

THE LAST GOODNIGHT

Writing and recording *Poison Kiss*, their major-label debut, The Last Goodnight set the bar almost scarily high: “We wanted to write great songs that no one ever heard before,” states singer Kurtis John. Indeed, while influences and references range from Ella Fitzgerald to Richard Ashcroft to Supertramp to Sly Stone to ELO to U2 to Massive Attack, *Poison Kiss* is impossible to pigeonhole. “It’s about vibe. We keep the spontaneity and adventure in every aspect,” John explains. “In the studio, we built whole songs using the versatility of drum machines and laid down live drums last. We wanted to let the rhythm of the song define itself through the creation. I love the unexpected crafting of musical and lyrical desperation and vulnerability mixed with upbeat hooks.”

The result is 12 cinematic, singular songs, rife with ‘80s musical references and classic rock influences, but with a modern resonance. *Poison Kiss* is piano-driven but guitar heavy, and at once rhythmic, lush and soulful. From the first single, “Pictures of You,” a collage of poignant and vivid vignettes, to the strident title track, where the sounds of crackling vinyl meshes with a melancholy but buoyant, layered vibe, *Poison Kiss* takes an emotional journey. John compares The Last Goodnight to favorite actors and films: “It’s Tom Hanks in *Castaway* because he’s lost and lonely, somehow stumbling across Sharon Stone in *Basic Instinct*, because the music has a sultry sexiness, then there’s a healthy dose of soul like Pam Grier in *Foxy Brown*, but touched with a bit of dark strangeness from *Clockwork Orange*.”

But that’s not how the Connecticut-based band initially sounded. “We’ve grown up a lot since our first indie releases,” explains guitarist Anton Yurack. “On *Poison Kiss*, there’s a reason and purpose for each song.” When Yurack says the band has “grown up,” that’s literal: The Last Goodnight met in high school. “I was at a house party where I ran into Mike--we both went to Enfield High in Connecticut,” recalls John. “There was only one guitar at the party, and Mike was playing some Metallica—fast, impressive things--and the girls were like ‘WOW!’ When girls asked for Chili Peppers or Cat Stevens, I’d grab the guitar and play that. So Mike and I started a band with a bass player, Leif Christensen, also from our school. Our original drummer went to Enfield too, as did Anton. We were and are totally a band of friends.”

Under The Last Goodnight’s original band name Renata, the lineup earned kudos from the *Hartford Advocate*, including 2003’s Best Original Rock band. Two indie releases under the Renata moniker earned airplay and opening slots for Lifehouse, Avril Lavigne, Howie Day, and more. Between college and jobs at T.G.I. Friday’s, they played in Boston, New York and Connecticut---then piled into a van for more extensive tours. After a 2004 gig at the Whisky in Los Angeles the band slept in their van, woke up at LaBrea and Sunset and got a fortuitous call from A&R exec/producer Jeff Blue. A fruitful period of songwriting ensued, the band writing and demoing hundreds of tunes

between L.A. and Connecticut, which led to a deal with Virgin Records/Capitol Music Group in 2006.

With Blue producing, the band set about achieving their sonic goals, using gear in unusual ways: “In ‘Return to Me,’ we ran guitar strings over a couch with reverb and delay,” notes John, whose musical experimentation started early: “My father is blind, but he plays piano and loves blues and jazz. Growing up, we couldn’t go outside and throw a ball like the other kids and fathers, but we had this special musical bond,” John relates. “When I was 7, we’d listen to Dr. John and Billie Holiday and Guns and Roses, and my dad would teach me to hear things out on the piano. Because he can’t see, he doesn’t play in a schooled or traditional way. I still use the odd finger techniques I learned from him. So when we ran guitar strings over a couch with a reverb and delay on “Return to Me,” it didn’t faze me much. Back then he said something that stuck with me. He said, ‘just keep it simple, K, and strike an emotion.’ I think of that to this day when I’m writing.”

The songs on *Poison Kiss* bear him out. “Pictures of You” is “a collage of life, a landscape of lyrics that paints a picture of ‘what if,’” explains John. “What if a different path was taken, or someone was dealt the wrong set of cards?” With the empathy infusing *Poison Kiss*, it makes sense that The Last Goodnight isn’t only about the music—“there’s an energy the band has that I want to put to the best possible use,” John explains. “It’s about what we can do to change the world.” It’s not mere lip service: The Last Goodnight plays benefits and works for groups including the Children’s Cancer Foundation, Children’s Diabetes, food shelters and more. The Last Goodnight are integral pieces in the “collage of life” they write about. And they invite everyone from punkers to pop fans to partake of a *Poison Kiss*, as Yurack concludes, “I think our music has a universal appeal, because it’s emotional and heartfelt and has beauty, all within a modern rock and soul context. It’s about how you allow the music to hit your soul.”