

Mando Saenz

Bucket

In-Stores February 5, 2008

Wandering the streets of Houston, playing regular gigs at bars like the Continental Club, or settling down for drinks with the kinds of characters that populate poetry (but rarely read it), Mando Saenz wrote it all down – in melody, on little scraps of paper, or in his head. Like the gloriously disorganized life he observed in his former neighborhood, his songs usually aren't about linear expectations or predictable narratives, they are flashes of emotion, snapshots of time reassembled in his songs with rhyme and melody to make uncommon, musical sense.

He carried most of the songs from Houston to his new home in Nashville, finishing out a few of them with co-writers like Will Kimbrough, Kim Richey and R.S Field, a first for the previously lone writer. The songs on his new album *Bucket*, are still populated with life's losers, soul-searchers, and dreamers - the kind songwriting that won him praise for his more acoustic-tinged debut, *Watertown*. But this time, he leaves the Texas imagery behind.

For his second album Mando distanced himself musically and thematically from his past. Partnered with some of roots-rock's most potent musicians – Kenny Vaughan, Richard Bennett, Tony Crow, Jason Lehning, and Chris Carmichael -- and helmed by producer R.S. Field, *Bucket's* distorted guitars and chiming acoustics punctuate Mando's haunting tenor and unexpected phrases.

Born in San Luis Potosi, Mexico and raised in Corpus Christi by his music-loving parents on an eclectic diet of 60s-era songwriters, traditional Mexican music and the Everly brothers, Mando Saenz began guitar lessons at the age of 11. But the realization that he could write and perform music for a living didn't hit until he had done the 'responsible thing' and earned an MBA - if only to stick it in his back pocket.

He began playing live full-time and the response was encouragement enough to launch his career in DIY fashion. Soon, he joined the line of notable singer-songwriters to chronicle their lives in Texas via *Watertown* – originally self-released until landing in the hands of Carnival Music.

"*Watertown* had a definite underlying theme, and in some sense was almost a concept record – kind of revealing a lot of hidden truths," he says. "*Bucket* changes gears a bit more and I wasn't afraid into slipping into a love song"

The opening track of *Bucket* begins with exotic strumming and thumping tablas, matched with a drum loop and chiming, echoing guitar coming in slowly. "Wrong Guy" juxtaposes mellow mid-tempo pop-country with the macho, defiant stance of the narrator who is warning that he's a difficult person to be in a relationship -- saying "And don't call my name / Cause I'll be right there with a bucket of hate."

(More)

The leadoff single, “Pocket of Red,” is the flipside of “Wrong Guy,” -- written from the other person’s perspective. Mando finished it with Kim Richey, and really wanted the hopeful pop-sounding music to reflect the alter ego of the song. Another song he wrote with Richey - “All Grown Up,” Mando says, is about being “old and educated but you still don’t know what the to say sometimes.”

“Pittsburgh” is that song that hopefully every artist stumbles across – the song that everyone asks for during live shows, with a lilting melody that easily slips under the skin. It has been recorded, but never released. Mando started it with the melody, and pieced together the lyrics by writing 30 or so of random phrases that fit each line of the music then he, “puzzled them together as best I could to keep the sentiment of the song; which is really up for grabs at the end of the day.” It wasn’t until *Bucket* that Mando says they finally got it the way he heard it in his head, and it will always be a cornerstone of his live shows.

“Seven Dollars” was written about being broke and young in a bar in Houston and having just the amount to get you by. Mando believes it’s “pretty abstract but pretty specific at the same time,” which is a pretty good way to describe the album as a whole. But the song Mando sees as maybe being the most autobiographical on the album is “Touch is All.”

“It’s a song about moving around to be happy or not be happy,” Mando explains, “Or just feeling the need to move, whether it’s moving to another town or just being restless in a restaurant. It’s about not being able to stay in one place for very long -- and at the same time finding it hard not to miss for lots of reasons. Many of which you don’t realize till your gone. The title refers to how much it takes to stay with you and also bring you back.”

It’s this restlessness that drove him from Texas to Tennessee and that brought him to his new musical milieu, but has all the movement meant musical change?

At the end of the day, Mando believes that “Songs are songs. Whether they were written in Texas, Tennessee or Idaho doesn’t really matter.”

11/07

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