



Josiah Whitley – *Lay Me Down In Roses* Biography

In a small living room decorated with outdated blue and green paisley wallpaper sits a small shelf full of vinyl records. The titles and names elude just about any millennial; *Townes Van Zandt - Live At The Old Quarter*, *Guy Clark - Old Number 1*, *Tom Waits - Bone Machine*. All jammed together in a well-worn collection of music full of sentimental imagery, plot twists and fine-crafted lyrics that always seems to be above the heads and under the radar of the average pop music listener.

Which makes *Lay Me Down In Roses*, Whitley's second full-length album and third overall release so unique. Whitley is only twenty-six years of age. But one listen and at times you would swear he is an old man. From the acoustic blues stomping "The Ballad Of Johnny", to the mournful lyric from "Heaven Ain't For Fools" which says, "He died inside at twenty-five, was buried at seventy-two, he could turn the blues into ballads, turn the ballads into the blues," Whitley sells the old soul persona to a fault.

But it's not an act. Josiah Whitley *is* an old soul. "I grew up on old music, old TV shows, etc.," Whitley says in his southern Ohio twang. "By age eight I was playing "Your Cheatin' Heart" by Hank Williams Sr. on the mandolin, drinking coffee and reading the newspaper with my grandparents. I never thought any of that was strange. It's all I knew!"

Nowadays old fashioned isn't all he knows. He lived in Nashville for a brief period doing session work for newer artists. "I used to get so irritated when I was a Nashville session musician," says Whitley with annoyance. "Here we were burning time and money auto-tuning and constantly doctoring up tracks instead of going for the perfect take that didn't need touched. I kept thinking about how Black Sabbath and The Beatles recorded their entire debut albums in twelve hours. The raw performance in recorded music is gone and goes against everything I believe in."

Lay Me Down In Roses is an album that is just that. It's a collection of raw live in the studio performances. Yet it wasn't recorded in a proper studio. "I enjoy records that just scream genuine," he explains. *Exile On Main Street* by The Rolling Stones was recorded in the basement of a house, and even Deep Purple's *Smoke On The Water* was recorded in an abandoned hotel. So why couldn't I record *Lay Me Down In Roses* in an old movie theater?"

Whitley admits the sound of the theater wasn't the only factor in his decision to record

there. While the album was being recorded Whitley was in dire straits. He was broke and homeless, couch surfing, staying in guest bedrooms and sleeping in his car between shows. All the while desperately trying to book more dates to pay the bills. "I fell on hard times and I couldn't afford a studio or pay anybody to help with recording or engineering. I desperately needed an album that showcased what I do live. I thought, 'I'll just write my best songs, push the record button and give it the best performance that I can.'" True to his word *Roses* is indeed his best songs and his best performances on record.

Whitley showcases his love for words and storytelling in many of the songs, particularly in "The Devil's Left Hand Man," a song about a man who finds himself in quite the predicament in the afterlife. "It's about a guy who dies and finds that St. Peter and the Devil gamble with dice to seal his eternal fate. So he finds himself in Hell shoveling coal in Hell's fire to keep it burning and decides he wants to change jobs and applies for a transfer and becomes the ghost who buys the souls from the people who wants to sell them." With a shrug and a laugh he concludes, "Needless to say it's not your typical party in the USA pop song."

Other notable mentions on the album include "The Hobo", a true story about Whitley's great grandfather who was a hobo at the turn of the century which was recorded on The Blue Plate Special radio program in front of a live studio audience in Knoxville, TN. There's also the grit and grime attitude of "The Ballad Of Johnny", which kicks off the album with its stomping blues riff. It became single from the album and has its own accompanying music video.

There is plenty of light to contrast the darkness on the record as well. The softest tune on the album being the heart string pulling "Fall Into Me", the song that inspired the title of the album. "I had that lyric in there and always loved albums that cited a lyric as the title for the whole project," Whitley says proudly. "When I wrote, 'The devil needs an angel every king needs his queen, so ease on in and lay your smile right here on my cheek. I'll turn your winter time to Spring if you'd fall into me,' I meant every word."

And finally the album itself closes with a rendition of "Dead Flowers", a Rolling Stones tune that Whitley stripped down with just him and his guitar and a female accompanist. Which comes as a surprising choice as a way to end an album by an artist who takes so much pride in being a songwriter. The only explanation Whitley gives is, "It worked in *The Big Lebowski*, didn't it?"

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