



Ron Sexsmith Is at His Most Playful on 'Hermitage'



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BY **ANGELA MORRISON**

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7 Ron Sexsmith's *Hermitage* opens with bright piano and the sounds of birds chirping, immediately introducing the delightful and whimsical tone of the album, his 17th LP since his 1986 debut *There's a Way*. Since moving from Toronto to Stratford with his wife and children, Sexsmith has gained a newfound appreciation for the little things: sunshine, birds, a nice glass of wine, and the small

comforts of home (hence the album's title). Although Sexsmith's vocal delivery is as plaintive as ever, there is a lightness to the album as he recounts happy memories ("Chateau Mermaid," "Apparently Au Pair") and looks forward to better times ("Spring of the Following Year").

After building his career on a rather sombre persona, Sexsmith's albums since 2015's *Carousel One* have demonstrated a much brighter, yet still contemplative, outlook. Indeed, the cover art displays Sexsmith's lightheartedness and sense of humour as he holds the handles of a lawnmower, decked out in Elton John-style sunglasses and a pink feather boa. Playful, folksy instrumentation, including banjo, piano, accordion, harpsichord, and light, bouncy percussion, evokes Donovan, the Kinks, and *Astral Weeks*-era Van Morrison. While the album's whimsicality is mostly charming, there are times that it feels platitudinous, in songs such as "Small Minded World" and "Dig Nation." Despite good intentions and some clever wordplay ("In Dig Nation..."), the heavy-handed messages of "be yourself" and "don't be so self-righteous" come across as trite.

Crisply produced throughout, Sexsmith and regular collaborator Don Kerr achieve some truly beautiful melodies on songs such as "Glow in the Dark Stars" and "Think of You Fondly," the latter of which includes a section of layered vocalization that almost sounds like Brian Wilson. Perhaps this is not Sexsmith's most lyrically accomplished work, but it is difficult to dislike any of these lovely, breezy, genuinely heartfelt songs.

(Warner)

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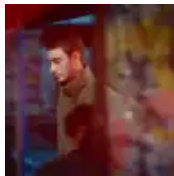


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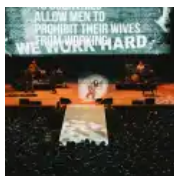
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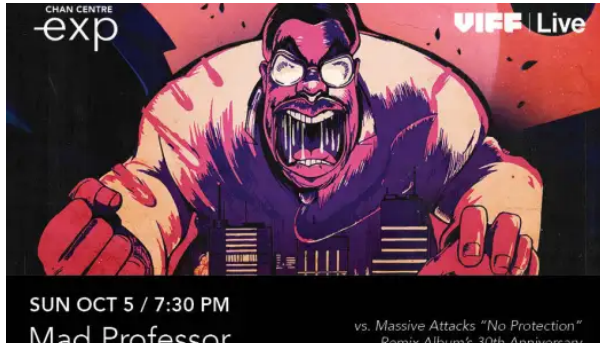
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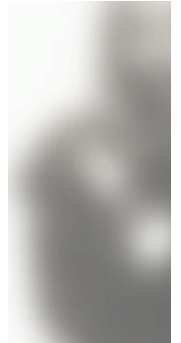
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