

BEC WILLIS – OTHER SIDE OF TOWN

Singer-songwriter Bec Willis' third long-player *Other Side Of Town* is aptly named – it was the album she started writing when she literally moved to the 'other side of town'. The tracks were penned on the road, travelling for both work and personal reasons – opening up her creative and imaginative space and creating a 12-track opus of acoustic offerings, rockin' country blues and heartfelt folk.

The title-track *Other Side Of Town* was the first new track Bec penned for the release, the song which opened the floodgates for the album, inspired by her move. Moving interstate, the breakdown of her marriage and the passing of her Mother provided the toughest times she had experienced and Bec channelled those emotions into her songwriting, although initially a new album wasn't on the cards.

"I kept writing as I bounced through the rough seas of life those few months, and kept writing because I had to, the songs just came out," she says. "In about July 2018, I decided I was going to release a new album, inspired by Mum's passing, and the new freedom I had to really be myself. So, I wrote the songs driving down various roads in New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia. I demoed the songs in my lounge room in South Australia onto my iPhone and I arranged the songs and planned the instrumentation and dynamics of the songs when I was doing some preparation about a month before we recorded."

Recorded in Bill Chambers studio in Bensville and mastered by Jeff McCormack, the album features musicians Dean Ray, Chris Haigh, Ali Foster and Michael Sparrow. A chance encounter back in 2004 saw Bec attract the attention of Bill and Kasey Chambers, so much so that they offered to produce her debut album. The musical connection continued with the release of her sophomore album *Little Soul* in 2015, also produced by Bill, so it was a natural progression when she was ready to step back into the studio for her third release, that Bec would call on the help of her mentor and friend again.

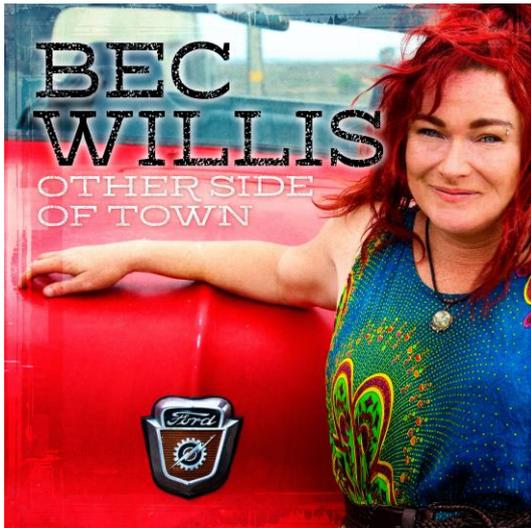
"Bill is a no bulls**t guy and I can totally be myself with him," she says. "He is open-minded to my, sometimes strange, ideas. Bill lets the song do the talking. He doesn't want to saturate the songs with bells and whistles production and we seem to be on the same page when it comes to production ideas. I learnt from being on the road with Beccy Cole for some years that it's really important to work with people you trust and can be yourself with. Beccy's band has always been like that, a family. Due to the personal nature of my songs, I trust Bill as a producer, it's like trusting someone with a newborn, to me the songs are my babies and whoever works on them has to 'get' them. Bill gets it!"

Bec, her partner and their two dogs – along with a bag of songs – moved in with Bill and his wife Kate for a week to record – it was a complete immersion experience. "I was nervous to do the pilot tracks, where I play and sing acoustic, so the band can get their heads and hands around the songs," she says. "It's a nervousness that comes with sharing my songs with other professional musicians for the first time. Once that was done, we started laying down the bass, drums and acoustic guitars all at once. The players were so great and intuitive that they basically played along and it sounded like I wanted it to sound in my head. However, Chris, Ali and Bill also added creative ideas and flair as musos which brought the songs to life."

It was a four-day process in the studio to record the 12-track release. "We had Dean Ray drop in and contribute some blistering electric guitar on *Hot Spot*, *You'll Find Me* and *White Ass*, which was great. Chris Haigh was booked for bass guitar, but ended up playing acoustic and electric guitars on certain songs also. I've known Haighy for years and he treats my songs with a respectful sensitivity. He is quite an exquisite guitar player. Ali Foster was on drums and one of the most easy-going and professional drummers I've ever worked with – a real delight. Then Bill added some slide guitar, Dobro, backing vocals, mandolin and ukulele once we had done the band tracks, and we knew exactly where to place what instrument. Michael Sparrow came and did some backing vocals, he is a genius. We got most of the vocals in two or three takes, and the acoustic tracks were live vocals. Two songs in particular were difficult for me to sing without getting emotional – *Fly* and *Dreams In My Pocket*. After we finished, I felt emotionally exhausted and drained, but super happy."

