

## Review: John Moreland goes deep in ways few songwriters can

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John Moreland, “LP5” (Old Omens/Thirty Tigers)

Singer-songwriter John Moreland could bring an audience to tears singing nursery rhymes.

On his new album, “LP5,” Moreland adds a new element of production to the stripped-down style that made his first four albums so memorable. Some of it works, some of it doesn’t. But taken as a whole, it’s still rich with the stirring lyrical imagery and brutal honesty that made Moreland a word-of-mouth sensation even without a natural home on traditional radio.

On “LP5,” Moreland works with producer Matt Pence and is more adventurous musically than he has been. Some of it distracts from what he’s best at. “A Thought Is Just a Passing Train,” for example, is dressed up with instrumental solo work that feels like the wrong outfit for this particular party.

But even if some songs don’t match the simple elegance that was the hallmark of his earlier work, this album still dazzles with lyrical surprises. Moreland is such an original that comparisons are risky here, but his singing owes a debt to Bruce Springsteen, and his lyrics, dare we say it, evoke Bob Dylan — without creating the impression that he’s trying too hard.

On “In Times Between,” an achy tribute to a songwriter friend who died in a car wreck, Moreland grieves openly and movingly. “You’re buzzing in the strings, you’re sailing towards the skies,” he sings. “You’re swimming in the seas that are streaming from my eyes.”

Moreland opens “Let Me Be Understood” with the line, “Momma’s little martyr woke up with her face drawn on.” And that’s it, you’re hooked. It’s the beginning of one of the album’s best songs, and yet another reminder that Moreland digs deep with the kind of ease few singer-songwriters can match.