

JON AND ROY

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The Road Ahead is Golden arrives at the perfect juncture for Jon Middleton and Roy Vizer.

The long-time bandmates, who began releasing music under the Jon and Roy banner when they were university students, have hit their stride as artists. And with that comes the decision to eschew what once was for what could be on their seventh album.

"We were at a good place when we were recording **The Road Ahead is Golden**," Vizer said.

"We were motivated. It felt like the songs were recording themselves, so we made a concentrated effort to work quickly in the studio."

The pair from Victoria, BC turned to the studio shortly after the first series of rehearsals got underway, pushing aside a long-term plan that would have put them in the studio many months down the road. The songs that make up **The Road Ahead is Golden** – a record with subtle tones but a purposeful message – took shape with relative ease, and once Jon and Roy got in the studio with bassist Louis Sadava early sessions appeared to bring out the very best in the group.

"Doing it right then and there can often have a better result than if you think about it too much," Middleton said.

Middleton and Vizer have made a career out of embracing the unexpected, rather than running from

it. That approach worked wonders on **The Road Ahead is Golden**.

The band's latest record was recorded at a small, rural West Coast studio, a setting which stands in contrast to Greenhouse Studios in Vancouver, where 2015's **Riverside** was recorded.

Riverside pushed the musicians outside of their comfort zones, but **The Road Ahead is Golden** marks a return to organic operations for the group.

"On **Riverside**, we were pushing to get a little bit more of an edge, and we had never consciously decided to do that before," Vizer said. "Maybe we had something to prove."

Coming quickly on the heels of 2014's **By My Side**, the upbeat tone of **Riverside** served a key purpose for Jon and Roy, and positioned the band for success on a worldwide scale. A recent tour of Europe was brought about by a booking agent for Filter Group (Milky Chance) whose eagerness to see them overseas presented Jon and Roy with a long-awaited opportunity. The bandmates had no choice but to trust his enthusiasm, and their maiden tour of Europe wound up being an amazing success, Vizer said.

"It was a real trip to see people in Amsterdam singing along to [2008 single] 'Little Bit of Love.' And seeing sell out shows on our first European tour was the coolest experience. That gave new life to the band. We were booking a follow-up tour, all while doing this one."

Jon and Roy will return to Europe on two separate occasions in 2017, with great expectations. "Europe had some of the best shows of our career," Middleton said. "There is an opportunity to grow

there.”

The two bandmates never directly spoke about it, but the motivation to make an impact on new audiences fuelled them at every turn during their European trek. Previous tours with Xavier Rudd and The Cat Empire had put Jon and Roy before fans across North America, who continue to support the group in key markets on both coasts. Exposure in TV ad campaigns for Volkswagen, Scotiabank, and Lululemon, in addition to song placements in TV shows on HBO, MTV, NBC and OLN among dozens of others, broadened their reputation further. But it is their reputation as a must-see live act which continues to serve them well.

The trademarks of previous Jon and Roy releases – sly runs on Middleton’s acoustic guitar, Vizer’s guardrail groove – are in abundance on **The Road Ahead is Golden**, but changes are evident. Vizer, a trained percussionist, put congas back on the equipment list for two songs after he decided against using them on **Riverside**. And Middleton is joined by other voices – a rarity – on several songs, including members of Current Swell on ‘Better Life.’

Middleton doesn’t like to discuss the meaning behind his music, but there is a sense of import to his new batch of material. “There are some lyrical themes that are explored on the new record that I haven’t particularly touched on in the past, the difficult side of relationships. It’s not just the lovey side. There’s a little more reality.”

When pressed for more details, Middleton would only offer album opener ‘Running’ as an example of his mindset on **The Road Ahead is Golden**. The tune’s meaning has morphed over time, Middleton said, which appears to mesh with his “take-it-as-you-

will" approach when it comes to divulging details about his songwriting process.

"It went from a song about past girlfriends staying with guys they shouldn't into one about deadbeat dads," he said with a laugh. "But I love that our songs have an ambiguity to them. Certain lines will stick out, and it may have some meaning for you, even though the song is not actually about that topic. Some Bob Dylan lyrics don't make any sense whatsoever, but you make your own meaning out of them."

There's a simplicity to the music of Jon and Roy that makes what they do sound effortless. But nothing could be further from the truth.

"We worked really hard on this album, even though it came together quite quickly." Middleton said. "At this point in our career, it's the album it seemed we were destined to make."

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