

BALL PARK MUSIC



Over 15 years into their career, everything **Ball Park Music** does these days feels like a victory lap. The Brisbane indie darlings have long established their status as one of Australia's most revered and endearing bands – with five of their seven albums having debuted in the ARIA top five, four of their songs having gone platinum and no less than a dozen Hottest 100 placements to their name. Most bands in that position would be happy to coast out their days on heyday nostalgia alone, but if it wasn't already clear: Ball Park Music are not most bands.

On their eighth studio album, **LIKE LOVE**, Ball Park have delivered a series of bright, endearing and comforting songs – entirely on their own terms, and in a manner quite unlike any of their albums before it. Eschewing the frenetic energy of their faster numbers entirely, album number eight sees the band orienting their focus towards reflective, thoughtful and refined folk-rock. So, how did we get here? How else – through a journey of self-discovery. “We needed to get out of our comfort zone,” says **Sam Cromack** – the band's lead singer and chief songwriter.

“We've been trying to make the quote-unquote 'perfect' indie album for a while. I'm proud of all of our albums, but they were all essentially trying to achieve the same goal. The songs on *LIKE LOVE* have been slowly accumulating over the years, but I never really knew where any of them belonged. All I really knew is that they were all precious to me. After we got off tour for the last album [2022's *Weirder and Weirder*], I found myself at home listening to a lot of Bob Dylan, Big Thief and Julia Jacklin. Sometimes, the pressure of working on a follow-up album can really get to you, but listening to these artists who had clearly experienced this kind of artistic liberation meant that there was never any tension or stress in making this album.”

Fans have already been eased into the sound of *LIKE LOVE* through the release of its title track, which marks a first in Ball Park's storied history: A song released under their name that features only Cromack on his lonesome. Cromack had demoed the tender acoustic ballad all by himself in the studio, and he would have gotten away with it, too – if it weren't for those meddling kids, ie. his bandmates. “Dean [Hanson, rhythm guitar] was snooping around on the computer,” Cromack recalls. “He found the demo, and immediately texted me: 'This is one of the best fucking songs you've ever written'. The rest of the band threw their support behind it, and eventually I started playing it live.”

The adoring reception the song received eventually coaxed Cromack into properly recording it – which, as it turned out, was not all that different from the demo. “We've been together long enough to know what a song does and doesn't need,” he explains. “None of us could really picture it any different from the way it

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was. It makes me think of songs like 'Yesterday' by The Beatles, or 'I Will Follow You Into the Dark' by Death Cab for Cutie – they're credited to the band, even though it's just one member by themselves, and they're considered token songs by both. This is a Ball Park Music song. It belongs to all of us.”

Reuniting with producer **Matt Redlich** – who worked on the band's 2011 debut ***Happiness and Surrounding Suburbs***, its 2012 follow-up ***Museum*** and their 2016 effort ***Every Night the Same Dream*** –

Cromack and co. headed south of the Sunshine State to Sydney, where they hunkered down in Marrickville's Golden Retriever Studios under cover of darkness. There, *LIKE LOVE* was forged in a fittingly-delicate manner, across two weeks of sessions that Cromack describes as “a full Beatles daydream”.

“We really wanted to tap into that golden era of folk,” the band's singer adds. “There were beautiful pianos and acoustic guitars at the studio that we used, plus we did a lot of singing together as a group. Daniel [Hanson, drums] was amusing himself by trying to do less and less every day – cutting things left, right and centre until he had distilled to just the essentials. The whole studio experience just ended up being this great exploration of our musicianship, which is exactly what we wanted. The plan was to get as uncomfortable as possible in order to see what happens to us as a band when that happens.”

Across its ten tracks, *LIKE LOVE* stays true to its title and sees the band exploring what it means to truly put your heart on your sleeve. 'Please Don't Move to Melbourne', sure to become an instant hit with non-Victorians, pines for an interstate distance to be filled between dear friends. 'Pain & Love', meanwhile, comments on the fragile nature of familial bonds – something the band members know all too well, with the majority of them now being parents themselves. “Moving into your 30s, you kind of expect life to settle down or plateau,” Cromack observes. “You'd be surprised how tumultuous life can still be. There's still lots of things that fall apart, and struggles to overcome. Love is what perseveres through all of that, and that came to be the defining theme of the album as we looked at it from all angles.”

LIKE LOVE is, ultimately, an album quite unlike anything Ball Park Music have ever done. It's been handled with the utmost care, with a clear vision, and Cromack can only hope you can find a piece of yourself within it. “I gave everything I could to these songs,” he says. “I hope it punches you in the gut. I hope it shares a bottle of wine with you while you're crying at night. I hope this hits the heart harder than ever before.”

Written by David James Young