

"FROM THE TOWN OF LINCOLN, NEBRASKA"

MARCOS CABANAS ALBUM REVIEW BY TAYLOR DAVIS

"From The Town of Lincoln, Nebraska." First time I heard these lyrics were on an album that single-handedly changed my life as a musician. Bruce Springsteen's *Nebraska* was never supposed to be released in the version you hear today. It was a demo tape that was supposed to be used to teach the band how to play these songs to save time & money in the studio. That idea never came to fruition, and a new process of converting a Tascam cassette tape to vinyl and CD began to take place. An album that is so raw that you can even hear the rocking chair in the cut, it would soon become a platform for a whole generation of musicians to start recording in their house. In September of 1982, a series of home recordings were released to the world as *Nebraska*.

38 years later, Marcos Cabanas tips his hat to Springsteen and all the folks that have fallen in love with a man with a guitar, telling you a story in the classic Folk tradition ranging all the way back to Woody Guthrie & Pete Seeger. Marcos, as he sings, "*loads up his gun*" and takes a shot at the same story that Springsteen wrote 38 years prior, but this time from the opposite narrative. *Nebraska* tells the story in the voice of notorious American killer Charles Starkweather and his child bride Caril Ann Fugate on a killing spree through the Badlands of Wyoming and Nebraska. Marcos turns this arrangement on its head with not only the guitar, melody & style, but tells the story through the viewpoint of Caril. Pushing barriers as a male songwriter singing in the voice and spirit of a 14 year old young woman, Marcos puts you in Lincoln, Nebraska when you close your eyes, on a backroad in the middle of nowhere praying you don't run out of gas. Cabanas proudly wears his influences on his sleeve and this tip of the hat almost 40 years later provides a beautiful connection to the idea that music is timeless. Its influence can be felt, used, and honored in many ways and that's exactly what Cabanas does on the title track.

A Letter to a Young, Lost Love continues in the landscape of *Nebraska* and the heartlands of Americana. Careless moons, rising suns, standing on the porch as you reflect with the radio on. And from that landscape, Cabanas begins describing everything beautiful & finite about young love. Its shortcomings, its beauty, its desire to last forever, and the necessity to work on oneself, so that you can be the best you can be for that other person. The songs question some of the things we think about and never say –

"Why did she come and go into my life so fierce but yet so fast?"

The reason people are fascinated by writers like Dylan, Springsteen, John Prine, Jackson Browne, etc. is because they say things in their songs that we think about all the time but never say, and when we hear those things we go, "Someone hears me, and has felt what I am feeling." The character in *A Letter to a Young, Lost Love* is someone that we can all relate with. Men, women, folks from Americana all the way to the sea have felt that feeling. Lost, regret, hope, closure we never got, and questions we still have. Cabanas takes these concepts in the palm of his hand, rubs them together, and opens them up to give you a beautiful three and a half minute piece of expressive art.

53 Cocaine Hill Drive. The first single off the record was given to the world and immediately set a tone of what was to come. Characters that are in the pits, but have an understanding of their surroundings. If all you've ever known is darkness, it becomes your friend sometimes. *53 Cocaine Hill Drive* addresses a real epidemic we know is happening all across the world but aren't properly addressing – substance abuse in its purest form. A power strong enough to not only change your life, but change your emotional and mental address. That place you arrive at is this song. Cabanas doesn't fuck around creating a pretty image. He gives it to you in a raw, unrefined image, like it or not. Story.

"Wrap the belt around the arm, put the needle in the charm, fill your vein up to survive, you're at 53 Cocaine Hill Drive."

"Pay your fee, get your high."

"It takes your kids and it takes your wife."

"Late at night you come back home with cuts in your arms and a powdered nose. Kids are asleep, your wife's in bed, she says, 'Son of a bitch, where have you been?'"

