

uptown What's up

Winnipeg Free Press THURSDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2015 7



Sweet home, Alabama

Winnipeg singer-songwriter
found kindred musical souls
in southern town

Mutual admiration society

SCOTT Nolan acted as producer on William Prince's new debut album, *Earthly Days*, and will be part of Prince's band at the CD release party Monday, Dec. 7, at the West End Cultural Centre. The pair have known each other for years, and just happen to be releasing albums in the same week.

NOLAN ON PRINCE:

"William and I met, he introduced himself to me and we became friends, and he asked if he could drop by and visit. We'd sit out back of my studio and just hang out and talk and play songs a bit. The one thing I think we did right was, just as friends, we took time off the clock to... you know, here's this remarkably talented guy, I didn't want to rush him or start suggesting I record him.

"From the minute I had him on at a show of mine — he had to borrow my guitar because he didn't even have a guitar at the time — he really knocked 'em dead. And I've had him up six or eight times at shows since. He's strangely fully formed in that his presentation and delivery belies his age, and I think it's his deep First Nations roots. I can hear and see his father in what he does in a way I don't see in people all the time. It's a tradition that I think he's even just tuning into.

"He's a real dynamo. It's something special there for sure. I don't produce a lot — a few things come my way a year, so it's gotta be a real harmony. I can't work and produce music that my heart's not completely invested in, and that said, I can't work with someone who is wildly talented and an asshole. It's gotta be all the ingredients in one, and William exemplifies that to me. I really feel like he's gonna take the Canadian music scene by storm pretty quick. He's the real deal, that one."

PRINCE ON NOLAN:

"He really allowed me to see what I was working with. He brought that out of me because he's so nurturing and patient, and when it comes to music, he's a songwriter that is truly unparalleled. He has a great work ethic and when things weren't really

By Erin Lebar

IN the small town of Silverhill, Ala., Winnipeg-based blues-folk artist Scott Nolan made some musical magic.

He travelled to the southern spot, which has a population of just barely 700, while on tour with fellow troubadour Mary Gauthier to perform at the Frog Pond at Blue Moon Farm, a “finely curated festival” that’s a kind of outdoor house concert in the vein of Levon Helm’s Midnight Ramble Sessions.

It was there he met up with Willie Sugarapps, a supergroup of musicians — some whom were old friends and others new acquaintances — whose combined musical prowess was enough to lure Nolan back down south to record his new album, the aptly titled *Silverhill*, with them.

“I see it as, like, a thousand years of ancient musicality when you put the five of them together,” he says, with a degree of reverence in his voice.

The band includes Anthony Crawford, Savanna Lee, Will Kimbrough, Corky Hughes and Grayson Capps, and Nolan cannot speak highly enough of them. He throws out words such as “amazing,” “magical,” “remarkable” and “accomplished” often, which is why he went to Alabama, just songs and guitar in hand, knowing everything would turn out all right.

“I’ve been travelling a lot and it’s been a really interesting year, out of the ordinary for me, and I thought, ‘I wanna make that trip,’” says Nolan. “I just took a guitar that belonged to my late road manager, Ernie Blackburn... just took that, no harmonicas, no amps. I was really determined to just occupy

Scott Nolan

CD RELEASE

- Saturday, Dec. 12, 8 p.m.
- Park Theatre
- Tickets \$20 at the Park Theatre, Music Trader and Ticketfly.com

CONCERT PREVIEW

one chair.”

In just two days, they laid down the 13 tracks that make up *Silverhill*. As Nolan describes it, he tried to leave the songs as “raw as I thought was passible.”

“I would walk around to each of their little stations, and I’d lay out a sheet of lyrics and I’d say, ‘Y’know, whatever your process is, I’ll play the song once,’” says Nolan. “They had no demos, no charts, and all five of them would do their own process for learning the song as I did it, and then we could cut one to three takes only.”

For many artists, a two-day timeline would be a Herculean task, but Nolan had the opposite experience.

“I felt more free, actually,” he says with a laugh. “With the exception of two songs, the record sequence is how it happened. The first six songs in the first day — and you can hear it in my voice by song six, something’s changed. And then song seven starts back the next day. Strangely, it wasn’t daunting.”

Getting *Silverhill* finished wasn’t Nolan’s only focus this year — he turned 40 last December, and while he was skeptical of those who warned him it would be a profound experience, it turned out to be exactly that.

After smoking for many years, he

clicking — that’s where I tend to think we’re wasting time — he’s like, ‘No, let’s just do this right.’ He really guided me through the recording process and to trust that, in the end, things were gonna be OK.

“Honestly, he was just a great friend. For me to admire him and be such a fan of his for so long — it finally just sank in that we’re partners on this. He’s invested in this just as much as I am, and by the end of it, he was more excited than I was. He just created an environment where I was able to work to my full potential, and he added so much to it (the record)... it’s ready now, and it wouldn’t have been without him, so I really owe him the world for this record.”

decided to quit and, to fill the void, started walking seven kilometres every day, no matter the weather. Almost a year later, he’s still doing it and has found the walks, coupled with his newfound interest in writing poetry (he had two pieces published in online quarterly journal *The Puritan* this fall), have changed his outlook, not only on his art, but on his life.

“Within the first couple days (of walking), I started writing poetry and my head got clearer. It just seems strangely too good to be true that I’d take these walks and I’d get more writing (done) and of an even higher quality,” says Nolan.

“I’ve smartened up and I’ve realized that it’s not the records I sell or the gigs I do, this is what keeps me alive and healthy in my spirit.”

Erin.lebar@freepress.mb.ca
Twitter: @NireRabel