

THE WARPED 45s

10 Day Poem for Saskatchewan

In less than two years together as a band, Toronto-based roots rockers **The Warped 45s** have been moving at warp speed creatively, rapidly turning heads and opening ears with their stylistically freewheeling and compelling sound. Their self-titled 2008 independent six-song EP scored unanimous rave reviews, garnered strong college radio airplay across both Canada and the U.S., and had such publications as *Exclaim!* and Toronto's *EYE Weekly* citing them as "Destined for Greatness in 2009."

Those predictions are being emphatically fulfilled this year, as evidenced by the \$10,000 cash prize they took home in June by winning the Rogers Fan Choice Award for a triumphant performance at the North By Northeast Festival. The next step in their meteoric ascent is the September 1st release of *10 Day Poem For Saskatchewan*. Out on the Pheromone Recordings label and distributed by Fontana North, this debut full-length album is a work of genuinely epic proportions.

Pigeonholing The Warped 45s sound is a slippery task best not attempted. As points of reference, consider the artists the band cite as musical touchstones - Wilco, The Band, Blue Rodeo, Steve Earle, Tom Waits - all of whom defy stylistic straitjackets. The Warped 45s incorporate country, gospel, folk and rock elements with seamless grace.

This is a band with a formidable arsenal of musical weapons, as they feature four vocalists, two songwriters, and multiple multi-instrumentalists (how many groups do you know that include three banjo players?). To further expand the widescreen sound of *10 Day Poem For Saskatchewan*, they recruited such talented friends as Romney Getty and Annelise Noronha (backing vocals), J.P. Desaulniers and Alex Cheung (violin), Craig Smith (dobro), Andrew Penner of Sunparlour Players (lap steel) and trumpet star 'Brownman.'

10 Day Poem traverses more territory than most bands cover in a long career. There's the sweetly poetic opening title track (Dave added the music to lyrics from a poem by David Seymour), the keen social observation of "Progress" and "(bring on that) New Depression", the evocative narrative and searing guitars of "Leader of the Lost Expedition" (a song screaming out for rock radio play), the tender elegy of "Radio Sky" (a tune sporting such ace lyrics as "let my headstone be my favourite jukebox loaded with the songs of my



friends”), the hauntingly atmospheric “Trestle for a Train” and “To the Daybreak,” and the gospel fervour of “Why Have You Passed Me By Grim Reaper.”

Singer/songwriter/guitarist Dave McEathron explains that “right from the beginning of this band, the mandate was to hopefully begin with good songs and then take them wherever it seemed to make sense musically, regardless of style. So far, people are accepting everything we’ve done so there has been no need to pull it back too far. That’s so liberating as a writer, to think there’s nothing we can’t do.”

The Warped 45s began in 2007 as a collaboration between Dave and his cousin, singer/songwriter/guitarist Ryan Wayne McEathron. Rounding out the band now is keyboardist/multi-instrumentalist Kevin Hewitt, drummer Hamal Finn Roye and bassist Alex Needleman (who replaced original member Mark Gabriel).

To record the new album, The Warped 45s set up shop at Green Door Studios, the intimate Parkdale space owned and operated by John Critchley (13 Engines, Elliott Brood). The band first used this as their rehearsal room, and Critchley then came on board to produce, record and mix their EP. That experience proved beneficial when Critchley returned to the console for *10 Day Poem*, as he explains: “That gave them a sense of how I like to work and I got to know the people in the band and how they interact.” The producer’s input included ideas on arrangements and instrumentation for some of the album’s most adventurous tracks. “With so many different soundscapes to be built, John was able to help us use the studio as an instrument,” notes Dave.

Great songs are the very essence of The Warped 45s. As John Critchley observes, “It doesn’t really matter how well you sing or play a song if the song is not so good. This band writes tremendous songs.” The previous solo songwriting experience of both Dave and Ryan has clearly stood them in good stead. Dave has extensive gigging and two solo albums under his belt (1999’s self-titled debut and 2007’s *Passers By, Passers Through*), while Ryan wrote and recorded his album (2007, *Don’t Settle*) during a two year stint in Australia.

The gritty authenticity of the songwriting of the McEathron cousins can be traced back to their family background. Dave and Ryan weren’t city kids who learned late to love and appreciate Gram Parsons. They have deep rural and blue collar roots (Ryan’s father was a truck driver, his grandfather a union leader at the General Motors plant in Oshawa), and their families were very musical.

To the McEathron clan, family jams meant musical gatherings, not home-made preserves. Jam sessions at their ancestral cabin near Algonquin Park had a huge impact on both Dave and Ryan. “When I was young I couldn’t wait to play guitar so I could play along with everybody,” recalls Ryan. “Then you want to get good enough that you can actually sing a song in front of all these people.” The thrilling vocal harmonies that are a signature of The





Warped 45s, both on disc and in performance, can in part be traced to these exuberant sing-a-long sessions.

The pair's subsequent blue-collar work experiences also lend the ring of truth to songs like "(Bring on that) New Depression" and "Progress." In the latter song, Dave convincingly adopts the persona of a worker at a garbage dump, and its timely observation that "we don't build nothing and we call that the new economy" is the best socio-economic critique you'll hear this year.

Many of these new songs have already been previewed live. After playing their own Toronto club shows and opening for the likes of Justin Rutledge, The Skydiggers, and Tom Cochrane, The Warped 45s recently won converts to their cause with their first East Coast tour. They're a formidable live band, combining power and precision, and they'll be hitting the road in earnest with the new album.

Your own warped vinyl singles may be a source of frustration, but The Warped 45s and *10 Day Poem For Saskatchewan* are poised to provide intense satisfaction.

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