

At Risk of Change

Holcombe Waller's journey
Into the Dark Unknown persists

BY RYAN J. PRADO

It depends on when—exactly where, why, how—you're visiting Holcombe Waller's new album *Into the Dark Unknown* that will determine its sentimentality for you. That the album will trigger an eruption of inimitably potent nostalgia is a foregone conclusion the second you hit "play"—but in what ways exactly remain, obviously, subjective. Lest you feel iffy about such a nebulous aural proposition, rest assured: You won't be alone. Waller himself is still reevaluating the album; after all, he wrote a majority of the songs five years ago.

"Into the Dark Unknown: The Hope Chest" was Waller's grand 2009-10 touring production, pitting his most cerebral compositions to date against his affinity for visual arts and multidisciplinary expression. The theatrical folk show reached cities across the United States, Canada and even as far as Croatia.

Though the songs performed on the tour had already reached a wide audience—with help from his musical ensemble The Healers—Waller's decision to actually release the songs on an album did not come without its share of self-reflection. In fact, this may be the last proper album released by Waller, whose previous efforts have been hailed by the likes of *Revolver* and *SPIN*.

"I don't think I'm necessarily going to make another record and push a release like I have

with this album," says Waller, 35, between sips of coffee in a bustling North Portland coffee-shop. "I think in some ways that's a step backward from the kind of idea when I was putting out the *Winter Songs*."

Winter Songs was what Waller created to establish "iterative, song-by-song" releases for all future recordings—a plan hatched at the height of his Kickstarter campaign, which successfully raised funds for the final production costs of *Dark Unknown* last year. Waller released songs as they were recorded, or as demos were being

considered for recording, to his website, where listeners would then have the chance to help choose which tracks would end up on the album.

At the time, Waller was bristling with excitement at the effect this would have not only on his new album, but his future songwriting. More importantly, the perennial independent was finally seeking help.

"If there's one title I think you should put for this article, it's 'Holcombe Waller Needs an Intern,'"

says Waller, not entirely disingenuously. "That's the only thing I'm really trying to figure out, is how to find people who might like to work with me. I don't know who those people are."

During the recording of *Dark Unknown*, Waller was still crisscrossing the country for "The Hope Chest," raising funds for the al-

"I feel like the late twenties and early thirties are rife with offensive awakening and great connections, and it actually kind of goes away and you're left there with these memories of great inspiration and epiphany. I'm not so able to recreate those anymore."

—HOLCOMBE WALLER



bum, writing a film score for David Weissman's documentary *We Were Here*, and in all likelihood conjuring the cosmic molecules that will later this year become his latest creation, tentatively called "Surfacing"—a multidisciplinary dance and music piece for which he recently received a sizable grant from the Regional Arts & Culture Council.

"I get spread thin between these projects, which I really do put my all into," relates Waller, who moved to Portland in 2005 from San Francisco. "It's harder for me to maintain basic things like friendships, personal health, good sleeping patterns," he laughs. "More and more, I'm trying to prioritize those things."

One of the ways Waller's done that is by working with Portland photographer and filmmaker Alicia J. Rose. Through this partnership, Waller has been able to realize more fully a relatively new aspect of his creative impulses—

the music video. Rose co-directed and shot the clip for "Bored of Memory," which premiered on Out.com in January.

"In collaborating on that video, she just became privy to everything I was working on," explains Waller. "It's the first time anyone has ever really been there helping me. I've tried working with others, and in the end I'm very particular about how everything gets done. It's an interesting experiment."

But Waller's work with Rose on "Bored of Memory" is just the tip of the video iceberg. In fact, it's Waller's intention to include video content for almost everything he produces for the foreseeable future, including several videos or other visual stimuli for tracks off of *Dark Unknown*.

"I've been fantasizing that when I finish this album—in a sense because of how old some of the songwriting is—[that in the fu-



Hala J. Gores, Attorney

Serious Injury & Death Cases

Wrongful Death • Medical Malpractice • Serious Accidents • Brain Injuries
Trucking Accidents • Spinal Cord Injuries • Nursing Home Abuse • Therapist Malpractice

Over 21 Years Experience • Top "AV" Rating

Proudly serving our community since 1989

Free Consultation 503-295-1940 • 800-795-8945

www.goreslaw.com

Holding Insurance Companies Accountable