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Rich Robinson keeps it real with The Magpie Salute



The Magpie Salute (Photo by Laurent Chanez)

More than three decades into his career as a musician, Rich Robinson's focus remains as steady as it's always been. Want

proof? Ask him if he wanted the first release from his band, The Magpie Salute, to be a double album instead of a pair of *High Water* records issued in 2018 and 2019.

“I wanted to put out a double album and the label didn’t, so I capitulated because I didn’t want to argue,” Robinson laughs, knowing that maybe the younger version of himself would have battled it out with the powers that be to get his way.

But an older, wiser Robinson is like a crafty, veteran prizefighter these days, picking his shots and knowing when to push and when to pull back. And luckily for fans of good music, the High Water albums are a 1–2 punch to the status quo in a business that’s a lot different than it was when Robinson first arrived on the scene with The Black Crowes.

“Sometimes it’s a struggle really just to get out there and get your name,” he said. “It’s a different world now, so the way that people break bands is different, the way that people consume music is different, the way that all these things happen is totally different, so ultimately, I’m learning as I go, too.

“There wasn’t social media back then, there wasn’t this sort of weird malaise that people get because they’re overloaded with information,” Robinson continues. “Back then, you toured, the radio station played your stuff or MTV played your stuff and that was pretty much it. And a couple magazines would write about you and the people would either check it out or they wouldn’t. Because of the internet, maybe there were 2,000 bands in 1990 that people were paying attention to. Now there’s three million, and every time you go online, someone’s selling you something in some algorithm. It takes away the human discovery, and I think

that we, as humans, respect things more when we actually do the work to discover something.”

The disappointment is clear in Robinson’s voice, but that doesn’t mean the 50-year-old is about to give in or change what he’s doing. He found kindred spirits in his Magpie bandmates (Marc Ford, Sven Pipien, John Hogg, Joe Magistro, Matt Slocum), some of whom were with him in the Crowes before the band broke up in 2015, and as soon as they got together, it wasn’t about anything but the music — playing live and writing songs that they wanted to play. No Snapchats or Instagram campaigns. THE MUSIC.

“That’s why we do it,” he said. “God knows what people like or gonna like. It’s incredibly fickle, and trying to write based on trying to get someone to like it is one of the most insincere ways that you can create art, in my opinion. It has to come from an authentic place; you have to really write from your experiences, what you’re doing, how you see the world, the places you’ve been, the people you’ve met. That’s what life is. And we write about that. Otherwise, what are we doing? Sell some toaster ovens. If you’re just here to sell s**t, then sell something you can manufacture that doesn’t take time to think about. Art is different. Art is here for a higher purpose in my mind.”



And if you notice, He didn't call this Rich Robinson's Band, or Rich Robinson's Magpie Salute. This is a band of equals, and that's the way he wanted it.

“We're dudes on a stage playing music and playing our songs that we wrote and that we played on, and we're out there as a unit of people trying to do what we do,” he said. “It's not about me. It's about this record and this band and what we can do, and that's more of how I see it instead of trying to get some sort of weird notoriety or fame.”

He's seen the notoriety and the fame as a founder of one of the biggest bands of its era. There are good sides and bad sides to all that, but today, while it may have its struggles, starting out fresh with Magpie isn't a bad thing at all for Robinson.

“I can never start from the ground floor,” he admits. “We’re starting out on a different plane, but by the sheer fact that the Black Crowes were that successful and lasted that long, it’s not something that we can ever go back to that way. But it is interesting to start from a lower rung, let’s just put it that way.”

And at least he’s got his musical buddies with him for the ride, most notably Ford, who, with Robinson formed one of the best (and most underrated) guitar tandems we’ve seen and heard in the last 25 years. And though both are great on their own, they’re even better together.

“It’s all instinctual,” said Robinson. “And I think it comes down to ears; the way that Marc hears what I’m doing, the way I hear what he’s doing and the interplay between the two. A lot of times people just zone out in their own world and they’re not listening, and if it’s somebody who’s playing lead guitar, they just literally find a key and solo and it’s more about themselves and showing off what they can do instead of serving the song and seeing what happens.”

That’s never been the case with Robinson and Ford, with reminders all around the 12 tracks of *High Water II*, an album the Georgia native is as proud of as anything he’s released. Now it’s the world’s turn to listen. That’s the exchange he’s always excited about.

“We have to be able to see and hear things that challenge us as people,” he said. “The whole point of life is to learn different takes on things. Artwork is supposed to show us a higher position. That’s why I make records, and that’s what this record is about. It’s about this authentic human feeling about how we see the world as musicians and artists and how

humanity has a lot to do with it. We really can't lose sight of that."

For more information on The Magpie Salute, click [here](#)