

Joel Plaskett Biography

JOEL PLASKETT TURNS THREE

It all started simply enough. Joel Plaskett noticed that he had three songs coming together where each title was one word repeated three times: the hillbilly stomper “Rolling, Rolling, Rolling”; the soulful electric-piano ballad “Rewind, Rewind, Rewind”; and the aching folk-pop of “Gone, Gone, Gone.”

“I was like, well, I’ve got these songs that roll in threes,” says Plaskett. “Maybe I should do a whole album of songs where every song title is the same word three times. Then I thought, well, I’ve got all these other songs that aren’t like that, but I also want to put on a record... so I’ll just make a triple record! The idea came pretty quickly.”

Once Plaskett decided to go with the concept of Three, the references flew fast and furious throughout his songs: among them a “1-2-3” count and a “3-2-1” countdown in the same song (in fact, within two lines of each other); “Good things come in threes”; several allusions to “33-1/3” (his age at the time of recording); and that he worked on 33 songs for the project.

“In ‘Deny, Deny, Deny,’” says Plaskett, “it’s like, when it’s only me and you, why does everything always gotta break in three? There’s you and somebody else [in a relationship], but there’s always some third thing: another person, your job, the road, or the two people becoming a third thing. I was trying to bring that idea into musical fruition.”

If things do always break in three, so do these albums, which are split according to three phases of traveling: departure, separation and return. “Disc one is focused around the idea of being left behind or of leaving,” Plaskett explains. “It alternates perspectives, from being the traveling man, footloose and fancy free, to the idea of being left alone. The first record has a real soul influence, and it’s the most rock ‘n’ roll. Disc two is about being alone, wherever you are. Whether you’ve gone off or you’ve stayed behind, you’re by yourself, and you’re left to your own dark thoughts and your own loneliness. I thought this was a great opportunity, with disc two of Three, to make a really somber folk album, in the context of two others that aren’t. And disc three is like, the slow return home, and the idea of getting back to where you’re from. The levity of album number three helps to paint the complete picture.”

Of course, the idea of such traveling is second nature to Plaskett, who proves it all night, every night, as a hard-touring live showman. “The culmination of this record comes off two years of harder touring than I’ve ever experienced,” he says. “In 2006, 2007 and the beginning of 2008, I toured almost non-stop, went to Australia three times – one time for six weeks, which was epic.” In fact, Plaskett has earned his reputation as a consistently exciting, dynamic live performer throughout his career, even from his teenage years fronting the

Halifax indie upstart band Thrush Hermit in the '90s. He's also garnered steadily increasing critical respect and commercial success in his recording career with his stellar band, The Emergency (Dave Marsh on drums and Chris Pennell on bass), from the indie albums *In Need of Medical Attention* (1999) and *Down at the Khyber* (2001), through his MapleMusic recordings *Truthfully Truthfully* (2003) and *La De Da* (2005), his first solo effort.

Since 2006, Plaskett has toured extensively both solo and with The Emergency, to sold-out clubs and theatres throughout Canada, the U.S., the U.K. and Australia, on the heels of great Canadian success with his *Make A Little Noise* DVD & EP (2006) and *Ashtray Rock* concept album (2007). *Make A Little Noise* spawned an infectiously catchy hit single, "Nowhere With You," that landed Plaskett on the Top 10 at hot Adult Contemporary (AC) radio. He also garnered three 2007 East Coast Music Awards (ECMAs) "of the year" wins: Single for "Nowhere With You," DVD for *Make A Little Noise*, and Songwriter. *Ashtray Rock* was nominated for the prestigious Polaris Music Prize, and earned Plaskett and his band all six of the 2008 "of the year" ECMAs for which he, and they, were nominated: Recording, Group Recording, Single (for "Fashionable People," another hit song), Video (also for "Fashionable People"), Rock Recording, and Songwriter. He's also earned several Juno nominations (including Songwriter of the Year along side Neil Young), and was the First Place Winner in the 2008 Great American Song Contest and the Billboard World Song Contest, for "Fashionable People" (in the Pop Category). That's the kind of action that keeps a man on the road to support it.

And Plaskett travels as much musically as he does physically. Typically for him, *Three* is an eclectic blend of styles, ranging from the drum-machine rock 'n' roll of "Wishful Thinking" to the deep-country vibe of "Pine, Pine, Pine"; from the stripped-down acoustic folk of "New Scotland Blues" to the rollicking pop of "Deny, Deny, Deny." Plaskett also explores some brand new sounds this time out, like the penny whistles on "Sailor's Eyes," the dry pedal steel guitar on "Every Time You Leave Me Alone," and the soulful horns on the album's first single, "Through & Through & Through".

Another new texture heard throughout *Three* is the combination of two female backing voices singing in unison. That got started in February 2008 at the North American Folk Alliance Conference in Memphis, where Plaskett met up with singer-songwriters Rose Cousins (who he knew from Nova Scotia) and Ana Egge (from Brooklyn). He called a Memphis friend, Doug Easley – who had previously recorded an album for Thrush Hermit – and booked a day at Easley's new studio, inviting the singers along.

"We recorded that seven-minute version of 'Wishful Thinking,' and I just made up parts for them," says Plaskett. "The thing was supposed to be a three-and-a-half-minute song, but I just kept writing verses on the spot. I made up a bunch

of stuff, all these parts where they're going 'Heel!' and 'Hoo!' I was like, okay, this is how I want to record. This is cool. Writing on the fly, creating really quickly and spontaneously, making up parts in the studio." That was the first song recorded for Three, but Plaskett liked the sound so much that when he dug in for recording at his own Scotland Yard studio in Dartmouth, he called the two women back to sing on most of the songs on the record.

Three also marks the first time that Plaskett has recorded with his father, Bill, a longtime musician himself. Plaskett senior, whose musical tastes run to British folk of the '60s, like Bert Jansch and Fairport Convention, used to play guitar and sing semi-professionally in a working band called Starboard Side, who made a recording for the CBC at one point. "I grew up around him playing a lot," says Plaskett the younger. "He invited me to play with him on a number of occasions when I was 14, 15 years old. He'd be playing a folk night somewhere, and I'd get up and play a song with him... Over the past couple of years, there've been opportunities where I've invited him up to play with the band, or do shows together. I just thought, in the back of my mind, that it would be great to document that in some capacity. So he's playing guitar or [four-string] tenor guitar on a lot of the second record of Three."

On the first leg of touring to support Three, Plaskett will be presenting a more stripped down acoustic show accompanied by his father Bill, Rose Cousins and Ana Egge. The Emergency will join the fray for the last few shows of the tour (including Massey Hall in Toronto). So after 6 months and dozens of songs recorded it's back to the road and Plaskett's last word. "Three is very much a traveling album," he says. "It's tough, 'cause you want to make music that is universally appealing outside of your world. The [touring] life of a musician, it's not easy, but at the same time, it's not like you're going off to war. There are so many amazing things about it. I think my strongest suit as an artist is writing from personal experience, or at least observation and trying to give my audience a sense of what I care about. This time around I figured I'd roll that all into a giant, somewhat-autobiographical, occasionally-fictional mess of songs."