

LONE STAR MUSIC

Artist of the month

Radney Foster

On this third CD for Dualtone, Texas singer/songwriter Radney Foster continues to take chances. Introspective yet freewheeling, *This World We Live In* combines Foster's gift for literate songwriting with the rough and tumble sound of a man who's done battle with the complexities of life.

The set reunites him with producer Darrell Brown and engineer Niko Bolas, the team behind Foster's critically acclaimed *See What You Want To See*. "Darrell and Niko are two of the most creative individuals I know," says Foster. "And we're like brothers, so we hold nothing back. The trust and freedom that brings to a project is immeasurable."

After listening to the group of songs Foster had written for the record, they decided to do things a little differently. Instead of hiring the same Nashville studio musicians, they called in some friends: Waddy Wachtel and Charley Drayton (members of Keith Richard's side project, the X-pensive Winos) along with Wallflowers' keyboardist Rami Jaffe and legendary bassist Bob Glaub (Jackson Browne, C.S.&Y, Warren Zevon). "Those guys come by the roots-rock feel pretty honest," laughs Foster. "I knew they were great musicians, and I figured if I knew the songs well enough upfront, they could just fall in. I wanted to keep it simple. By going to Los Angeles to record, time and money were naturally limited—but it was a good limitation. Sometimes I think we do too much just because we can. Instead, we went in and cut the tracks in two days."

The arrangements were banged out in the studio, and that live, old-school feeling comes across in the tracks. "We didn't go in with any pre-conceived notions about how each song would sound," says Foster. "We just did what best serves each song."

"It is a very rootsy record, but the title cut is Darrell and me trying our very best to write something like Jimmy Webb or Burt Bacharach would have written in 1968," Foster continues. "Because I love that stuff! The nice thing about doing a record from an independent perspective is that I get to have songs like 'This World We Live In' next to stripped down country-R&B things like 'New Zip Code' and roots-rock-meets-Buck Owens things like 'Big Idea.'"

It's not hard to pick out Foster's influences; everything from the aforementioned Owens and Webb, to the vintage pop of the Beatles and the truth and grit of Texas troubadours Guy Clark and Townes Van Zandt. Yet while you can hear those ghosts in the grooves, the collection is all Radney Foster.

This World We Live In is just the latest addition to Foster's catalog. Though he's been writing songs since he was seven-years-old—"Little did my mother know that it would haunt her son for the rest of his natural life," he jokes—he first gained attention in the late 80's as one half of Foster and Lloyd. The duo released three groundbreaking albums, yielding hits "Crazy Over You," "Sure Thing," "What Do You Want From Me This Time?" and "Fair Shake," and showing a generation of youngsters that Country music could be hip without losing sight of the roots. You may have heard the famous quip about the Velvet Underground: Not a lot of people bought their records, but everyone that did started a band. The same could be said of Foster and Lloyd; many artists in Nashville

claim it was the first F&L record that convinced them to move to town.

As influential as his work with Foster and Lloyd was, as a solo artist Foster has gone on to create a body of work with the same kind of impact, proving that you can have mainstream success without selling your soul. His hits—“Nobody Wins,” “Just Call Me Lonesome,” “Easier Said Than Done”—along with crowd favorites like “I’m In,” “Texas In 1880” and “Folding Money,” marry pop smarts and roots credibility with a profound insight into the human condition.

This World We Live In carries on that tradition. While his catchy melodies have made his songs radio favorites, it’s the theme found in songs like “Kindness of Strangers”—finding redemption in the unlikeliest of places—that make his songs resonate with listeners. It’s also the reason that commercial Country acts like Keith Urban, Kenny Chesney, Brooks and Dunn and Sara Evans have sought out and recorded his songs.

“Radney Foster’s songs carry enough guts, depth and soul to deliver a knock out punch to any serious listener,” says fellow Texan and co-writer Pat Green. Indeed, Foster has become sort of an older brother to the artists on the Texas music scene. He’s also written with Cory Morrow and Roger Creager for their projects and is currently producing the Randy Rogers Band, a group known for their blend of roadhouse-rock fervor and smart songwriting. Their first collaboration, RollerCoaster, led to a deal with Mercury Records, and their debut for the label is set for release this summer. His co-write with Jack Ingram on this set, “Never Gonna Fly,” is a classic piece of Lone Star songwriting, simple and true, as if it were an outtake from Guy Clark’s Old Number One.

This World We Live In’s first single, “Prove Me Right,” was co-written with Stephanie Delray, another Texan and frequent collaborator of Foster’s. The song is an example of what Foster does best—for all it’s honky tonk swagger and dusty imagery, the song is about hope, pure and simple; that love is there if you can look deep enough and believe it.

And then there’s the set’s opener, “Drunk On Love.” On top of a slippery Stones-ish groove, Radney sings “Baby, take my car keys, put ‘em in your pocket, Lord knows I got no business with ‘em.” What starts as a sloshy drinking song is really a sly ode to giving in to the goofiness of love.

“The best records I’ve done are about big transitions, things that have happened in my life that made me dig around in my soul,” says Foster. This CD reflects that, and in a lot of ways, “Half of My Mistakes” is its central song—‘You can lean too hard on regrets/ But I don’t recommend it/ ‘Cause half the good things in life came from half of my mistakes.’

That’s the beauty of This World We Live In. It pinpoints those messy parts of human emotion, but in the end it’s about letting go—with the faith that the tide is going to hold you up and carry you along