

Mp3 Richmond Fontaine - Winnemucca



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Richmond Fontaine's fifth release is a dark brooding desert ride. Written mostly in the town of Winnemucca, Nevada. They put down their electric guitars for this one. Often compared to Nebraska, by Bruce Springsteen 10 MP3 Songs ROCK: Americana, ROCK: Roots Rock Details: RICHMOND FONTAINE THE GREAT ESCAPE Richmond Fontaine's Winnemucca by Nate Lippens/The Stranger "Just put my heart in gasoline," sings Willy Vlautin on "Winner's Casino," at the beginning of the heartsick road trip that is Richmond Fontaine's latest album, Winnemucca. It's unclear whether Vlautin wants immolation or the elation of the road--as it turns out 10 songs later, he wants both. It's a very old American voice speaking through the narrators of these songs. It's the same voice that Huck Finn spoke in when he said, "I can't stand it. I been there before." Wanderlust and the promise of geographical cures for romantic and spiritual loss are encoded in the noir country-rock of Portland's Richmond Fontaine. On the band's fourth album those impulses and daydreams are attached to very specific people and places: the prisoner in "Santaim" trying to sort out his life; the young man in "Northline" conflicted about his longing for a skinhead girl; Ray Thaves in "Five Degrees Below Zero," riding a Greyhound bus, headed back to live at his uncle's house in Las Vegas; and the "Winners' Casino," in the Nevada town that is the album's namesake. "Winnemucca is a place where we go when we have the money to hide out," says Vlautin. "The whole record is kind of about hiding out, finding a place that's comfortable." Most of the songs were written and demoed in Winnemucca, Nevada, and the sleepy, dusty texture of the place is embedded in the songs. The back-to-back instrumentals "Twyla" and "Pattie's Retreat" sound like elated takes on Ry Cooder's Americana film soundtrack to Paris, Texas. Cinematic sweep and imagery infuse Winnemucca's songs with innate luminosity and power. "Winners' Casino" ends with a snippet of dialogue from Allison Anders' film Gas Food Lodging. "That movie was a lot like my life growing up, even though

I'm not a girl," Vlautin says. "The whole story line is similar to mine, though not as dramatic of course. I was thinking a lot about that movie when I wrote this batch of songs." For Winnemucca, the members of Richmond Fontaine wanted to give the songs the panoramic scope of the quiet joy they had taken in the places it reflected. "We decided not to bring in electric guitars. We do a lot of quieter stuff that never makes the records," says Vlautin. The album has a mellow, voluptuously rounded sound, with Paul Brainard's pedal steel acting as the second voice to Vlautin's, trembling just beyond the grasp of language, and the stories' undercurrent of longing and barely contained longing. "I think a lot of the spaciousness of the record comes from the pedal steel," says bassist Dan Harding. "It gives it that lush, huge sound. It feels like you're traveling through it." Harding's bass and Sean Oldham's drums are the steady heartbeat beneath the passing scenery. The sound is languid, mysterious, and beautiful, inflected by folk and country with the cosmic cowboy transcendence of Jimmie Dale Gilmore tucked into Vlautin's guitar parts. The songs have the detailed precision of short stories, and it's no surprise to discover that Vlautin is a writer. "I didn't write stories until I read Raymond Carver when I was 20," Vlautin says. "I never thought a guy like me could write stories. I always thought you had to go to Stanford. He was the first guy that made sense to me." The emotional compass of the songs circles dissolution and disillusionment, the flipside of success and drive. The men and women on Winnemucca drive away from places, and lives, but they are not driven. They are aimless and haunted; the ghosts they attempt to outrun may give them the appearance of forward momentum, but being chased by something you can't quite name and outrunning it is very different from having a sense of purpose and direction. Vlautin's narrators seek clarity even as it muddles before their eyes. "Western Skyline" closes the album with broken-down words of comfort as Vlautin sings, "You'll be set free." The ache in his voice tells the other half of that freedom, how hard-won and elusive it can be, how lonely and disconnected it can feel. The possibilities are there too. Anything can happen, and it will.

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