

ODE TO RESTRAINT

Blues/folk misfit Bobby Long learns the art of compromise

"I LOVE THAT RECORD ... I'm really proud of it."

The album to which Bobby Long is referring isn't the new *Ode To Thinking*, but 2013's *Wishbone*, his second and final release for ATO. And the reason he's talking about it, quite frankly, is because the guy interviewing him won't shut up about it. "This is one of the most in-depth *Wishbone* interviews I've ever had—I was hoping for this kind of interview when it came out," says Long with a chuckle. "It just shows you that, sometimes, things don't stick."

Wishbone's swept-under-the-rug status was all the more perplexing given the strength of its songs—nearly every one an engaging marriage of the Englander's competing passions for folk, blues and Britpop. If any album that year was equipped to bridge the divide between "September Gurls" and "The Thrill Is Gone," *Wishbone* was it. So, is it any wonder that ATO didn't quite know what to do with the thing?

"I don't want to be one of those people who slags off their old label—there were some really lovely people there," says Long, who's now settled in Beacon, N.Y. "I was instantly put in the singer/songwriter bracket, so I was kind of rebelling a bit. I remember playing a song for the people in my camp early on, and one said it reminded him of Coldplay. I was like, 'Well, isn't that a good thing? They sell a shit-ton of records.'"

To be clear: Nothing on *Ode To Thinking* sounds even remotely like Coldplay. Recorded by Mark Hallman at his Congress House Studios in Austin in September, the album was funded by a Pledge-

Music campaign after Long cut ties with ATO. "It was just me and the producer in the studio; I played whatever, and Mark played the rest," says Long. "We'd start a song in the morning, and we wouldn't stop until we were finished. We did 24 tracks in, like, 10 days."

With its crisp, unobtrusive production and emphasis on Long's gritty, increasingly nuanced vocals, *Ode* is a solid compromise between *Wishbone's* burly full-band sound and the sparse, live-to-tape feel of 2011's *A Winter Tale*, produced by Grammy winner Liam Watson (White Stripes). "Not a lot of people work with Liam Watson on their first record—he's a maverick producer," says Long. "Maybe I should've recorded this album first."

Perhaps that would've made *Wishbone* easier to swallow. —Hobart Rowland

UNDER THE INFLUENCE

with **BOBBY LONG**

01 LOUDON WAINWRIGHT III

"I'm listening to more and more of his stuff. The way his thoughts, anger and stories directly hit the page and become a song is what I want to achieve more of."

02 CREATIVE PALS

"My friend Jamie Strachan's photography is really beautiful, and I'm lucky we're using his work for music videos and the album covers. Collaboration is inspiring."

03 UPSTATE NEW YORK

"I just moved there, and the mountains, rivers and nature are so beautiful. It puts the wind in your sails and the words on your page."