

TOM ODELL

In early 2014, a somewhat exhausted Tom Odell suddenly realized that he had spent more than a year promoting songs from his debut album *Long Way Down*, the album which had propelled him to tremendous success and notoriety upon release the previous year.

The album debuted at #1 on the UK chart, accumulated 8 Gold and 2 Platinum certifications around the world, sold over a million copies worldwide and garnered over 200 million cumulative views on YouTube. Odell also knew that the success of the album had meant that he hadn't written any new material throughout the whole cycle of promotion and live shows. For such a hugely talented writer, whose first collection had seen him honored with the Ivor Novello Award for Best Songwriter, it was overwhelming to think that the gestation period for the first set of songs – his whole adolescent and adult life, basically – might need to be condensed into a very short period of writing new material for his second album.

It's a typical issue facing every creative artist, how to find the time to write a follow-up to an album which, in this case, was lauded by supreme songwriters including Elton John, Billy Joel and The Rolling Stones, who invited Tom to support them at London's Hyde Park.

The youthful reserve which was so apparent when Tom Odell first arrived on the music scene, with no expectations and no preconceptions, soon was replaced by idealism, stoicism and conviction that if you were going to do something, then it should be done at your own pace.

So Odell did what many artists have often done before him, called a halt to the madness, booked himself a flight out of London, and went to New York, where he rented a tiny apartment in the East Village, ultimately disappearing into a city where it's easy to be a stranger and easier still to be alone. Dominated by a grand piano, this tiny apartment refuge in a city where he knew very few people, would come to inspire a regrouping of thought and intent, and ultimately a redefinition of what Tom Odell is all about.

This is where work began on his new album ***WRONG CROWD*** (RCA Records).

Watching films by night and wandering the streets of Manhattan by day became only mildly schizophrenic when this schedule/lifestyle was interrupted by small things like supporting Billy Joel at Madison Square Garden a few times. Life suddenly retained balance and, after that, the songs just poured out.

A brief return home in the Spring of 2014 saw Tom tour Europe and collect his prized Ivor Novello Award for songwriting, but by September his wanderlust kicked in again and he left London, this time to LA where he rented an apartment in the back streets of Echo Park. It was in LA, home and adopted home to so many legendary singer/songwriters that **WRONG CROWD** began to take shape.

Along with producer Jim Abbiss (Arctic Monkeys, Kasabian, and Adele) and Tom himself at the helm of production, the album's sound evolved into a more rhythmic, energetic production. Comments Tom: "With the brilliant Jim Abbiss producing, I wanted the songs to sound big and dramatic; big strings and melodies emphasizing the songs further, rich in musicality and holding nothing back. I'd been touring for a few months by this point with my dear friend Andy Burrows (drums) who plays with such flair. His drums provided the darkness and excitement. On the track 'Silhouette' I had always imagined a big Gershwin-style introduction, which we recorded at Abbey Road. But most of the recording was done in Rockfield in Wales which provided the kind of quiet we needed to make such a loud noise."

As recording continued, a narrative for the album began to emerge.

"The album follows a narrative of a man held at ransom by his childhood, yearning for it, yearning for nature. A desire for innocence in this perverse world in which he now lives. It's a fictional story but the emotions and feelings are obviously ones I have felt – but the stories are elaborated and exaggerated. I wanted to create a world with a heightened sense of reality, like in a Fellini film."

Always a film buff, Tom's New York sojourn had expanded his huge interest in film as an art form. Work by Won Kar Wai, Paolo Sorrentino, Terrence Malick, Wim Wenders and Fellini became the backdrop to his rather solitary New York life and inevitably influenced the album. "The songs I was writing began being about isolation, growing up, trying to fit in. I began looking back and inwards, using myself as a starting point but letting my imagination run wild with a story. I imagined the music to be a soundtrack....that beautiful image of the weeds growing around the tree and suffocating it in 'Thin Red Line' by Malick, of man destroying nature, crucially forgetting that he is part of it. That began to resonate with me."

As the album progressed Tom began to craft a script for a collection of films released as music videos which follow the themes in his songs. It was then that he got in touch with director George Belfield, with whom he quickly formed a symbiotic relationship. The pair traveled to South Africa to shoot the first part of the film, based on a character plagued by self-destruction while living a hedonistic/nihilistic lifestyle. This video for the title track "Wrong Crowd" explores how that affects people around the protagonist.

"Ultimately his lifestyle destroys the only innocent thing he has left, his love. This closes the first part of the film, but the story continues" as seen in the video for "Magnetised."

These striking videos are compelling companion pieces to what is a hugely assured, confident and energized second album from a remarkable writer and performer who chose to do it his way because he chose to do it right. Four years ago, Tom Odell was quoted saying the following, although the words still stand true today:

“Really, I’d love to live in a time when music gave people a real sense of elevation. When my music is sad I want it to be REALLY sad. When it’s happy I want it to feel euphoric...I suppose I want the record to express the heightened feelings and emotions we all get in our lives.”

WRONG CROWD (RCA Records) will be released on June 10th and the lead single “Magnetised” is out now.

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