**FIRST COMES THE NIGHT**

**CHRIS ISAAK**

For Chris Isaak, first comes the song.

And for *First Comes The Night* -- Isaak’s stunning first album of new material in six years -- this gifted singer-songwriter and bandleader is bringing us a bumper crop of strong and intriguing songs from which to choose. “There was no mission for this album other than to follow the songs,” Chris Isaak explains, and in terms of songwriting, the floodgates really opened this time. “My last release was *Beyond The Sun* -- my tribute to Sun Records with a lot of covers -- so this time around I had a *lot* of new material that I was thrilled to record. My manager always tells me, `We need more songs.’ This time, even she realized she’s creating a songwriting monster, and had to beg me to stop.”

*First Comes The Night* fittingly represents a number of firsts for Chris Isaak, who recently signed on to become a judge for the first time on *The X Factor Australia*. Of his new television gig Down Under, Isaak explains, “I *love* Australia, and if you’re going to look for stars, I can’t think of a more beautiful place on Earth to start looking.” As for *First Comes The Night*, this is the first time that Isaak has written and recorded so much in Nashville, Tennessee, a change in location he explored partly upon the suggestion of his friend Stevie Nicks. ”Somehow even I had some misconceptions about Nashville,” confesses Isaak. “You’d think a music guy who’s been in the business as long as I have would know better. I’m a huge fan of country music since I grew up listening to Hank Williams, Ernest Tubb and Buck Owens, and I know my country history well, but even I somehow forgot Nashville is --- and always been -- about more than just country.”

Indeed, in Nashville, Isaak found himself working with a number of new producers who helped show him how exciting a place to make music Nashville could be. “I worked on the album in Los Angeles along with Mark Needham who’s done great work with me over the years. Then I took some time to write and record in Nashville. I had the misconception that a producer in Nashville would be bringing in banjos and asking me what songs I had that were pure country. The truth is that great producers are great producers, and Nashville is so full of brilliantly talented people. I worked with Paul Worley who is a great producer, *period*, and he can go anywhere in the world and make great records like he’s done with the Dixie Chicks or Lady Antebellum. The same was true when I worked with Dave Cobb who’s been doing amazing work lately with Jason Isbell and many others. Their backgrounds are so deep and they’re into so much music, there was *no* reference I could make they would not know and respond to in a heartbeat.”

Similarly, in the Nashville tradition, Isaak also did more co-writing than usual, including working with some of the town’s talented songwriters. Before long, Isaak fell in love with the tremendous musical energy of Nashville. “It’s Music City – not just country city,” Isaak says. “At first you think of all the classic country artists, at least I do, but then you realize how many great records Roy Orbison, Elvis Presley and the Everly Brothers made there too. Great Rock & Roll came out of Nashville and great Soul music too. I think I bumped into more musicians in Nashville of every kind than anyplace else *ever*, and that gives you the feeling that music is alive and well. In Nashville, people are still excited to be playing and making records, as they should be. Literally, my cab driver was a drummer. The guy who sold me a shirt at Macy’s was a singer-songwriter. The guy at the health food store was a bass player. And I went to breakfast one morning, and saw Robert Plant. *Everywhere* you look is another potential bandmate.”

Yet for all this exciting collaboration, *First Comes The Night* is very much a great Chris Isaak album that features him at his best. For all the firsts, there’s a strong through-line that continues from Isaak’s earlier triumphs like *Silvertone* (1985), *Chris Isaak* (1986), *Heart Shaped World* (1989), *San Francisco Days* (1993), *Forever Blue* (1995) and *Always Got Tonight* (2002). “I guess you can make a drink with many ingredients, but if one is very strong, *that’s* what you taste,” says Isaak with a laugh. “For better or worse, I have a tendency to dominate because I have a big voice and some twisted ideas.”

For Isaak continuing to write and record is one of his best and least twisted ideas.

