I'm not scrambling trying to write. Because I haven't had a real successful album, I feel each album is my first all over again. I'm a work in progress."

In fact, the release of *Long Player Late Bloomer* was delayed by more than a year due to prospective record labels' hesitation. Sexsmith eventually elected to release it through his own Ronboy Rhymes imprint. "When we were shopping the album, we were told it was too mainstream," he says. "I was thinking it isn't mainstream compared to what's considered mainstream these days. But I come from a more melodic time. The music I liked had nice melodies, and that's what I'm trying to do."

—Lee Zimmerman