**JJ Shiplett - Something To Believe In**

Decades from now, when they’re nursing bourbons on the front porch and proudly recalling the glory days, JJ Shiplett and Johnny Reid will still marvel at how fate fortuitously dropped them in each other’s path.

Were it not for Reid, Shiplett’s exquisitely soulful yet rugged voice – with its scant regard for gravity and even greater resistance to easy categorization – might still be Calgary’s best kept secret rather than the singular engine propelling the electrifying debut, *Something To Believe In*.

And were it not for Shiplett, the inaugural recording on the Scottish-born country music superstar’s newly minted HALO Entertainment Group wouldn’t be poised to show just how thrillingly unique country-dusted roots-rock circa 2017 can be.

Even in the cockamamie music industry, the planets occasionally align.

“I was always going to play music – there’s nothing I love more in life,” Shiplett says, a conviction all 11 original songs on *Something To Believe In* bear out. “I’d been playing the Calgary scene with regularity for about 12 years while working a day job as a house painter. But when that call from Johnny came in, it was just such a huge opportunity for me. I am extremely grateful to him.”

The now-legendary call – which arrived in late 2014 just as Shiplett was putting the finishing touches on a since-shelved independent album – is further evidence of the sheer power of the self-described “prairie boy’s” voice.

As the story goes, Reid heard the album *Heart Like This* by esteemed Alberta country singer/songwriter Joni Delaurier. One song, “Truce,” featured Shiplett. He’d cut the track with Delaurier a few years previous and promptly forgot about it. But it instantly sparked Reid’s imagination.

“I remember the day I got a call from Joni saying, ‘I just gave Johnny Reid your number. I hope that’s OK,’” Shiplett chuckles at the memory. “My guitar player Daniel Huscroft said to me, ‘You’re standing at the door. You *have* to walk through it.’ And it went from there.”

Things took off like a rocket. Literally two days after Shiplett finished mixing the before-mentioned indie album, he flew to Nashville to begin working with Reid on the songs that would eventually become *Something To Believe In*, an album cut both in Music City (Reid’s adopted hometown) and Calgary withShiplett and Reid sharing producing duties.

As with most debut albums, Shiplett confirms “these songs were written basically over my lifetime.

“Once Johnny and I met we decided to just run with this,” Shiplett continues. “We had done some preproduction, worked on the arrangements – something Johnny is really skilled at. We sat down in his house and just started going through the songs and, as Johnny would say, cutting out the fat and getting down to the meat.”

Indeed, *Something To Believe In* is all substance, lyrically pinned to universal (if often fraught) themes of longing. “Longing to be a better person, a better man, a lover and a better brother,” Shiplett says. “Every single one of the songs deals with me coming together as a brother or a lover.”

Perhaps surprisingly given its lyrical heft, the album locates an artist as comfortable unspooling honky-tonk rave-ups (the jangly piano-goosed singalong "Am I Dear") and knock-kneed ballads (“House on a River”) as heart-stopping anthems (the title track).

Before Shiplett could even issue his debut, however, Reid’s sprawling 47-show, 35-city “What Love Is All About” 2016 tour beckoned with Shiplett invited to support on all dates. (HALO Entertainment Group now also manages Shiplett).

That tour prompted the pair to issue four songs – the soaring wink-nudge first single "Darling, Let’s Go Out Tonight" plus "Higher Ground," "Always For You," and "Something To Believe In" – as an appetizer EP for concert-goers ahead of Shiplett’s full album.

“Songs like ‘Something to Believe In,’ ‘Sorrow,’ ‘Higher Ground’ and ‘Darling, Let’s Go Out Tonight’ I have recorded many times in different studios with different players. They coalesced over a long period.”

Shiplett continues: “By contrast, 'Seeking Shelter' was a tough one because I didn’t want it to become a kind of jock-rock song even though it has a big chorus. I wanted to make sure I kept its organic feel. It’s so easy when you’re recording to just start layering guitars. That was a song we wrestled with… and that fought back,” Shiplett cracks.

Though mostly cut in Nashville, Shiplett brought the songs back to Calgary for additional tweaks. “I wanted to add some character reflecting where I come from. So, I worked in a couple of studios re-tracking drums and guitar parts. As such, there are a lot of different players on the album.”

With *Something To Believe In* finally ready for its proverbial close-up, Shiplett couldn’t be more stoked. An ecstatic trail of media support throughout 2016 is destined to reap dividends in 2017 as Shiplett begins scorching stages from coast to coast, amassing new fans while cementing his status as a roots-rock star in the mould of Chris Stapleton.

“I just want people to hear this album,” Shiplett says. “If someone is longing for something better, or they’re in a difficult relationship or they’re fighting through an issue in life, there is something for them to grab onto with this record. I want them to know that it’s there. If I can get that message out somehow, *that* will be success.”

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