“People who love music still get excited for a great new song or a performance that connects,” he explains. “Making this album wasn’t a contractual obligation – it was a thrill and a privilege to be making music with so many great people. I know the business is tough and some people say it’s not a time to make records now, but I’m hooked. I love music so much. I don’t think, “I’m going to sell 40 million records.” I think, “How I’m going to make a hell of a record even if it’s for 40 people who just listen to it a million times. I think about it this way -- I’ve worked my whole life and never missed a gig in 30 something years. I want to do *this*, and for me, the thrill is *not* gone.”

In part because of his new position on *The X Factor Australia*, Isaak finds himself thinking back to his own path to stardom and the musicians who made that journey more meaningful. “When you’re 20, you just want to be in a band to make it,” says Isaak. “All these years later, I’ve never missed a tour or a date. And only now in the past ten years, I’ve realized the real prize isn’t how much money you make or the gold records. The *real* prize is the people you work with. That sounds like a Hallmark Card, and that might sound crazy to a 20 year old who just wants to get famous, but it ends up being true. I’ve seen tons of bands I know who make tons of money and they’re very unhappy people who don’t have a friend in the world when they’re on the road. I’ve always gone out on the road with people who I love and respect as musicians and as people. I don’t want to be onstage with anyone who I don’t like. I’m *not* that good an actor, and I have the movies to prove it. I feel lucky to play with my band. You’d think we’d be blasé by now, but the guys are excited to have a new record. We love playing together and we’re *still* trying to get it right.”

**FIRST COMES THE NIGHT:**

**SONG BY SONG WITH CHRIS ISAAK**

**FIRST COMES THE NIGHT**: I had this piece of rolling melody in my head, and the line, “That’s your stuff/I kept it just the way it was/It’s the only thing I got that’s left from us.” To me, it summed up how many people end up feeling when someone is gone, and they almost make a shrine. Even though I’m the writer, I often feel like an archaeologist with a brush on the ground trying to knock off the dust and figure out what this song is *really* about. Is it about a girl who’s dead or just gone? I realized this is about a relationship and the girl he’s still searching for. I brought what I had to two of the guys in my band -- Roly Salley and Scotty Plunkett -- to see what they’d bring to it. They helped bring “First Comes The Night” up to a bigger place. Thanks to them, this song has a dark, sad undertone, but happy possibilities too.

**PLEASE DON’T CALL**: I didn’t know that Natalie Hemby is this big Nashville songwriter, but I can see why – because she is absolutely fantastic. Writing with writers in Nashville ran the gamut. I sat with writers who just throw out any word that rhymes and I’d say, “I think I left something in my car” and *never* come back.

But then, you meet great writers like Natalie, and true collaboration just clicks. I write lyrics really fast and so does Natalie, but I won’t settle for something *just* because it rhymes, and she has that same dedication to getting every song and every word *right*.

**PERFECT LOVER**: “Perfect Lover” is my *homage* to Roy Orbison – “homage” is French for “rip-off.” Somehow “Perfect Lover” ended up as Orbinesque as anything I ever wrote, and I so wish Roy were still alive because I would be bothering him, saying, “Roy, this song is *perfect* for you.” Roy had all those great songs where love is tragic and hard, but then there’s a turnaround, like one of my favorites, “Leah.” I like how “Perfect Lover” ends on a positive note when the man in the song wakes up -- so it’s a song about bad dreams and happy endings. People may not hear it, but at the same time this is *also* my nod to ABBA, who I really loved, so the song has that big production and my friend Michelle Branch singing along so well.

**DOWN IN FLAMES**: In Nashville today, people often write in groups of three. I loved writing this one in a trio with Gordie Sampson and Caitlyn Smith. I’ve been kicking around the first line for a while about how “Kennedy got it in a Lincoln/Caesar got it in the back/Somebody told me Hank Williams died in his Cadillac.” I thought they might think it was too strange, but immediately Caitlyn came in with “Down In Flames” and Gordie came up with “Elvis died alone or did he?” which really made me laugh. As you can hear, we all had a *lot* of fun going “Down In Flames” together.