Songs sometimes help us relate to situations we may not understand. You may not know what a Heroin addiction is like. I may not understand an amphetamine situation that ruins family lives, but we do all understand the pain. *53 Cocaine Hill*

Drive asks you to step into that person's shoes and try to understand it. If we can understand this epidemic more, we may be able to do something about it. This isn't a bad place to start.

Wet Sunshine takes you for a brief moment right from the beginning count into what it might be like to stand in the studio with Cabanas, as he prepares to take you on a musical and literal adventure. Playing off the title once again of Springsteen's 1995 *Dry Lightning*, and a musical feeling similar to *Straight Time*, Cabanas speaks on what it means to be alive. What it means to feel sometimes too much and sometimes not enough. Around 2:55 in the track, a beautiful piano supports Cabanas as he begins to wrap up his realizations of himself and the one that he loves. If *A Letter to a Young, Lost Love* is speaking to a first love, then *Wet Sunshine* speaks to a current lover. Even the character and the narrative show a maturity from a youthful man in love, to a mature man understanding the depths more and more of what love truly means. Perspective is everything. The same man from the second track is still looking up at the moon, but he understands that sometimes walking a straight line in life is what it takes to survive. You have to do your best to not let your partner down, and when you can look in that person's eyes and know that you are both doing everything you can to be there for one another, there is no better feeling.

The Last Great American Dynasty one again shows Cabanas' ability to inhabit the voice of a woman. This Taylor Swift cut, off her new record *Folklore*, brings on young gun Jake Thistle who trades verses and shares melodies with Cabanas. Thistle is a young prodigy in his own right, already with accreditation from Tom Petty, Dire Straits, and John Hiatt's camps, and brings a beautiful voicing to the story. The song tells the story of socialite wealthy choreographer Rebekah Harkness, who passed away in 1982, seven years before Taylor Swift was even born. Harkness lived a troubled life of wealth even going to the extent of washing her pool with Dom Pérignon at one point. She also had to deal with her daughter's many various suicide attempts, her own marvellous attempts to ruin everything, and her own lavish that she became infamous for. Thirty years later, Swift is the owner of Rebekah Harkness' mansion and is reflecting in the song of the life of the woman who once roamed its halls. Cabanas and Thistle pay a beautiful tribute to a woman's story, originally sang in a woman's voice, in a new rendition that uniquely becomes their own.

The final track on the record, *Ida's Song*, speaks in the character of a man who is telling about the beautiful connection in real love. Really knowing someone for a long time, seeing someone's darkest moments and still loving them. Seeing each other cry, laughing 'till the early morning time, and most importantly, always being a listening ear. Cabanas sits by the bed as she tosses her hair, and realizes that for better or for worse, she is his light. In the darkest of nights, bring the lightest of days and for Cabanas that is Ida. The beautiful imagery of faith in the song reminds us that we all need something to believe in. A rosary and a Bible by the side of the bed tells us that this man is relying on faith not only with Ida, but in all aspects of his life. A beautiful end to beautiful record, much the same way as Cabanas' muse, Springsteen, ends his 1981 record with *Wreck on the Highway*. The concepts match up perfectly to my ear. The finality that, at the end, you are all lucky to be home safe in this world and watch your love sleep peacefully. Play with her hair, say a prayer that tomorrow we all wake up and get to do this life all over again. Faith in another day, and faith in another chance.

From The Town of Lincoln, Nebraska shows Cabanas doing what he does best. Creating a landscape, filling it with characters you may or may not know, and then supporting it all with a beautiful underscore that is the music. The album asks you to step in a world and look these characters in the eye. Find out how you are similar, where you're different and where you can understand what you didn't think you could before. Cabanas adds himself to the list of narrative songwriters that follow the Folk and Americana traditions of keeping things raw and simple. Letting the narrative lead and the music play the supporting role. From lost love to love found, Cabanas takes you on a ride that is sure to help you understand certain aspects of your own life. If a guy from Spain living in Amsterdam and Switzerland can deliver a Heartland Folk Americana sound and inhabit those characters to the fullest, he provides a path for you to do the same.