

The Builders and The Butchers

Salvation Is A Deep Dark Well

Alaska is a most unlikely origin for the five young men who comprise the Builders and the Butchers. Between 2002-2005, each of the members that would eventually form the band moved to Portland from Alaska pursuing music as a means of escaping subzero temperatures and the endless winter darkness. Soon after moving to Portland Ryan Sollee, singer songwriter and guitarist for The Builders, immersed himself in pre-1950's American music, and started writing Southern Gothic themed story-songs "I was raised on Punk Rock but when I moved to Portland I discovered American Roots music, I felt as though there was similarities between the two styles. They are both genres that you cannot passively listen to, they almost evoke a response or an immediate reaction from you."

It was a typical rainy Portland afternoon at Ray Rude's house (who plays "drums" in The Builders), hanging with friends when Ryan decided to show them what he was working on. Something clicked that afternoon and within minutes everyone in attendance found something to play. Alex Ellis happened to have an old acoustic bass, and Harvey Tumbleson had borrowed a Mandolin, Ray sat down at the piano and they just started playing. Paul Seely joined the band a week later as a drummer and instrumentalist and the Builders and The Butchers were born.

Starting innocently enough as a fully acoustic rambling bunch, seeking out audiences on street corners and outside of venues, make no mistake this is not another story of busking come good, The Builders were not looking for money nor were they looking for fame, they were just playing the music they wanted to on their own terms. The band didn't work out parts on these early songs, they were developed playing on the street, and this philosophy carries through today, by choosing to develop songs live or at rehearsal. Ryan Sollee says "Something special happens when we get in a room and try to work out a song. If I come in with a developed song it never seems to sound as good or it does not sound like The Builders." In particular it was at these performances that Ray and Paul worked out their unique "deconstructed" drum style.

They played in the rain and cold of Portland winters until instruments were warped and broken, then one day the Builders *sold out* and booked a real show, then another, and crowds soon were seeking the Builders out. At the early shows it was hard to distinguish the band from the audience, nothing was mic'd or amplified, and seemingly everyone in the audience had a shaker, washboard, or were just beating on the wall and singing. All in attendance saw something special happening, *a Portland audience was having fun*, singing along and participating, the music demanded a celebration. Within a year, the Builders would win the **Willamette Week's** "Best New Band of 2008" and **Seattle Sound's** "Best Live Performers 2008" and completed supporting tours with the Helio Sequence, Brand New, Langhorne Slim, Amanda Palmer, Dax Riggs, Murder By Death and Port O'brien.

The Builders don't pay homage to old America, they channel it. All of the basic instruments are there, acoustic bass, drum, guitar, banjo, and mandolin. They mix gospel, blues, and bluegrass and howl desperate story-songs that latch onto your brain and demand immediate attention.

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The timeless sound of their songs, harkens back to a time long passed in music, but reflecting the dark times of the present. Their self-titled debut was released in 2007 and showcases the bands early raw sound. Their latest release titled “Salvation Is A Deep Dark Well” is a much more complete work showcasing the bands full potential. On Salvation, the Builders worked with producer Chris Funk from the Decemberists who brought with him a throng of expertise, patience, instruments, and some of the best musicians in Portland. Salvation record combines the immediacy of the Builders early work with more a developed songwriting, each one with its own personality and story to tell. In the vein of the Southern Gothic tales Ryan weaves stories of struggle with the usual cast of characters God, the Devil, soldiers, branches, wind, rain and hell fire. The record starts with a piano chord and an eerie wind escalating into the thunderous “Golden and Green”, stomp and grinds its way through “Devil Town” and “The Short Way Home”, to the Spanish tinged “Barcelona and “Raise Up”, and the soaring chorus of “In The Branches”, ending with a lesson of hope in the gospel homage “The World is a Top”.

The story of “Salvation is a Deep Dark Well” is that there’s joy and celebration through the darkness, there’s light in the hardest of times, and when you reach the bottom may salvation light your way.

