



GREAT SCOTTS

story by Patsy Galore

Enscensed in a darkened cinema illuminated by John Cameron Mitchell's wondrous *Shortbus*, I am left gasping audibly as a tall, bearded fellow takes to the screen. His singing is quite possibly the most beautiful thing I have ever heard, and while I'm distracted shortly thereafter by the unsimulated sex scenes and bohemian eclecticism of Mitchell's cult masterpiece, it is that voice that stays with me for weeks after. That bearded fellow is Scott Matthew.

Many years ago Brisbane-born Scott left university and moved to Sydney, where he founded a punk outfit called Nicotine. During this time he also began performing solo sets, and in doing so discovered a passion for ballads. In pursuit of new horizons and a new direction for his musical journey, he made his way to Brooklyn, NY. Over a decade later, he is still there, having released an EP with former Morrissey drummer Spencer Cobrin and contributing tracks to anime series *The Ghost In The Shell* and *Cowboy Bebop* along the way.

I ask if New York is now home, not just literally but figuratively, and Scott thinks a moment before responding. "I've been here a long time, and in those years there have been many moments when the thought of leaving has crossed my mind. It certainly hasn't been the easiest of journeys, but I've never felt ready to return to Australia. I've missed it and not seeing

my family has certainly been a compromise, but I've built a community of friends in New York that are integral to the making of my music. It also helps that I get to leave America to tour every so often, so it seems more balanced now."

Not long after seeing *Shortbus* I discover that Scott is in Australia on one such tour, and will perform at Sydney's Oxford Art Factory. I enter to find him seated diffidently before an enraptured audience, dressed in black, red wine in hand. He is a man of few words and with a voice like nothing I've heard before. Most compare it to Rufus Wainwright or Antony Hegarty of Antony And The Johnsons, but these denote a strength absent from Scott. It is a voice of vulnerability and intensity, a voice that conveys the wounds of love lost without whining, and falters with a tremulous delicacy that seems to permeate direct to whatever place it is that we store memories of heartbreak. One reviewer writes "Matthew is a man who could sing a telephone directory and make it sound like a wake."

I'm not sure that funeral is quite the right term, as Scott's songs teeter between heavy emotion and delicate, understated light. They are, however, unflinchingly sorrowful, which leads me to ask whether there is a particularly fruitful emotional state from which to write. He tells me, "my songs are very personal and very autobiographical, so considering the content

of them yes, I do find myself writing when I am in a certain state of mind. Usually that means melancholy and heartbreak."

In The End, for example, explores the demise of relationships, acknowledging that "we all bear the scars/yeah we all feign a laugh/we all cry in the dark/get cut off before we start". It's my favourite of Scott's songs, and the one that when performed live seems to generate the best reaction. Whilst Scott didn't perform the track in *Shortbus* - the honour instead falling to co-star Justin Bond - we can only assume that it is from here that the track draws its notoriety.

Asked how he came to be involved in the film, Scott tells me that, "it happened very organically. I was at a house party here in Brooklyn and met John Cameron Mitchell. We got talking about music, I sent him some of my stuff, and he asked me to submit songs for the film. He's a dear man and I am so grateful to him. *Shortbus* has been an amazing catalyst. Without it nothing would be as it is now - it got me my management which, in turn, got me my record deal."

I, for one, don't believe that for a second. *Shortbus* may have fast tracked Scott's success, but with his breathtaking, unwavering talent it was always only a matter of time.

Scott Matthew's self titled debut album is out in October 2008 on Longtime Listener Records.