Having the ability to come full circle and be back in the studio with Bill for a third time is special for Bec. "The first time I was in the studio in 2007, I was totally and embarrassingly starstruck," says Bec. "Kasey and Bill steered that album perfectly and I'll be forever grateful for how they handled my songs. *Other Side Of Town* was more Bill and I nutting it out together. Like everything I do musically these days, I have a lot more to do with the decision making and I also played guitar and harp all over this album. When my debut was released, I really was unable to know what I wanted to sound like as an artist, so I'm grateful Kasey and Bill had the reins and gave me such a great start. It's an album I'm still really proud of. The difference is 10 years ago I had no idea who I was and now I have a pretty good idea."

Bec Willis third album *Other Side Of Town* is independently released on Friday 8th March 2019. For more information, please visit www.becwillismusic.com



1. Real Thing [4:14]
2. Fly [4:07]
3. You'll Find Me [4:35]
4. Drive [3:16]
5. Dream In Your Pocket [3:05]
6. Promise [3:59]
7. All We Need Is Love [2:57]
8. White Ass [3:33]
9. End Of Time [3:58]
10. Other Side Of Town [3:39]
11. Hot Spot [4:23]
12. Nothing [3:48]

The Real Thing

I don't care much for material things, find it boring looking at diamond rings, don't spend much on my hair or my shoes, but I care for a love that's true...

The Real Thing is inspired by just that, the real thing, that real head-over-heels compatible in every way love. "I was living with my 80-year-old Dad as a single Mum aged 42 with my two young boys," says Bec. "I had relocated to South Australia when my Mum died and I just could not return to New South Wales as I was a mess and needed my family. I had no car, no house, no money and one day selling fishing bait for Dad this loud, very upbeat guy walked in it was instant, and unexpected. It was like a bad country song 'my man left me, my Mum died and I met my love at my Mother's funeral'. It was all so bizarre. I still think my dear Mum – RIP – organised it and was laughing at me from beyond the grave."

The song stayed pretty true to its original composition in the studio. "The only difference to my vision was that Bill added a rippin' slide guitar to the track, which I love," says Bec. "It's pretty much turned out how I imagined it, but better. Once Haighy (bass) and Ali (drums) added their magic, I was like 'yes, this is it!' It was such a good feeling!"

Fly

Bye bye boys bye bye, board the plane so you don't see me cry, you're going to see your Daddy for a while, spread those little wings and learn to fly...

Penned on the Princess Highway on the way back from Adelaide Airport, *Fly* will resonate with any separated family. It was written immediately after Bec put her two sons on the plane to spend school holidays with their father. "As anyone whose kids have two houses knows, it's hard, no matter what the arrangements are or who does what, it's hard," she says. "I imagined them growing up and us all growing old, then my imagination took over. It's about raising your kids and hoping to impart to them the best of yourself, protect them from your faults and encourage the relationship with the other parent so they can get the best from them and learn from them too. Always put the kids first and never use them as pawns in an ex-game."

Recording the song was understandably an emotional experience for Bec. "I had to have a nap and a cuppa in the middle of the vocals as I kept getting weepy," she says. "This song originally had about 27 verses, because the trip from the airport back to Kingston Southeast is a good three and a half hours, so I just kept writing it. I obviously cut about 20 verses off it. Bill and the band added greater dynamics in the song as the verses can be quite 'samey' so they mixed it up with a delayed band-in arrangement and a break down near the end, plus the two solos."

You'll Find Me

This won't define me, you'll see. I'll put it in the past behind me, if you try to find me, you won't recognise me oh you won't find the girl I used to be, you'll find me...

Inspired by essentially finding yourself, Bec penned the song in a little town called World's End on the World's End Highway in South Australia after a break on the New South Wales - South Australian border while her children were with their father over the school holidays. "I was so totally lost without them and I had the chance to process some of the hard year I'd had," she says. "The original thought was that I'd become so lost over the past few years with no idea of what I wanted in life and the pain had put me in touch with who I was and what I wanted. It's a song about surviving crap times and thriving, coming out the other side and saying to yourself 'oh, there you are, I've missed you!'"

