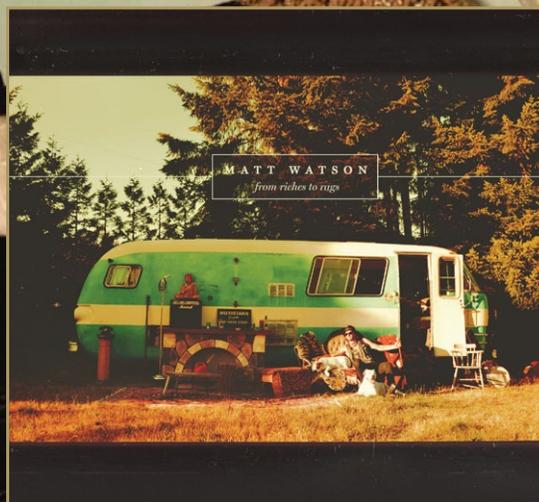


# MATT WATSON

*from riches to rags*



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*Track Listing*

1. LOW
2. THE HONEYPOT
3. DESERT
4. I WENT OUT
5. NON-STOP BOOGIE
6. TIMES HAVE CHANGED
7. WOUNDED THIEF
8. ELIZABETH
9. HAMMERIN NAILS
10. SICK OF YOU
11. SUNDAY TRAIN
12. COURAGE MY HEART

**It could be said that the song “Sick of You”, a ballsy, bluesy self-penned tune, could be Matt Watson’s theme song.**

One of the wonderfully gritty tracks from his debut solo album, *Riches to Rags*, the song encapsulates years of frustration as the Toronto native has strived to carve out a career as a musician and songwriter.

After many years as a frontman for a string of Toronto bands that were full of possibility but which also could never seem to get out of the blocks, the 35-year-old moved to British Columbia for a fresh start and a chance to break the shackles of bad luck and pressure he felt encumbered by.

The resulting album is a concerted effort to make music that not only represents the fruition of all of Watson’s hard work and dedication, but which is also an unapologetic piss take on some of the vagaries of life, family and relationships.

“Sick of You” is the epitome of this damn-the-torpedoes approach, as it is a bluntly honest examination of Watson’s ongoing struggle to preserve his own artistic dreams in the face of other people’s expectations.

“It’s hard when you really believe in something with every bit of your soul and everybody else thinks it’s a waste of time,” Watson said.

“This song and the whole vibe of this album is about taking control of your own life. You have to take responsibility for yourself, for your own hopes and dreams.”

That dream began at age 17 when Watson moved from his suburban Mississauga home to the club scene of Toronto, playing in a host of rock and punk bands, honing his craft and living the life of a struggling musician, taking a string of day jobs, including owning a wine business and building sets for MuchMusic. His last band broke up in 2009 and he walked away from the business and tried his hand at another form of entertainment – reality TV.

He and wife Kate were the featured couple on a 13-episode season of the HGTV series *Marriage Under Construction*.

“It was about a new couple as they fixed up their first house. Over the years I learned carpentry to pay the bills. So we were the couple on the show and I was also the contractor. What I figured out very quickly is that there is very little reality in reality TV,” he said with a chuckle, adding that what he truly gleaned from the experience was the realization that he had allowed his musical dreams to be overshadowed by external pressures and compromises.

But, no more.

“I realized I was going down the wrong path and I decided to pack the car and move with my wife and dogs to the west coast. It was a place where I spent my teenaged summers. I am a Torontonion and al-

ways will be, but there is a real special inspiration that you get from the mountains and the ocean.”

He landed near Gibsons, famous for the Canadian television series *The Beachcombers*, but also where his uncle Ray Fulber has his own recording studio. This is where *Riches to Rags* was created and recorded. And Fulber is also the man who inspired his young nephew to take up the rock and roll life in the first place, when he was a member of punk-pioneer Art Bergmann’s band in the late 1970s and 1980s.

“He was the bass player and my aunt Sue [Susann Richter] was the keyboardist. They met in the band. It was always frustrating to have a recording studio in the family but not be able to use it because it was so far away. So at 35, much to my wife’s chagrin, we dropped everything, moved out here and did the album,” he said.



“Art’s band was pretty notorious for partying. Whenever they were on tour in Ontario they would come and stay with us. So I have memories of sneaking into my own room in the morning with the drummer passed out in my bed, grabbing my clothes and dressing for school. We would go to their gigs when the t-shirts were hanging down to our knees. I saw all of this first hand. And I have to say is it’s why I still have this whiskey drinking, cigarette smoking image of rock and roll.”

With that authentic punk pedigree, Watson also has a serious grounding in the blues thanks to impromptu lessons from Vancouver blues master Tim Hearsy. On those summer excursions to Uncle Ray and Aunt Susann’s place in his late teens, Watson developed an appreciation for the Blues through his friendship with Hearsy, something that is incredibly evident in the songs on *Riches to Rags*.

“He would teach me the fundamentals of guitar and then the Blues and whenever I would come out west we would hang out and work on little things. On this project I obviously thought of him as the session guy. And the music itself is not straightforward blues although you can definitely hear the influences. We call it post-apocalyptic hillbilly blues,” Watson ex-

plained, adding that his uncle played bass on the album, Pat Haavisto played drums, and his aunt did background vocals.

The tracks were essentially recorded live off the floor (at StraitSound, co-owned by Richter) with few overdubs or repetition required. Many of the ‘scratch’ tracks, especially acoustic guitar and vocals, which were basically just laid down to provide a guide to the other players, were actually kept and made it to the final product.

“It was everyone’s initial fresh take on the songs. We didn’t overthink it. We knew we had the right take when it gave us a little rush on playback.”

The lead-off track and first single, “Low”, is about an archetypal love/hate ... or more accurately, lust/hate song.

“It’s about the person who can push your buttons to piss you off like no-one else, but who call also push your buttons to turn you on like no-one else. We all have this person in our life that is our kryptonite, but who we can’t seem to stay away from.”

Then there are the more groove-oriented songs like “Non-Stop Boogie”, which is a raucous, unabashed good-time tune.

“It’s a party song. Nothing more complicated than that. It’s saying ‘you know what, it’s okay to just get up and dance sometimes.’”

“Wounded Thief” is another introspective but powerful song about the break-up of Watson’s last band and how that sort of disentanglement can be even more painful than most other personal losses.

“It can be applicable to any relationship, but for me it was about this band. When you play in a band, those are some of the closest relationships you have – sometimes closer than your spouse. And when it ends, it just ends. You never see the people again; you never talk to them again. There is always so much stuff that goes unsaid and unresolved when those sorts of relationships go badly. That’s what this song is about.”

Songs flow out of Watson as a stream of consciousness, and like the way he recorded *Riches to Rags*, he doesn’t allow himself to overthink or overanalyze what he is writing. The music is very much of the moment and in the moment. There is no artifice, no calculation no formulas. *Riches to Rags* is a portrait of a musician as his most nakedly open, honest and fearless.

“This is me putting myself out there, warts and all. It’s real music. It’s off the grid, it’s balls to the wall. I have put everything I am, everything I have creatively and emotionally into this. And I can’t wait to share it with music fans from coast to coast.”

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