

RAY LaMONTAGNE

PART OF THE LIGHT BIOGRAPHY

After seven studio albums, six Top 10 AAA hits and multiple awards, including a Grammy, Ray LaMontagne has come to understand a creative process that so many find mysterious.

"The writing of the songs is always the same -- it's just a matter of listening to the melodies and then waiting for them to tell you what they want to be," explains the singer-songwriter. "I discover what they are, what they mean to me, what they're about, long after they're done, until I sit with them for six months or so.

"But while I'm writing them they're still a mystery to me. You just have faith in these little snippets of melodies and follow them when they appear. They're all kind of surprises to me. And that's OK."

LaMontagne follows his muse yet again on *PART OF THE LIGHT*, his latest effort and the follow-up to 2016's acclaimed *OUROBOROS*. Self-produced and recorded in LaMontagne's home studio, the Big Room at Apple Hill on his 19th century homestead in the foothills of Massachusetts' Berkshires, the nine-track set is at once another expression of his fearless, introspective lyricism and a dynamically ambitious record that's by turns gentle and ferocious within flawless, intricately delivered songcraft.

PART OF THE LIGHT is, in fact, a study of extremes. The psychedelic-tinged "As Black As Blood Is Blue" and the biting blues of "No Answer Arrives" are among the hardest hitting material LaMontagne has ever released, while "To The Sea," "Let's Make It Last," and the airy first single "Such A Simple Thing" (previewed during LaMontagne's 2017 solo tour) represent some of the quietest and prettiest. LaMontagne ventures into noir country flavors on the romantic "It's Always Been You," while "Paper Man," "Part Of The Light" and "Goodbye Blue Sky" offer tightly drawn arrangements showcasing the unique instrumental interplay of LaMontagne and his band on the album.

That relationship, in fact, was key as he set out to make *PART OF THE LIGHT*.

"If there was any intent going on it was more in the production and bringing the guys together," LaMontagne says of a crew that includes the likes of guitarist Carl Broemel, bassist Seth Kauffman, keyboardists Bo Koster and Kevin Ratterman, drummer Dave Givan and, on several tracks, Wilco's John Sirratt. "If there was any real forethought going on, that's where it was extended, in pulling the band together and thinking about the players and the overall sound of the record. We have a relationship and we've all played together and they're very sensitive musicians and really good people to have around. I just enjoy being around them on a purely personal, friendship level, never

mind the music. That's kind of a bonus. The friendships are really important to me, finding people that you can communicate with easily and approach the music, or their life within music, the same way. That's important."

And this time out, LaMontagne felt like he was best suited to handle the production reins himself -- for the first time since 2010's *GOD WILLIN' & THE CREEK DON'T RISE*, which was nominated for two Grammy Awards, winning for Best Contemporary Folk Album.

"The role of producer is so strange," LaMontagne says. "I think for me, in my experience, it's led to making the process more difficult than it needs to be. I know exactly what I want, so this time I felt I just wanted to go directly to the source and not have any filter between me and the music." And, he adds with a laugh, "I'm easy to talk to."

LaMontagne was also happy to be working back at the Big Room, where *GOD WILLIN'...* was also recorded. "This is a really nice space to work in," he says. "My studio is very nice, full of natural light. You don't feel like you're in a cave. You bring the right musicians and the right engineer in the room and take it from there."

LaMontagne notes that finding the balance on *PART OF THE LIGHT* "was a little tough. I had too many songs; The record was too long, and I just had to keep paring it down and trying to find what the through-line was." The nine songs that hung together to create the album, meanwhile, find LaMontagne letting loose about his sense of contemporary life from the relative shelter of his quiet homestead.

"There's a sense of anxiety to them," he says, "some kind of subconscious reaction to how our culture feels to me, which is so strange lately. It feels so sad and so self-absorbed and shallow and mean. The world just seems so vastly different than it did 20 years ago, and not for the better. I know everybody feels it on some level, but I find myself in some ways really withdrawing. I find myself kind of pulling in to protect what I have, meaning my wife and sons, into this little safe place we created for ourselves." Nevertheless, LaMontagne tried to convey a positive and hopeful message on *PART OF THE LIGHT*, one of resilience against challenging times. As he sings in the title track, "When kindness is the greatest gift that one can share/Why choose hate or subjugate your fellow man...I choose to be part of the light."

"I think as a writer a lot of your work is almost like yourself talking to yourself," LaMontagne explains. "I know that's how I feel about the songs. It's trying to comfort me. I find myself thinking a lot about how important every moment you have is, how important your friendships and relationships are and how brief life is and how beautiful and wonderful it is and what a gift it is, and not allowing myself to be pulled away from those essential truths."

That's certainly a theme the New Hampshire native has explored since 2004, when he emerged with the gold-selling *TROUBLE* and its attention-getting title track. Rave reviews

and more prizes -- including three Boston Music Awards and nods from Esquire magazine's Esqy Music Awards and the XM Nation Music Awards -- put LaMontagne on the map as one of the new millennium's most provocative and consistently engaging artists. Subsequent releases -- TILL THE SUN TURNS BLACK (2006), GOSSIP IN THE GRAIN (2008), GOD WILLIN'... (2010), SUPERNOVA (2014) and OURBOROS (2016) -- have maintained that stature. A top-selling touring act, LaMontagne has made appearances on "Live From Abbey Road," "VH1 Storytellers," "The Tonight Show" and more, while his music has also appeared in films such as "The Town," "She's The Man," "The Conspirator," and on TV shows like "Law & Order: Criminal Intent," "ER," "One Tree Hill," "Bones" and "Rescue Me."

He's looking forward to taking PART OF THE LIGHT's songs out on the road, channeling the band sensibility of the sessions into even more dynamic stage presentations of the material. And along the way LaMontagne figures he might even figure out what they're all really about.

"I'm a very private person, so going out there is in some ways the hardest thing for me," he confesses. "But there are people who want to hear this music, and I'm very grateful for that. I'm very grateful they've stuck with me, and they buy the albums and the live audience continues to grow, which amazes me. It seems like more tickets are sold every couple of years when I go out and it just continues to grow slow and steady. I've really kind of built this one show at a time -- and I feel like that's what I'm still doing."