**REVERIE**: This song was written with Natalie Hemby and Michelle Branch. Natalie had a great piece of melody and that beautiful title “Reverie.” I love when you hear a word that describes something quickly and perfectly. This one’s about someone who makes love, but then shuts the door and is gone again emotionally. I came up with a line I like, “Wish you could see your face/You go someplace no one can touch you.” I’ve found that I love writing with women -- in this case Natalie and Michelle -- because they just have a different way of looking at the world. Michelle and I have worked together back to when people still thought she was a kid, but she’s *always* been very mature and she has a very emotional voice. I always believe what she sings.

**BABY WHAT YOU WANT ME TO DO:** I wrote this about a woman who was very pretty, but had such a mean vibe. She told me stories about how she had been vindictive with her ex, and some bad stuff he had done. So I pictured a beautiful woman walking down the street, breaking hearts just to get back at whatever man had hurt her. I always pictured her with a tight skirt, black boots, but those are my issues. Thanks to Paul Worley, this sounds like the title song from some Forties movie. I *love* the string section. That’s why Paul has Grammys cluttering up his room. I told him, “Paul, if you get tired of them, I have *plenty* of room in my house.”

**KISS ME LIKE A STRANGER**: I wrote “Kiss Me Like A Stranger” with James Slater, a songwriter who has a feel like no one else. James already had a good start on this song when we met, and that title which is a great one. I like to think I brought it to a slightly different place. It’s neat when one person starts somewhere interesting and then the other person can take another left turn. You follow some cool forks in the road. It’s a true collaboration.

**DRY YOUR EYES**: That’s one that I have had kicking in my head for a long time, and I always liked the chorus, but I could never figure out how to put it all together. When I finally did, I was really happy because it felt like something by the Strawberry Alarm Clock or some lost Sixties band. It’s a little bit out there – but I am glad to have that strange corner of the musical universe covered on this album.

**DON’T BREAK MY HEART**: This one started out as the kind of song you do just to jam and have fun with the guys in the band. Then one day I thought, why am I not recording this song if it’s so much fun? “Don’t Break My Heart” reminds me of Elvis, but not the most famous Elvis, but the songs in some of the bad Elvis movies. I was aiming for *that* kind of happy Elvis song in like a 1966 movie. Now I just need the bad movie to go with this good song.

**RUNNING DOWN THE ROAD**: A huge influence on me is Jerry Lee Lewis, and so that one is odd because I wrote it on a piano and as my piano player can confirm, I am not a good piano player but somehow I did it all in one take. Then I said to Scotty, “Can you play what I played, but better?” And that’s what he does. He took my piano riffs, and made it his own and *much* better. This is real rock and roll about blowing out of town and running away from your problems.

**INSECTS**: Yes, it’s really true: “Bad ideas are like insects on the windshield of my mind.” I love that our keyboardist Scotty Plunkett brought this to an almost Mose Allison place. I love Mose Allison. When I first started playing clubs in San Francisco, I played down the block from the Kasbah – a strip club with Latin music, and one day one of the strippers invited me to come over, and I swear for some reason he was playing there. I instantly fell in love – with the music of Mose Allison - so this is kind of my tip of the hat to what he does.

**THE WAY THINGS REALLY ARE:** I’d be walking down the street, and that little melody would get stuck in my head. The song tells you when to finish it. Then when we start to put all the songs together, it becomes like flower arranging and you can see what colors you still need. Usually, I have a lot of ballads. If you have seven or eight slow songs, you know you need a fast song. This album I had a lot of upbeat stuff for a change, which was nice for a change.

*First Comes the Night* will also be available as a second configuration – a deluxe edition featuring five additional songs – released simultaneously with the standard edition.

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