

Out of the Park

Kyle Park hits with *Don't Forget Where You Come From*

By S.D. Henderson

WITH A CLEAR TENOR THAT TRAVELS easily from pasture to dance hall, Kyle Park creates music that just sticks in your head. I've kept "Don't Look" on my playlist for about ten years and it hasn't worn thin yet. Sometimes I'll even whistle "Leaving Stephenville" without even realizing it.

On June 1, Park's latest release *Don't Forget Where You Come From* delivers on the promise the title suggests. After thirteen years of crafting songs and playing shows that resonate with a wide Texas audience, Park stays rooted without getting stuck in the past.

Under forensic analysis, *Don't Forget Where You Come From* contains all the essential elements of a Texas honky tonk record; songs about beer drinking, true love and cowboying in no particular order, but this wasn't meant for a clinical ear. I don't mean to damn with faint praise, but this is a fun album to listen to, funner to drive around with on dirt roads, and funnest to hear on a dance floor. Music should always take you somewhere, this album takes you to places you'd like to hang around.

You can hear a lot about Park's journey as a songwriter through his voice and through his words. Park boasts an encyclopedic knowledge of the country music of his youth, and you get a sense of him picking up his first guitar and hammering through an old Chris LeDoux record as his first music primer.

As producer

THAT INITIAL SPIRIT FOLLOWS him through the records he writes and produces today. Like several of his previous albums, Park produced *Don't Forget Where You Come From* himself because he values creative con-

trol and has a genuine talent and love for producing records. Park said, "As a musician, I feel like making a CD is like a chapter in my life. If I wasn't playing producing would be my next occupation."

There's plenty on this album to suggest that Park will spend more time playing and creating for the foreseeable future before he takes up a full-time position on the other side of the booth. Ahead of the June release of the full work, Park has already put a big hit on the Texas music charts with single release of the soon to be summer staple "Ain't Nobody Hotter." Add that to the title track "Don't Forget Where You Come From" and my favorite "What the Heaven" with "Rednecks with Paychecks" and you've got an album primed for a long run.

If there is a formula for Kyle Park's success, it would be a combination of strong writing with a sense of place and purpose, collaborating with good people and having an ear for making the kind of music people want to hear and you want to create. That's easy enough to say, but it's really hard to pull off once, much less for the past thirteen years.

The voice

OH, AND I ALMOST FORGOT the most important part, you got to have a voice capable of carrying all those elements and distill into a three-and-a-half-minute track. Maybe the most impor-

tant thing isn't that after all, as Park relates, "I'd rather do this kind of music and not be a success than do something I'm not proud of. I'm really proud of this."

In his earlier releases, Park clearly demonstrated his individual songwriting talents. On *Don't Forget Where You Come From*, Park showcases the value and merit of collaborating with other writers; like Trent Wilmon, Bart Butler and Julia Cole, along with friend Cody Johnson who add a dimension hard to capture writing alone. Park adds, "As a writer you get stuck in your own head. I'll get stuck on one line, and I realized that I need to quit trying to be some epic poet. Early in my career I wasn't comfortable sharing, the older I get I've grown more comfortable and now I get a fresh set of eyes."

Nowhere on the album is the value of collaboration more evident than on the title track "Don't Forget Where You Come From" which Park penned with songwriter Sig Sanchez. Drawing on years of experience and crafted in hours, Park said "I knew this was going to be special, right after we had that line, 'pray out loud, make us proud and son, don't forget where you come from.'" In the span of three minutes; Park, who lost his own father early, and Sanchez built something enduring, a song worthy of anchoring an album and paying respect for all the things that make us what we are today.

As a collection of songs, Park covers a lot of ground on this album. The lone cover of Merle Haggard's "If We Make It Through December" is a personal favorite, but according to Park, "was the scariest song on the album to record, I mean, it's Merle Haggard's song." As much as that song belongs to Haggard, Park made it his own by adding his own vocal style to a very straight and pure cover of a classic. Some might

scoff, but who listens to those people anyway? The value of some kid finding Merle Haggard at a hot summer Kyle Park show outweighs the value of a great song collecting dust.

Pure honky tonk

I WOULD BE REMISS NOT TO add a disclaimer somewhere in the middle about the pure honky tonk legitimacy of

Don't Forget Where You Come From as a body of work. As mentioned previously, there's a lot going on here and Park does indeed touch all the bases for a good Texas music record. Whether he's singing about horses, women or beer, or some combination thereof; it's good songwriting and good songs that carry the day on each track.

You put great writers in a

room; you get songs with great potential. A great song that never reaches an ear still sounds like a tree falling in the forest. In order for those songs to become great, you've got to put great musicians in the studio. As the producer of this album, Park lined up a rich cast of players to bring it to life in the studio. Backed in the studio by long time drummer and band mate Will Armstrong, and over a dozen of Austin's finest players including (three Buddy Texas Tornados) Floyd Domino on piano, bassist Glenn Fukunaga and fellow engineer-player-of-everything-with-strings uber musician Rich Brotherton, Park ensured that the songs he'd labored over would come to life on the album.

As important as a great studio effort is to an album, if you can't take it on the road and share it

live, it loses a lot in translation. Kyle Park has the good fortune of his band to bring the full experience of *Don't Forget Where You Come From* out on tour for over 120 shows a year. With Armstrong on drums from the beginning of his career, Park shares the stage with Kris Farrow on guitar, Daniel Clanton on bass and Ben McPherson on the fiddle to round out a show capable of delivering the full punch of his records live.

That live experience, hearing music the way the Lord intended is what really separates the wheat from the chaff.

You can download the full body of work from Kyle Park's *Don't Forget Where You Come From*. On June 15, you can catch Kyle and the full band at Hank's Texas Grill in McKinney.

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—KYLE PARK



He is scheduled to perform with the full band at Hank's Texas Grill in McKinney on June 15: Kyle Park