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Track By Track by Ryan Sollee

Golden and Green

I wrote this song after watching “In the Realms of the Unreal” about Henry Darger who was a reclusive artist from Chicago, who worked his entire life as a janitor and wrote a 15,000 page fully illustrated novel. His life story and the plot of his life’s work I found so captivating that I wanted to write a song about it. The story of the song intertwines his life with the plot of the story, the “Vivian Girls” are the main hero’s and a General named Manley is the villain. This was the most fun song to record on the record and definitely one of the strangest Builders songs so we decided to make it the first track.

Devil Town

A song I brought to the rest of the Builders thinking it was mediocre at best, the song was transformed when Ray and Paul added the drums and suddenly I realized it’s potential. The interplay of the clicks on the bass drum rim, and the mandolin give the song a cool off kilter momentum. It’s probably one of the hardest hitting Builders songs and a common first track of a set list.

Short Way Home

The only song on the record where melodica is featured, Paul is playing it like a harmonica through a lot of the song, which really works with the banjo. The stompy tempo and call and response vocals are more similar to the early builders work. This is one of two songs that we used the 15 person Flash Choir on, when the song breaks down they sing a harmonic, “Ahhhhhhhhhh”.

Barcelona

This is one of several songs I’ve written about the Spanish Civil War, recently I spent some time in Europe and visited Barcelona and attempted capturing the feeling of being there in this song. Harvey and Sebastian (who played a lot of the trumpet that’s on the record) came up with the mandolin/trumpet flourish on the chorus and Paul along with our friend Victor mimicked the line.

Hands Like Roots

This song was written and recorded for the first record, but never sounded like it fit. For “Salvation” we added pump organ and violin which fills the song out. It’s a tough song to pull off live since to play all the parts we’d need a sixth person.

Down in This Hole

This song is about being locked up in a small town that feels like a prison. I wrote it after a heavy doses of Tom Wait's, wanted to write a song where the last line of the first half of the verse was the first line in the last half. The piano driving the song is played by Paul, who originally wrote this on melodica, in the studio started working out the part on piano, we all looked at each other and said, "no do that, that is amazing."

Raise Up

This is the other song on "Salvation" that's about the Spanish Civil War, this song also blends some apocalyptic imagery. The rim shots on the bass drum and Alex's bass line drive the song forward with a swing that's unique to any other Builders song. The mariachi section near the end was pulled off by countering the mandolin melody with a counter melody of 3 trumpets and violin.

Vampire Lake

This is one of the oldest Builders songs, it was recorded 3 years ago, but didn't go on the first record, "Salvation" needed another simple straight fast rocking song so we included it here. There is a slight lyrical change that probably only the original Builders fans will catch, the original version of the song is on the split LP we did with Loch Lomond.

The Wind Has Come

The Builders only real ballad, when Chris Funk approached me originally to produce the record, he inquired if we had ever written a ballad, at the time I had just written this song and I emailed him a demo of it. At home he scored out a violin, viola, and cello string arrangement and our friends Analisa and Emily Tornfelt, and Amanda Lawrence laid down the parts. Ray has a cool meandering clarinet part and Harvey is strumming Baritone Uke through the whole thing. The booming bass sound was attained by putting one bass drum in front of another and putting a mic behind the second one. There is also French horn, Organ, Bass and Bass Clarinet on this song, definitely the most involved composition on the record.

In the Branches

Chris had the idea to blend "The Wind has Come" and this song using several violin tracks creating an eerie chord. This song is set in the same time and storyline as "The Coal Mine Fall" and "Bringin' Home the Rain" from the record before. This is the other song on the record where the Flash Choir sings, they start with a prolonged "Ahhhhh" coming after the break near the end, and then echo the "my branches are waiting for you" chorus at the end.

The World is a Top

In the tradition of the first record, and most likely the next, of ending a record with a gospel song. This was fully recorded in the Masonic Temple in north Portland, which has a pretty incredible natural reverb in the room. For this one Chris Funk called upon his friend Marlon Irving from Lifesavas to gather friends and family who sing in a church in north Portland to sing on this track. Originally Ryan sang the

entire song, but for this version Kaysandra Irving sang the middle verse and drove the feeling and spirit of the song home.