



Matt Andersen – *The Hammer & The Rose*

“It’s the give and the take; that’s how it goes. When your head is the hammer, and your heart is the rose” – “The Hammer & The Rose”

When Matt Andersen steps on stage, he brings a lifetime of music to every note he plays. His latest album, *The Hammer & The Rose*, is a veritable garden of heart; a (mostly) delicate collection of tender folk and stirring soul numbers that find the Canadian songwriter thoughtfully tending to the most important things in life.

Andersen’s stage presence is informed by decades of cutting his teeth in dusty clubs, dim-lit bars, and grand theatres all over the world, delivering moving performances that run the gamut from intimate to wall-shaking. In the studio, he’s always brought the same attention to detail and commitment to craft as he has to his live show, and the result - a multi-faceted and poignant body of work - has led him to amass over 31 million streams on Spotify and 30 million views on YouTube.

The Hammer & The Rose features the kind of thoughtful, tender sentiments and arrangements one might associate with flowers, trading in the hard steel edges of his heavy blues riffs for delicate compositions and a warm sweetness. The title track provides an elegant metaphor for the differences and push-and-pull relationship between the head and the heart: the head wants to blaze a trail, prioritize practicality, and motor through things, while the heart wants to slow down, feel things, feel good. On *The Hammer & The Rose*, it’s the heart - the rose, the honey, the soul - that (mostly) wins out. But this is, of course, a Matt Andersen record. A surplus of heart is to be expected.

After seeing one of the shows with The Big Bottle of Joy band Andersen played on tour behind his 2023 album (*Matt Andersen & The Big Bottle of Joy*), producer and percussionist Joshua Van Tassel took him aside to express how much he loved the quieter moments of the set. Inspired by those times when the wildness settled down and he could hear, even clearer, the timbre and texture of Andersen’s voice, Van Tassel suggested cutting a record that maintained that low-key spirit. Andersen got to writing with that in mind, and it was the same chill vibe the team fostered for the sessions that would eventually go down in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, where Bahamas band members Afie Jurvanen (acoustic guitar) and Christine Bougie (lap steel), along with Aaron Comeau (keys), Kyle Cunjak (acoustic bass) gathered with Andersen to lay the tracks down live off-the-floor with Van Tassel behind both the boards and the drums.

The gently swinging title track opens the album and provides its thesis sentiment as Andersen laments the perpetual give-and-take between his stubborn head and soft heart. Roomier and more subdued arrangements allow his voice to take centre stage as he channels *Don't Give Up On Me*-era Solomon Burke for songs like the simmering ride-or-die ode "You're Here to Stay," the sorrowful tough luck number "Countin' Quarters," and the comforting "Hold On to Me," a warm promise to be there for a friend. Expressions of gratitude arise elsewhere on the record, too. It comes through on romantic songs, in the domestic bliss of the hushed "Stay Home with You" and "Tonight Belongs to You," a brief, moonlit history of Andersen's relationship with his long-time girlfriend. His take on the classic "Magnolia" does justice to J.J. Cale's simple tribute to a transformative love.

While the record, sonically, is mostly rooted in roses, Andersen offers up a couple hammers, too - on the seething "Wayaheadaya," he calls out negative and small-minded thinkers; and "The Cobbler (Good For My Sole)" cuts the album neatly down the middle with its funkier two minutes, a mostly instrumental interlude.

But at the curtain call, it's a return to gratitude - for the man who shaped Andersen, in the stirring closing track written for his aging dad. "No matter where we go now or what changes come," he sings over acoustic guitar, "you will always be my father, and I'll always be your son."

It's sentiments like these that shape the blossoming core of the record. On *The Hammer & The Rose*, Matt Andersen tends to his garden - to his heart - and reminds us to do the same.

In addition to headlining major festivals, clubs and theatres throughout North America, Europe, and Australia, Matt Andersen has shared the stage and toured with Marcus King, Beth Hart, Marty Stuart, Greg Allman, Tedeschi Trucks Band, Randy Bachman, Serena Ryder, Tab Benoit, and more.

Andersen nabbed the 2013 and 2016 European Blues Awards for Best Solo/Acoustic Act, was the first ever Canadian to take home top honors in the solo category at the 2010 International Blues Challenge in Memphis, won the CIMA Road Gold award in 2015, and has won multiple Maple Blues Awards. *Matt Andersen & The Big Bottle of Joy* was nominated for a Juno Award in 2024.

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