

the Waifs

'Ironbark'

Ironbark album is available from March 3, 2017 through Compass Records

Just one look at the beautiful cover photo on The Waifs' new album *Ironbark* says a lot about who they are and what they are about; friends and family bound together by their love of music, of performing and of Australia.

It's 25 years since West Australian sisters Donna and Vikki Simpson (now Vikki Thorn) joined forces with Josh Cunningham to create one of the country's best-loved bands. That cover shot, taken near Cunningham's home on the NSW south coast, marks The Waifs' quarter of a century together, but it's also a nod to Australia itself, its nature and its people, essential ingredients in the extraordinary body of work The Waifs have created in that time.

One can't imagine a better way to commemorate this significant landmark in the band's career than with a double album of 25 original songs, one for each year, all of them recorded in the kitchen of Cunningham's home near Moruya, where he grew up. That's the amazing _ and unexpected_ harvest from a couple of weeks of recording late last year, when the trio assembled with regular collaborators David Ross McDonald (drums, percussion) and Ben Franz (bass, dobro), not really knowing what they were about to record, other than maybe some covers of other artists' material.

"There was a freshness to it and a flying by the seat of our pants thing," says Cunningham. "The familiarity of the environment and the history around it was conducive to the recording. It wasn't like a normal studio where the clock is ticking and the atmosphere can be a bit sterile. We had the crickets and cicadas and the birds."

Completing this serene scene was engineer James Newhouse, who assembled his recording gear in the Cunningham kitchen, and got to work as one new song after another poured out of the three musos. The songs went down live, an organic approach that delivered a warmth and spontaneity as seductive as anything in the Waifs' impressive back catalogue.

"We didn't even have a list of songs," says Thorn, who for the first time is the leading contributor to a Waifs album, with 10 songs of her own and a co-write with her sister on the poppy *Not the Lonely*. "What I love about this album is that you can hear the chemistry. Some of those tracks it was only the third or fourth time we had played the songs together. I can hear the tension of us all listening to the music. That tension translated beautifully on some of the tracks."

Cunningham wrote the stunning title song shortly after the others arrived to spend a few weeks on his property. It's an uplifting song, coloured by his earworm guitar motif, not only about the leafy environment around his home, but also about having the strength, just like those tough trees, to endure difficult times. That's something The Waifs, collectively and individually, have done during their career.

"It's about people having struggles in their lives and getting through those," says Cunningham. "It's also about the enduring quality of those 25 years we've been together."

Since releasing their debut, self-titled album in 1996 The Waifs have established a strong and loyal fan-base worldwide, built on the relentless touring they did in Australia in those formative years, playing in any town that would have them, honing their stagecraft and their song writing skills along the way. *Ironbark*, the group's eighth studio album, is a thank you to those thousands of fans who have stuck with them at home and overseas, and a fitting one given the quality of the material.

"We thought about this album from their perspective," says Thorn. "How do we give back? It made so much sense just to sit around in a room and play our guitars together."

In a catalogue of many great songs, from early favourites such as London Still and Lighthouse to Black Dirt Track and Dark Highway from their most recent album, Beautiful You (2015), Ironbark is an embarrassment of riches.

Aside from the title song, which opens the album, Cunningham's contribution includes a couple of gems that are immersed in the land and sea around his home. The Shack, for example, a gentle spoken-word stroll, takes him back to his youth, to the tiny house where he grew up, next door to where he lives now. Then there are the exquisite sibling harmonies on I Won't Go Down, a pulsing acoustic tale of resolve that came to Cunningham during a thunderstorm while he was camping on the beach.

Thorn's mournful vocal glides over Franz's sparse basslines and McDonald's brushed snare on her ode to the emotional games young lovers play, Lion and Gazelle. Then she wrenches emotion of her own from the depths of another powerful musing on love, the banjo-infused Dirty Little Bird. Based in Utah with her family for many years, Thorn looks back to her roots on the lilting, alt-country tune The Coast, a reflection on the ghosts that are said to inhabit the treacherous coastline near Albany in WA where the sisters grew up.

Simpson has written about heartbreak before and does so again on the sprightly country/ blues of Done and Dusted. "Loves done and dusted/ that ship has sailed/love's done and dusted/I'm on my way," she sings. There's a fragility to her voice on Syria, the longest song on the album and one that observes sympathetically from afar the human tragedy going on in that country. "You see everything that is going on there on TV and social media," she says, "and here I am sitting by my fish pond in Fremantle playing my guitar thinking how lucky I am."

These are just some examples from what is the biggest and strongest collection of studio recordings in The Waifs' career, tail-ended by new versions of three songs that have become stage favourites over the years _ Shiny Apple and Take It In from their debut album and Willow Tree from 2004's double live album A Brief History.

In 2017 The Waifs' history is anything but brief and the future looks bright, particularly with the upcoming Australian tour, which begins in Perth on March 2. That, followed by overseas touring for the rest of the year, will be a celebration not only of the 25 years they have spent together but also of the rich vein of songwriting that manifests itself on Ironbark, brought to life in the tranquil surroundings of Cunningham's coastal retreat.

"It's a bit sobering to realise that much time has elapsed," says Cunningham, "but it has been a great journey. It has been such an honour to live this life and play this music with people that you love; and to still be here doing it and for it to still mean something to people."

Ironbark Track Listing

Disc One:

1. Ironbark
2. Higher Ground
3. Not The Lonely
4. I Won't Go Down
5. Important Things
6. Lion And Gazelle
7. Done And Dusted
8. Dirty Little Bird
9. Grand Plans
10. Something's Coming
11. Syria
12. Amazing Everything
13. The Shack
14. Long Way From Home



Disc Two:

1. Song For Jacqueline
2. Standing Strong
3. Sugar Mama
4. Don't You Ever Feel
5. Strangest Thing
6. Take Me To Town
7. Goodnight Lil' Cowboy
8. The Coast
9. Shiny Apple
10. Willow Tree
11. Take It In

Ironbark album is available to preorder now and available instores from March 3, 2017 through Compass Records.

For any publicity needs please contact Christina Dunkley at Compass Records.

Email christina@compassrecords.com