Taking it into the studio, the musicians help bring the emotion out in the music in the way that resonated with the feeling Bec had when she was first writing the track. "Bill got Dean Ray to play electric guitar on this one, and its tender, and sweet and melancholy tones that Dean added," she says. "Haighy's bass playing makes me want to weep when I hear it, it's so great."

Drive

Don't let the door hit your ass on the way out, I won't dignify this situation if I scream and shout, I'll feel better when I turn the key and hit the road...

One of the lighter songs on the album, it embodies Bec's tongue-in-cheek songwriting style. Inspired by her love of driving – one of her top five things to do in life – getting behind the wheel and just driving, pedal to the metal. It's no surprise then that this track was also written on the road, driving along the Barrier Highway in South Australia, near a town called Whyte Tarcowie.

"It was so hot that day the power had gone off at the servo, and I had to find a rainwater tank to fill my car's water up," says Bec. "Once you pass Burra, heading towards Coburn, the magic happens for me. That country reminds me of Ceduna where I spent a few years as a teenager. To me, everything there is spectacular – the colour and the textures of the land are like art to me."

Bringing the sound to life in the studio was exciting in itself, especially for Bec as she got the opportunity to play Bill Chambers' Gretsch electric guitar. "I loved playing electric on this song," she says. "The band rocked it! I had envisioned a grungy acoustic song, but we amped it up and Bill added slide guitar and my head nearly exploded with excitement. It was always going to have harmonica on it, but I think it has become a real feature of this song, along with the guitar riff."

Dream In Your Pocket

Put a dream in your pocket, that's what you wrote on my 18th birthday card, now the dream is so different, but that's okay, life changes us, and this one goes up to you, cos I know you're on my team, up there on the other side, help me find my dream...

Dream In Your Pocket was one of the hardest tracks for Bec to record on the album. Inspired by her late Mother, Loretta Willis, who passed away on the 17th October 2017, it is her ode to the woman who always believed in her. Penned when she first moved out of her Dad's house into her own rental after her Mum passed away, it has been an emotional journey and is one of the most significant songs on the album. Bec particularly loves Michael Sparrow's backing vocals and Chris Haig's electric guitar playing on the track.

"Mum gave me a card for my 18th birthday that said 'Dear Bec, Keep a dream in your pocket and never let it die, because one day it might come true. Love Mum'," says Bec. "When I had my first child and then my second, and had postnatal depression with both kids, Mum encouraged me to keep gigging and singing, because she knew I loved it and it was me being totally me when I was doing it. As usual, Mother knew best."

Promise

I'm never not gonna love you, I've been broken I got baggage too, I promise honey, what I won't do, I won't run away from you...

Surprisingly, *Promise* is the first real love song – about loving another person – that Bec has ever written, and it is penned about her new love. "I used to roll my eyes at love songs and think they were lame, like 'what drugs are they on' as I didn't get them" she says. "When I fell in love and wrote this song, it was like 'oh, now I get it!' I felt like a bit of a fool."

The song actually changed direction a bit in the studio from how Bec originally planned to record it. "I envisioned it as a band song, but Bill suggested just Haighy and I play acoustic guitar and record it live," says Bec. "I'm so glad we did, its more tender this way."

All We Need Is Love

All we need is love, babe, its big and brave and true, its written in the stars and I'm gonna give it all to you...

All We Need Is Love is another track that changed direction when Bec took it into the studio. She originally envisioned it as a band track, but in the end recorded it live with just herself, Chris Haigh and Bill on ukulele. "Now it sounds like chilling out in the hammock song and I love it," says Bec. "It also references my Mum who has passed – my special angel's watching us. When Mum died, it put so much into perspective for me. From her passing I learned that really, all that matters in life is how we love people – everyone, not just romantic partners – and how we are loved."

While a lot of Bec's tracks have been penned on the road, she is honest enough to let slip that the second version of *All We Need Is Love* was actually penned right before recording the vocals while on the loo – something she hasn't even shared with Bill or her fellow musicians, yet. So far, the song has been appealing to young and old audiences. "I'm a casual school teacher and I played this song to some little kids I was teaching," she says. "At the end of the song a cute little five-year-old came up and said 'excuse me Miss Willis, but who is Doug?' She thought it was '*All We Need Is Doug*'. Too cute!"

