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Review: Ron Sexsmith Takes His Own Unique Musical Path on 'The Vivian Lane'

BY HAL HOROWITZ FEBRUARY 23, 2023 2:32 PM

RON SEXSMITH

THE VIVIAN LINE

(Cooking Vinyl)

4 out of 5 stars

VIDEOS BY AMERICAN SONGWRITER

"Half man, half melody," touts Ron Sexsmith's publicity. And for a change, the hype is deserved.

The Canadian singer/songwriter has received acclaim from fellow melodically oriented artists Elvis Costello and Paul McCartney, among many others who know their way around crafting hooks. But despite a 30-plus year career, yielding 16 previous albums (a handful on major labels), a well-received novel, and even a documentary film made about him, Sexsmith has yet to translate his obvious talents into widespread commercial success, at least in America.

That hasn't prevented him from cranking out a minor masterpiece every few years, receiving near-universal critical accolades, then watching as it quietly fades into the public's rear view. Perhaps his placid, laid-back voice—similar to a blend of the Kinks' Ray Davies and the Zombies' Colin Blunstone—and innocent, sweetly salted pop, just wasn't made for these times, as Brian Wilson once wrote.



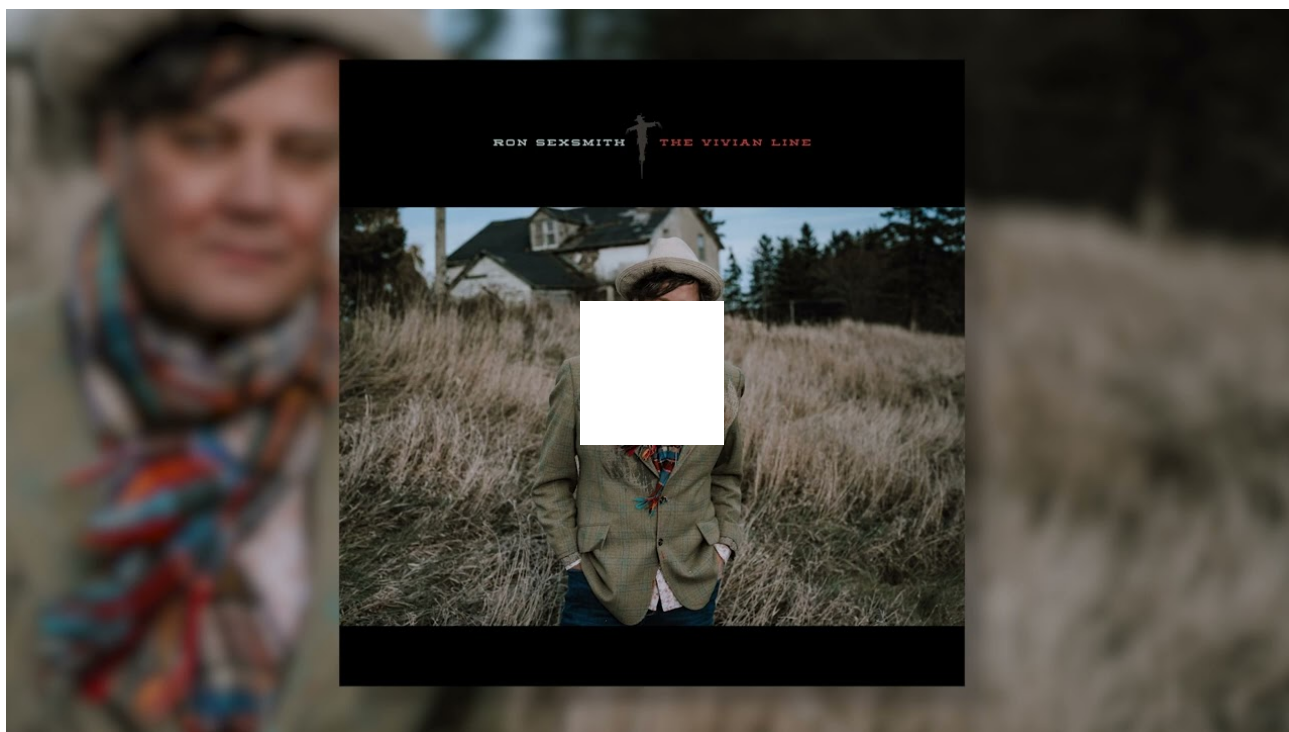
On his 2020 release, Sexsmith rejoiced in leaving his longtime Toronto home, relocating to a more rural life in Stratford, Ontario. The resulting rustic sound remains as album 17 stays the course.

Sexsmith's boyish singing and floating songs make an ideal combination. Whether he's singing about tender relationships ("A Place Called Love," "When Our Love Was New"), how his attention wandered as a school child ("It Wasn't What I Had in Mind"), or just how good he's feeling (riding on a "Diamond Wave"), his gentle, croon and mellifluous compositions, some with subtle orchestrations, feel humble, joyous and alive. You want to reach out and give the guy a hug.

On the ballad "Powder Blue" he evokes earlier times in a dreamy reminiscence that seems plucked from some decades-old psychedelic flower power Donovan collection.

The Vivian Line is unlikely to land on anyone's hip/hot list. Rather Sexsmith, now pushing 60, is content to churn out radiant, sublime, transcendent music that

unobtrusively exists in its own delicate bubble, inviting us in to join him on his unique musical path.



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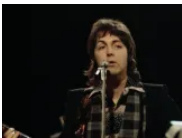
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