

One step at a time

After rebounding from misery, Ron Sexsmith talks turtles and radio play with **LAUREN McMENEMY.**



IT'S hard to be positive when your world is collapsing, but Ron Sexsmith manages to do just that. Known for his intensely personal songs, the Canadian piano man used his latest album, *Cobblestone Runway*, as therapy for a life seemingly gone wrong.

"Everything was falling apart – my marriage, and I'd just been dropped by my label," Sexsmith says. "It was weird. I moved in with my accountant – I didn't know where else to go. It was so surreal for me. After 15 years of kids running around and this and that, I felt like I was starting over in every possible way and I could've started writing some real downbeat songs, because I was feeling that way; I was feeling really bad. I needed to write stuff that was reassuring and so all these tunes – *Former Glory* and *Gold in the Hills* – these sort of songs were kind of written in a way to lift me up.

On all the records, the songs have been – and it's almost clichéd to say – but they are kind of therapeutic in a way, without getting too personal. I always try to balance it where I don't want my songs to be so personal that no one can relate to them or that they become claustrophobic."

Sexsmith says that sometimes it's even easier to be honest in song than in conversation.

"I certainly felt that way in the past. Especially when I was with my partner, because things got pretty crazy and I was away all the time – and the stuff you hear about life on the road isn't that far from the truth," he says.

"We were misbehaving, and drinking too much, so I would come home and sometimes I felt that in my songs I was being

“I think I needed to write stuff that was reassuring”

more honest than in real life. At the same time, often I would tiptoe around in my songs, because I didn't want to hurt anybody. So it's felt like a huge load has been lifted in a way. Now I feel like I'm an open book."

Sexsmith has released six critically acclaimed albums and toured the world – he counts his 1998 Australian tour as a favourite, and is back now – yet he is far from a household name. He says the lack of radio support is frustrating but it's worse reading articles saying he's on his way out: "There was an article that came out here a while ago, and

I remember doing the interview in New York City, and it was very upbeat and positive, but when the article came out it was all negative, about how I'm nearing the end and this and that. It's crazy in a way, but I've been very fortunate – this is my sixth album, and I have friends in Toronto who are still struggling to get albums out, or outside Canada and, you know, a lot of the stuff is out of my control. Each record I do, they're kind of like seeds in a way, and people have been discovering them, and they're still discovering them, in a kind of natural, word-of-mouth sort of way. That other stuff, the charts and that, it's a whole other world, I don't even feel like I'm a part of that. I feel more like I'm a novelist or something.

"I don't know why radio can play David Gray and not me, and why they can play Coldplay and not me. It doesn't make sense, but it's nothing I can do anything about. So I just try to get on with the work and hopefully I'll be able to continue doing it. I'm not going anywhere. I'm the turtle (from) the tortoise and hare."

□ Ron Sexsmith plays at the Gov tomorrow. *Cobblestone Runway* is out now through Festival Mushroom.