White Ass

And if my love's not big enough for you my dear, feel free to stick it up your white ass, I ain't wasting one more tear...

A relatively self-explanatory song, it is Bec's current mission statement – take me or leave me – no in-between, no excuses. "It is not a man-hating song" she says. "It's about celebrating making it out the other side of the dark divorce hole. I wrote it on the way back from a gig in the Barrington Tops, New South Wales where I was a special guest at Beccy Cole and Libby O'Donovan's Aussie Road Crew camping gig. I arrived a bit down as it was my 10-year wedding anniversary and I was separated. After a weekend with all the lovely people at Beccy's tour, I left for home feeling inspired and empowered."

Bec wanted to embrace that same feeling of empowerment when she took the song into the studio. "It was going to be a fast folk song," she says. "But Dean Ray skilfully slathered it in electric attitude and now it's my favourite song."

End Of Time

Darlin can you feel it? I don't want to leave like this, Cos I'm all yours and you are mine, Darlin don't you, want to grow old with me, we can be like this till the end of time...

A heart-wrenching track about the challenge of long-distance relationships and how hard it is to say good-bye to your sweetheart, *End Of Time* was one of the tracks Bec found a challenge in the studio until they hit the sweet spot. "My weird chord changes in this song made us feel like we were gonna be recording it until the 'end of time'," she laughs. "Bill added beautiful mandolin and I couldn't really sing the song with any conviction until I had that sweetness in my ears. Haighy played electric guitar on this one and I really love his treatment of it."

Other Side Of Town

I live on the other side of town, I'm listening to any kind of music I've found, trying to be the opposite of before, I'm running when I'm supposed to crawl, I've died my hair black, I paint my nails blue, I wouldn't take you back even if I wanted to, I fell out of your pocket and onto the ground over here, on the other side of town...

The first new track penned for the album, and the subsequent title track, *Other Side Of Town* is the epitome of what started the whole process of the album for Bec. It was fitting that it became the lynchpin for the album and the start of her new life – and new release. "During my marriage separation I literally moved to the other side of town," she says. "I moved to the older part of town, into an old miner's cottage which I ended up loving. I learned to put air in my own car tyres and light the fire in my home. I reckon I learned 'Sheila's Home Maintenance 101' in those first three-months that I lived there. I wrote the words for *Other Side Of Town* on the back of a coffee shop loyalty card as it was all I had to write on at the time. When I tried to read it, I couldn't, so I had to rewrite the song!"

Recording the song turned out to be something special – and challenging – for Bec. "Bill added his backing vocals to this song, and it really added something for me," she says. "Also, I got to play with Haighy acoustic and do this one live. I was struggling for breath, as I had a chest infection, and I thought 'seriously, why did I put so many words in the bloody chorus' when I was singing it!"

Hot Spot

Sittin', thinkin' waiting for you, hoping, moping, what am I gonna do? Lying, cheating, denying a mess? Oh baby you got me in a hot spot and honey you know the rest...

The oldest track on the album, *Hot Spot*, was written by an 18-year-old Bec Willis, living back in Ceduna, South Australia, listening to Sonny Terry and just wanting to write a blues song. It was a song though that brought back fond memories, so felt like it belonged on the album. "My Mum used to make up vulgar, alternative words to this song about my Dad that was hilarious," remembers Bec. "Sittin', fishing, shi**in' stinkin'..."

In the studio, Bec says the band really helped step it up to give the song the boost it needed to reach the sound she envisioned. "Again, Dean Ray dirtied it up with a really cool electric guitar sound," she says. "Haighy (bass) sounds like he's in a jazz club in America. I loved what the band came up with."

Nothing

There's nothing I can do to bring my best friend back, there's nothing I can fix to heal this constant lack, no story fills the ache, no sentence and no words, since my true love found her wings, she's free as a bird...

The final track on the album didn't change at all going into the studio – *Nothing* was always going to be an acoustic live number, designed to bring focus on the lyrics and meaning of the song. "My Dad was hurting when Mum died, in his heart," says Bec. "He said he couldn't cry – had never been able to cry – because he was brought up 'hard'. Seeing him unable to express himself broke my heart, so I wrote words for him and he said 'yep mate, that's spot on'. Bill and I both related to this one when we recorded it, as our Dads were 'old school' tough old fellas."

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