

ARTIST: Richie Kaye and The New Old-Timers
ALBUM: Plush Life
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“PLUSH LIFE:” STORIES BEHIND THE SONGS

When Richie Kaye rediscovered in middle age the wonder of classic country he listened to as a young child, the mournful and mysterious sound of pedal steel guitar stood out more than anything. Upon closer examination, he calls it a Rube Goldberg contraption, deeply complex in its design with foot pedals that require the use of all four limbs. He was hooked and wanted to know more, searching the Houston metropolitan area for someone who would school him on this unusual instrument.

All roads led to Jody Cameron, a virtuoso on pedal steel, and the ground was suddenly laid for “**Plush Life**,” his second album of classic country material following a collection of cover songs and first with the New Old-Timers whose lineup is rounded out by several top-notch studio musicians. But this time, he finally learned and then mastered the craft of songwriting in this genre and recorded 13 original songs.

Kaye penned “**Wide Awake at 3 a.m.**,” which he describes as a Ray Price tribute, then decided to write something humorous, a novelty song called “**Drink, Drank, Drunk**” that rounds out a long list of ditties involving the perils and pleasure of spirited alcohol consumption. Reflecting on those two compositions and several others on the album, he laments the dearth of “anything that’s sort of comic or joyful.” Those two common classic-country themes pervade “Plush Life.”

More beer-belly laughs can be found in “**Wiggle Woggle**,” perhaps the funniest one of all, which was inspired by a conversation Kaye had years ago with a next-door neighbor whose love interest was described as so rotund that he moved around like a pile of jelly. Lyrics came to him one morning while gazing at his own portly frame in the bathroom mirror. So he ran over to his desk and started writing comical lines with a face full of shaving cream.

In “**Don’t Give Me Up**,” a spurned male lover admits he was wrong, knows he needs to learn from it and asks for forgiveness. Kaye notes that most love songs blame others, but the lead character here owns his mistakes as he wishes for a second chance.

“**Yes Man**” is about someone who lies to his lover, telling her what she wants to hear – hence the title. But this is also what she wants from him. “People are together for a reason,” Kaye explains. “In the best case, it’s love.” The trouble is he’s writing about a man with no love in his heart who’s simply a yes man who will fool around on his woman, and she’ll never know the truth.

Some of the songs about romance are rooted in cinema. For example, the leading man in a film that Kaye recalls watching wasn’t good enough for the woman of his dreams, “and I thought to myself, ‘he ought to just let her go because she can find someone better, but he doesn’t dare admit it.’” The result was “**You Got To Do Better**.”

In one of Woody Allen's earlier movies, there's a line about someone's wife leaving him for another woman. "And I thought, 'oh, that's a song,'" he says, which led to **"I Always Thought She'd Leave Me for a Guy."**

The album also includes an ode to Wild Bill Hickok, an American folk hero known for his involvement in many famous gunfights in Old West frontier days as a soldier, scout, lawman, gambler, showman and actor. **"Aces and Eights"** reveals the winning hand he held in his final game of cards, which ended when a man nicknamed "Broke Nose" Jack shot him in the back. When they turned over the fallen protagonist's hand, it revealed a pair of aces and pair of eights.

Several other Kaye tunes turn darkness into light. **"Hopeless in New Hope"** – one of two spec songs, along with **"You Got To Do Better,"** that seeded the album – was built around a clever play on words with repeated rhyming of the word hope to accentuate the positive and make it more memorable to the listener.

In **"Moonshine on the Water,"** he wanted to show that beauty could be found in something tragic. The song demonstrates how patience can bear sweet fruit. The effort took him about 30 hours to complete, but it eventually paid off.

One of the tracks sounds like almost an homage to the name of his band. **"New Old Friends"** is about how old friends can end up strongly disagreeing at some point in time. While some friends will have a falling out, the ones he writes about realize that it's better to make up and reconnect.

"She's Packing Her Suitcase" was inspired by someone he knew who, when she eventually went to the great beyond, wasn't exactly ascending to heaven. The title was a quip about that transition with good riddance in the forefront of his mind. "The guy who's singing it has been taken advantage of mightily," he says. "And, who knows, maybe he's done her in!"

In **"The River is Wider,"** a baptism is deferred so that the main character can enjoy himself a little longer before realizing that eventually he'll have that come-to-Jesus moment. But for now, he's having too great of a time to make that leap of faith. And for listeners of "Plush Life," the pure enjoyment of all these fun-loving original songs just never stops.

– Bruce Shutan, Drummer and Journalist

Contact:

Bruce Shutan | Publicist – 89 Peanuts, Inc.

21198 NW Wapinitia Ln, Portland, OR 97229

Home office: 503.430.8146 Mobile: 310.975.9618

Bruce.Shutan@89PeanutsInc.com | www.bruceshutan.com