

SHANE GHOSTKEEPER *Songs For My People*

Fans of independent Canadian music will likely recognize the name Shane Ghostkeeper from his namesake project GHOSTKEEPER, a band that has been responsible for some of the more thrilling music to emerge from Alberta during the last 15 years. But while his parent band trades in a highly unique, left-of-centre approach to indie rock, this new project is a deeply reverential tribute to the music he absorbed while growing up in the Northern Alberta Métis communities of Paddle Prairie, High Level, and Rocky Lane. “The concept of this record,” Ghostkeeper says, “is to present, as a gift to my people, an exploration of the country & western and roots records they surrounded me with since childhood.” *Songs For My People* is a truly a family affair.

From the opening notes of the album, this notion rings true wholeheartedly; shades of classic boot-stompin' anthems shine through, offering glimmers of Waylon Jennings, Johnny Horton, and Conway Twitty; and Ghostkeeper snatched a particular shred of influence from the “Bakersfield sound” scene, a strain of '60s-era artists that infused traditional country & western songwriting with the electrified, then-new zing of rock & roll. In turn, Shane achieved his own version of “this plus that” by injecting the Bakersfield sound with his own musical hallmarks. Ghostkeeper's singing style is one of the most arresting aspects of his songwriting; his ability to mix conversational speech (think Lou Reed or Bob Dylan), percussive breaths, and other mouth-driven sound production with traditional melodic singing makes him one of the more dynamic vocalists you're likely to hear anytime soon.

And it wouldn't truly be a Shane Ghostkeeper project without a few flashes of sonic risk-taking; “Into the Night” begins with a dark, ominous introduction before settling into a classic country “train beat”, while “Sunbeam” sports a lightly psychedelic overcoat in tribute to Shane's T. Rex- and Led Zeppelin-loving Uncle Tucker.

But the true emotional core of this album is “Hunger Strike”; its upbeat feel sits in stark to contrast to its backstory. A few years after Shane's Grandmother Olive passed, her widowed husband Rolly spent a few heartbroken, lonely years by himself before deciding that her absence was too much to bear. “After a few years of pain,” Shane remembers, “he called an end to his time and went on a hunger strike. He notified all his family and friends so that everyone could say goodbye, and lasted close to a week before he passed away peacefully with his family by his side.” And as if this wasn't enough of an emotional shock, Shane's mother informed him that the date of Rolly's passing was indeed his Grandparents' anniversary. “I was floored beyond my emotional capacity,” the singer says. “I will forever be inspired and grateful for the immense power of love and romance that my Grandpa possessed and shared so generously. I hope these songs tell his story in a deserving way.”

Further extending the concept of “family”, Shane recruited a close-knit crew of collaborators to help him bring this project to life. He asked producer extraordinaire Lorrie Matheson (Rae Spoon, Art Bergmann) to “post up at the helm”, and this was no accident — Matheson has been part of the Ghostkeeper world since day one, recording their debut album in 2008, and producing and mixing their last, *Multidimensional Culture*, last year. Shane's bandmates in the main Ghostkeeper band — drummer Eric Hamelin (known for his work with JOYFULTALK and drumming on Alvays' smash hit “Archie, Marry Me”), bassist Ryan Bourne (Chad VanGalen), and guitarist and pedal steel player Wayne Garrett (Surf Kitties) — join him here as well, and their expertise and wide-ranging artistic sensibilities helped elevate this album from what could have been a simple tribute project to another fully-formed entry in Ghostkeeper's body of work.

Songs For My People is available _____ on Victory Pool Records, at your nearest record shop and streaming online.

[Chris Dadge, 2023]