

JEREMIE ALBINO Our Time In The Sun

When Jeremie Albino was a teenager, he started busking around Toronto, setting up along the boardwalk or on a street corner downtown, wherever he thought he might find some passersby. “Usually nobody was listening,” he says, “but occasionally one or two people would tell me it sounded great. They had places to be and things to do, but they would stop and listen for a little while. That kind of interaction felt very special to me, and that’s when I realized I really do love performing. That’s when I realized I could hold a listener’s interest and give something back to them.”

That experience set Albino on his path, and it showed him how much joy can be found in the simple act of connecting with a listener, whether it’s an entire crowd or just one person in that crowd. Since then, he has refined a vital and idiosyncratic mix of styles and sounds that are rooted in tradition but grasping toward the future: His songs are grounded in the gritty storytelling of classic country music, propelled by the rhythms of old-school R&B, played with the wild abandon of early rock ‘n’ roll, and sung with the deep feeling of southern soul. Thanks to his sweaty, livewire concerts, he has been steadily growing his audience from a few passersby to packed houses around Canada and the U.S. *Our Time In The Sun*, his soulful fourth solo album, sounds like the culmination of what he started out on the street corners of Toronto.

The title track showcases his remarkable range—emotionally, vocally, and stylistically. Anchored in a Stax rhythm section and punctuated with dramatic horns, it’s a dusty country-soul number about good love curdling into bad, but there’s none of the romantic recrimination that infects so many breakup songs. Rather, in his performance as much as in his lyrics, Albino conveys a warm generosity toward somebody who tried just as hard as he did to make it work. He’s the rare singer who’s always in the moment, taking nothing about the song or the melody or the lyrics for granted. And he brings the listener right into the moment with him. “I try to put my heart into everything,” he says. “There’s really no other way for me to do it. If I’m not putting everything into the song, then why would I even bother to sing it?”

As much as he loves performing and winning over listeners, Albino by his own admission has never felt that same connection to songwriting, but he made a breakthrough on *Our Time in the Sun*. Working with producer Dan Auerbach, he emerges as a sharp, observant songwriter who is quick with a clever turn of phrase and open to the emotional nuance of the stories he’s telling on “I Don’t Mind Waiting” and the raw “Struggling With The Bottle.” “I used to struggle with writing. Okay, I used to *hate* it. Whenever I needed to write new songs, I would just sit there for months toiling away.” When he signed with Auerbach’s Easy Eye Sound label, however, they spent hours and hours bouncing ideas off one another, their sessions becoming a masterclass on how to write a good, solid song.

“Something clicked right away,” says Albino, “and we ended up writing 4 or 5 songs a day. Before that, it would take me half a year to write 4 or 5 songs.” Auerbach brought in some of Nashville’s finest songwriters to share their wisdom, including Pat McLaughlin, Joe Allen, and Bobby Wood. “He told me, if you’re going to build a house, you need to call some carpenters. You need to bring in the experts who do it every day for a living. It’s the same way with songs. Some of those guys have been doing this since before I was born.”

Perhaps the most important lesson, he says, was to let the song come naturally rather than try to force it. It knows what it needs and will carry you in the right direction. “Rolling Down The 405” came to life during a break, when Albino and McLaughlin were messing around while Auerbach took a phone call. “The song came together so fast. I just started chugging on the guitar and singing lyrics off the top of my head... ‘Jimmy left me high and dry, rolling down the 401.’ It was originally the 401 because that’s one of the main highways around here. But 405 just sounded better.” Even Albino isn’t exactly sure, but he’s content to let them be whatever the listener needs them to be. He has a keen understanding of how to position a song between the specific and the universal, so that it will mean something slightly different to everybody who hears it. “The song grows from what you put into it.”

When they finally scheduled recording sessions for *Our Time In The Sun*, “Rolling Down The 405” was the first song they tracked with a band that included some of Nashville’s finest session players. “We played the demo for the guys in the room, and everybody just understood what it needed to be.” Together, they all crafted a breezy road song with the momentum of a classic rock song and the emotional resonance of classic soul—like a JJ Cale recording. “That was the most fun I’ve had making a record, and it set the tone for the rest of the sessions.”

They were often surprised by the directions these new songs would take. “Dinner Bell” opens with a swampy, funky breakdown like Tony Joe White, with Albino grunting and barking along to the rhythm track, then shifts into a kind of bayou psychedelia, punctuated by Auerbach’s anarchic guitarwork. (The song contains one of his wildest solos committed to tape.) “Dan has a great record collection, and when we were working, he would pull out stuff for inspiration. He put on this old gospel-funk record, and the rhythm of it was so infectious. We started writing this tune about working like a dog your whole life and feeling ground down and wondering what life is all about. It’s me telling a story, but it’s also me telling my story in the music I’ve grown up listening to and the music I’m just now discovering.”

Albino took that excitement back home to Canada with him, and for once he’s looking forward to writing some more songs. “I feel like I grew so much just being in a room with those guys, and I’m jazzed because it shows in the songs. And I feel like I learned so much about myself and what I’m capable of. This record is the most myself I think I’ve ever sounded. I’m more comfortable in my own skin now than ever before.”

