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Ron Sexsmith – The Vivian Line

by Mike Davies | 14 February, 2023

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The Vivian Line

Cooking Vinyl

17 February 2023

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Ron Sexsmith has been making music for so long that he makes it sound effortless, though it's clear that a high degree of care and craftsmanship goes into making it seem so easy. *The Vivian Line* takes its title from the rural route near Sexsmith's home, which he regards as representing a portal between his old life in Toronto and his new life in Ontario. The album includes a line-up of musicians that includes Joe Pisapia on pedal steel, drummer Conrad Choucroun, Brad Jones on bass and marxophone with strings by Chris Carmichael and Evan Cobb providing the woodwinds.

On the opening song, he inhabits a Place Called Love, a suitably dreamy, brass-warmed, piano-brushed, slow shuffling number about a community of kindred souls "*Where everybody knows the troubles you've seen/Oh and the people all know what struggling means*" : finding salvation ("*Everyone finds it in their own time/Oh and you can lay down your burden cry/You're in a place called love*").

The pace gets perkier with *What I Had In Mind* with its cascading chords, a reflection on schooldays ("*Could never memorize/All the blackboard figures and facts...My Ma could find A's/In my report card news/Hoped it was just a phase/That I was going through*") and how he never saw the nine to five grind as his life ("*Could never fall in line/With the slave all day/minimum pay design*") or "*see the relevance/Or the intelligence/Of preaching gloom and doom*"

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Like Boo Hewerdine's recent work, he's become immersed in a soft shoe ambience of 40s crooners, or what producer Jones terms 'baroque pop', a feeling that envelops *Flower Boxes*. When asked about the song, Ron told us, "It was written for a good friend who died unexpectedly a few years ago...He was like part handyman, part angel". He made flower boxes for their yard, from which the song takes its title ("*Even though you're gone/Your soul remains/In these flower boxes*"), and also touches on his legacy ("*The cheerful light you brought/The tearful lesson taught/From despair our memories can save us/All the things you need with pride/By hand with love inside*").

With tumbling melody line, strings, and female la la la backing vocals, *Outdated and Antiquated* is a playfully self-deprecating number ("*Old fashioned, I'm "balder-dashing"/Even new fangled trend/Can't seem to go with the flow/It just don't make sense/I don't fit in*") but at the same time also self-assertive as he declares, "*I'm relevant to myself/And I'm stubborn to the core/Go on and see for yourself/They just don't make em like me anymore*".

Written some 30 years ago but never recorded until now, the sunny, upbeat mood continues with the Spanish guitar picking and almost tropical melodic air of *Diamond Wave* ("*You know our luck was bad for a little while/We're still going nowhere but now we're going in style...You know the sun was hiding under heavy cloud/There was no one guiding us for miles/But any doubts and second thoughts are gone*") with its nod to faith in a divine purpose ("*For though we deal with things that we don't understand/I can feel the motion of our Father's hand*") and testament to shared love.

He's reflective again with the gentle swaying, shaker percussion-tinged *Powder Blue*, a song that encompasses a wonder at the beauty of nature alongside themes of growing up.

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fades”).

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On *One Bird Calling* in which, evoking thoughts of Noah’s flood, a summer storm in which “Many a bird had lost its nest” is also a herald to a healing dawn “To weave its grace for Heaven’s sake” and of “how lucky we are/To have and hold/To have a home”. Doubtless informed by recent relocation, that imagery of home or a place to belong permeates many of the songs and surfaces again in the walking beat, Brill Building hues of *Country Mile*, as he sings of trading the noise of the city for rural peace and quiet. A similar theme can be found in *That And The Other Thing*, although here, making that move comes up against prevarication and excuses, time ticking away “While your mind was clocking out,” and things keep piling up. It’s also the core of the whimsical *Barn Conversion*, a song about, well, just that, inspired by TV shows about couples doing up old country houses, the “manly farmers” all laughing at “a first-class slapstick comedy show” as our would-be handyman falls from ladders but then now “All the Old Ladies with their yarn perversions/They all so jealous of his barn conversion

He closes with, firstly, the romantic acoustic fingerpicked, brass-burnished ballad *When Love Was New*, a song about growing together over the years (“When our love was young/As young as the springtime/We were always on the run/Now it slows to a sweet time/Little did we know/We were old souls from the start/Although our love was young was ancient in our hearts”) and, finally, the absolutely lovely, relaxed old school cowboy country shuffle of *Ever Wonder*, a return to the notion of how we’re all part of the same world, all of us sharing the same doubts and setbacks, that “We’re not so different/In the small or grand scheme/Not so different/When we wonder what it all means” and even when “the world’s so out of whack” still “kindness/Can be seen o’er the blindness”.

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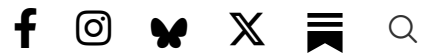
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Ron Sexsmith UK & Ireland Tour Dates

April

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FRI 28 th	Triskel Christchurc, Cork, IE
SAT 29 th	Dolans Warehouse, Limerick, IE

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SUN 7 th	Festival Marquee, Belfast, IE	
WED 10 th	Acapela Studios, Pentrych, Cardiff, Wales	
THU 11 th	Cambridge Junction, Cambridge, England	
FRI 12 th	Howard Assembly Rooms @ Opera North, Leeds, England	
SAT 13 th	Upper Chapel, Sheffield, England	
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