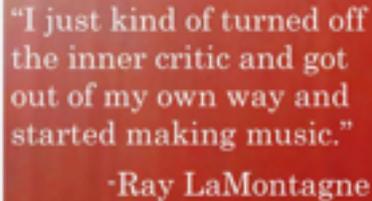


# RAY LAMONTAGNE SUPERNOVA

## STORY OF SUPERNOVA



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-Ray LaMontagne

Ten years ago Ray LaMontagne released his first album, TROUBLE, the gold-certified start to a fiercely ambitious, Grammy Award-winning, critically praised career that's encompassed three more albums, several EPs, a slew of soundtrack compilations and arresting live performances fronting a variety of ensembles.

"It certainly feels like some time has passed," LaMontagne says now. "But I have to say, boy, time flies..."

And LaMontagne is still having fun all these years later – and with his fifth album, SUPERNOVA, maybe more fun than ever.

"Fun is a trite word. I kind of hate to use it – but at the same time, I don't know how else to say it," LaMontagne says of the 10-song set, which was produced by the Black Keys' Dan Auerbach and recorded at his Easy Eye Sound studio in Nashville. "It was just an enjoyable process. These songs reflect just my joy of songwriting, what I enjoy about writing songs. they feel free to me. I didn't have to go searching around through cupboards to find the missing pieces; all the puzzle bits would just sort of burst to life in front of me. I just grabbed them and pieced them together and then would be surprised at what was in front of me – like, 'Wow, that's cool!'"

"It's an experience unlike any other I've had making a record."

SUPERNOVA indeed bursts with a spirited bonhomme and a rocking, technicolor-tinged energy that's different from its four predecessors. The title track and first single is a grooving, Nuggets-style burst of neo-psychedelia in which LaMontagne's high register sounds hoarse with pleasure over the explosive power of love. "She's the One" is a bold, punchy, swirling rocker, while "Lavender," "Julia" and "Smashing" are soaked in lava lamp melodies and day-glo grooves. LaMontagne and the crack band Auerbach assembled for the SUPERNOVA lay back into rustic, rootsy territory during "Ojai" and "Drive-in Movies," while "Airwaves" rides a light samba rhythm and "No Other Way" is a love ballad replete with trippy images.

And "Pick Up a Gun" is SUPERNOVA's noir epic, from its martial cadence to its airy ambience and lush keyboard textures.

"I know I was hearing certain different instrumentation -- a sharper sound, a broader sound," explains LaMontagne, who for the first time ever put together detailed, fully-rendered demos to give Auerbach "a sort of road map" of what he was after. "I sent him a note about the vocals, especially; 'You're going to hear my voice in a different place here.' Usually it's very round, very full, very up-front, and I wanted to sort of put them in a little bit of a different place this time and make them more a part of the overall sonic palette and not quite so in your ear as they've been in the past. I wanted my voice to be equally within the palette of colors and not be the focus."

LaMontagne did not come to this new place easily, however.

Coming off the success of 2010's GOD WILLIN' & THE CREEK DON'T RISE, which debuted at No. 3 on the Billboard 200 and won the Grammy for Best Contemporary Folk Album ("Beg Steal or Borrow" was also nominated for Song of the Year), LaMontagne returned to his home in the foothills of the Berkshires mountain range in western Massachusetts ready to get to work on what would come next. His work ethic had been honed since his earliest days as a songwriter -- getting up each morning, breaking for lunch and dinner, working into the evenings. "I would force myself to finish the things I started," LaMontagne reveals. But things didn't quite pan out as they had before.

"I had a batch of songs that wasn't calling at me strongly enough," LaMontagne relates. "It was all good stuff. I felt like everything had potential. There were good melodies. But they weren't calling for my attention that strongly, so I just kept putting them down and not finishing them." This, not surprisingly, was troubling, so LaMontagne reached out to Elvis Costello, a friend and personal hero, for some counsel.

"He sent me back a really lovely letter that said, 'There have been times I've felt the same way, too,' and he just sort of said, 'You're the only Ray LaMontagne there is, so just trust that voice,' and that was really enough." LaMontagne followed that by digging into Costello's music -- specifically his second album, THIS YEAR'S MODEL -- for a crash course in what his mentor was talking about. "That record is just unapologetic. It's so...Elvis, y'know. He's just so unapologetically himself, and there was something about that that really struck me, and it was like a light bulb came on, like, 'Oh yeah, that's it! You've just got to be yourself.'"

"I think that was sort of a turning point. I just kind of turned off the inner critic and got out of my own way and started making music."

LaMontagne began breaking some of his established rules, too. Rather than slavishly finishing off whatever he started, he allowed himself to be open to the muses that took him on tangents or in entirely new directions. "In the past I would push them aside and say, 'I don't have time to listen to you right now' and keep working on what I had going," LaMontagne says. "This time I said, 'Y'know, I'm going to follow you. I'm going to take today and just see where this goes' -- and there's 'Supernova,' bang! A new song. A new idea.

"The whole record was written that way. It was playful and really wonderful. It felt the way it feels in the beginning, when you're first writing songs. They're not precious in any way. It's just a

joyful, emotional truth, not like anything that's being dredged up. I just ran with it, man. It was a great feeling."

And after crafting the first nine songs, "She's the One" came to LaMontagne in a half-day burst to finish off the album. "The whole thing came fully formed, like a gift," he notes. "Whatever song God is out there who'd been busting my ass for a year trying to pull songs together and hammer things out, that one was just a little present -- 'Here, just have this one for free.' "

LaMontagne says he's "never gone into the studio feeling as good about a batch of songs as I did with these," and his enthusiasm was matched by Auerbach, who played guitar as well as produced, and the core band that included drummer Richard Swift, bassist Dave Roe, keyboardist Leon Michaels and multi-instrumentalist Seth Kaufman and Russ Pahl. "It was really a very quick learning curve," LaMontagne recalls. "I hadn't met any of these guys before and didn't know anything about them, so it took a little bit to get comfortable. But they were all really, really, really smart and everyone had ideas and was enthusiastic, and what really pleased me and kind of surprised me a little bit was how excited they were about the songs. They were really excited. They thought they were interesting, which made me feel even better about them."

LaMontagne is now looking forward to giving SUPERNOVA's songs an airing on stage. He's put together a new band, and he anticipates a new wrinkle for his performances as well. "They give me a chance to play more electric guitar, which I love to do," LaMontagne says. "But I've always had such good players on stage, and so many of my songs are keyed into what I'm doing on the acoustic guitar. So I'm really looking forward to being able to set the acoustic down for half the set, finally. That will be a nice feeling."

Written by: Gary Graff