

TARIQ

“Nashville? Are you making a country album?”

This was the most common response to Tariq’s decision to record his latest album in the country music capital of the world. Despite the hesitations and preconceptions of others, Tariq knew the decision to head south to record his fourth album; a collection of songs in the key of ‘mellow’ with soulful vocals over acoustic guitars, was the right choice. Even his sound engineers in Calgary admitted their reservations; fearing he would sound too ‘polished’, but the final product has yielded a different tune. Goodbye Lonely, titled after the album’s third track and recorded in a converted barn garage turned studio, comes across honestly and maintains a sense of intimacy. It’s almost as if you’re hearing the songs the way they might be played for the first time, long before the producer and the rest of the band has shown up.

After a trip to SXSW in Austin in the spring of 2004, Tariq found the musical inspiration he had been missing and dedicated himself to creating an album that would be true to his musical tastes and aspirations. Exchanging the contemporary pop feel of his third album, *While You’re Down There* (2001), Tariq adopted a more roots-based sound on *Goodbye Lonely*. “I felt I needed to go back to using a real drum kit with these songs, so that was kind of like our starting point. Then, when we began to add keyboards and string parts, I realized it was the sound I’d been hearing in my head the whole time!”

The second fateful outcome of Tariq’s musical trip to Austin was teaming up with Nashville-based producer and musician Neilson Hubbard (Garrison Star, Matthew Ryan). The union stemmed from a connection Tariq had established with *Performing Songwriter* journalist Clay Steakley. Tariq met Steakley when *While You’re Down There* was featured as a DIY album in *Performing Songwriter* magazine. After Steakley introduced the two, Tariq was impressed with the producer’s performance in the studio and the projects and artists he was working with. “He brings a great deal to the table,” says Tariq, “as a singer/songwriter and multi-instrumentalist, he was the kind of producer was I looking for.” Tariq considers their meeting and collaboration good fate, as Neilson was able to capture the songs truthfully in his arrangements. The bonus was Neilson’s rich back-up vocals and fluid guitar lines that added both harmony and diversity to Tariq’s subtle right hand strum.

Another benefit of the Nashville locale is the wealth of talent and creativity the musical mecca houses. While Tariq had decided to do less co-writing in preparation for *Goodbye Lonely*, the creative chemistry that evolved in the studio provided the rich texture of instrumentation such as pedal steel, strings, and even Mellotron keyboards that none of his earlier albums feature. “Sometimes co-writing causes you to write less personally because you’re just not as relaxed or open lyrically. However, I knew I wanted a lot of *musical* input and I am thrilled with the creativity from everyone involved.”

To get a real sense of Tariq as an artist we should look back to when he first picked up a guitar at age 15. “I taught myself the guitar by playing along with Bob Dylan and Cat Stevens and soon became the guy playing music at parties and around campfires.” It was only a few years later that he discovered music would have a deeper and more significant role for him. “After I knew music was meant to be in my life, it became my inspiration for everything and I just started putting myself out there in ways that surprise me now.”

Once again, Tariq's honesty delivered the good fate it can. In 1996 he had a record deal with EMI Music and was living independently as a musician. But after riding the 2-year high of being signed to the major label, and receiving a Juno nomination, Tariq experienced what many other artists have faced and continue to struggle against; being released by the label due to financial reasons. After losing the freedom and security of having a record deal, Tariq's tireless work ethic led him back to his former job and cultivated the kind of determination independent artists need to survive today's mainstream mania. While the musical journey has been tough at times, Tariq doesn't come across as a jaded or 'woe is me' kind of artist, but rather as one who is still searching, curious and earnest in the pursuit of his craft.

Tariq says he sees this album as moving from dark to light evidenced by the song "Brighter Day" the optimistic, reggae sounding hidden track that closes out the full 40 minute musical experience. Songs like "Vultures" and "Shoot To Kill", which appear earlier in the record, paint a bleak picture of a society turned on its head and its capacity for deception and cruelty. With an admitted weakness for sensational T.V crime series, Tariq has been a victim himself of endless episodes and is often left wondering: what turns a man into a murderer? "I got hooked on a crime bio for about a week last summer and "Vultures" ended up as my post mortem product".

As he ponders the mysterious psyches of serial killers, he also dreams about a world that offers forgiveness and ultimately hope. He sings in the title track: "It only hurts if you can't forgive the one that hurt you, and just say, Goodbye Lonely..." This sentiment, which sits somewhere between acceptance and euphoria, seems to ring true to the day-to-day lives we live. "We get hurt, we heal and then, we get hurt again. So we strive to be happy and learn from the bad stuff I guess." After a moment's pause, he adds: "Though it's hard to know what to learn from big tragedies like tidal waves that swallow up kids and whole towns - I don't know where you even begin to find the understanding in that."

There is levity too on Goodbye Lonely and you needn't look further than the track "Friend Song" for an agreeable take on a breakup where heartache is replaced with simplistic hopes. This lightness in tone is especially poignant in the bridge where he sings "And when you find another one you like, I'll have to listen to you tell me why, I can be friends with you..."

In "Growing Up Too Fast", Tariq captures a childlike innocence with lines like "Sammy is out on his bike, and Billy is home for the night..." but then moments later, knocks us back to consciousness with the sentiment "Daddy's just living to die..." It's this constant play between good and evil, joy and sorrow, and lightness and darkness that make Goodbye Lonely both soothing and haunting at the same time.

As we listen we are led, by the songwriter's words and trademark gravel tone, on a journey through the lonely landscape of modern suburbia. He takes us with him, past drunken poets in the park and through the tearful eyes of a mother mourning the hopeless idea of an unborn child. As the lights dim, this shadowy figure steps out onto the stage clutching his guitar close to his heart, ready to share his songs.