Barber comes to terms with his Manitoban prairie roots

**Del Barber**

**Missus Eula's Video**

**WHERE** Friday, Nov. 2 at 8 p.m.

**WHERE** ( Hamas Social Club)

**SHOW** $10 at theglive.ca

**Jenna Hildebrand**

**ARTS & CULTURE WRITER**

Del Barber is a prairie boy through and through. The 29-year-old Manitoban singer-songwriter is reared on meat and potatoes mixed with his love of Canadian folk music and philosophy, and has resulted in a compilation of new songs that explore the beauty of the prairies and the people who live there.

Obessed with the "cinematic quality of songs," his distinctive storytelling lyrics have won the attention of the Canadian folk music scene for their ability to capture the essence of prairie life in an authentic and compelling way. And Barber's continual attachment to southern, rural Manitoba life is expressed through lyrics that reveal a strong love for the prairie aesthetic.

"I grew up in a rural-urban split. I definitely feel like I have a split in both, kind of straddling that line," Barber explains. "Winnipeg was always right there, so I felt attached to the cultural framework of Winnipeg, as well as the agricultural traditions of Manitoba."

Growing up on his family farm, Barber was introduced to labour-intensive work at a young age, quickly learning what it takes to keep the agricultural tradition alive. His dad was a milk right agricultural engineer in a factory, contributing to the way the singer now finds stories of blue collar characters the most compelling to explore.

Barber's new album, *Fleetsong*, especially demonstrates these kinds of people, as songs like "The Right Side of the Wrong," "Winnipeg," and "Morning Tea" all tell the story of real life men Barber has met—like John, a Home Depot paint mixer originally from Carberry, Manitoba, now retired and living in Kelowna. In the search of solitude after a bad gig, Barber found him in the aisles of Home Depot and in familiar conversation with John, who used to farm where Barber's family did back in the day.

"I want to write songs that sound like they're from the flatlands, but also are about characters that people from the prairies can identify with in some way or another," Barber explains. "These are basically the two things that I'm most interested in, in a prairie esthetic."

But despite his current love for all things Winnipeg, it wasn't always home for Barber. Spending most of his 20s bouncing around universities in different towns and cities such as Chicago and Calgary, Barber spent years of his life trying to escape southern Manitoba by running away. But after living in 13 states and eight provinces, Barber now knows southern Manitoba has been, and always will be, home.

"I kind of feel now that I'm married in a very serious way to Manitoba and end up chasing her with all these other places I have to travel in and only ever going home and asking for forgiveness," Barber laughs. "It's everything — the language and infiltration and the Jets — there's so much romance about it and it's a deep love. I can't picture anywhere else."

However, Barber's excited to cheat on his hometown and hit the road for an upcoming tour across Canada. Having performed at the Edmonton Folk Music Festival last year, a gig he bails as one of the best of his career, Barber is looking forward to returning to Alberta, hoping for an intimate audience that's engaged with the layered songs and folk stories he has to share.

"I'm itching to record again, and I'm nowhere close or near ready for that, but I have a whole batch of songs that I really want people to hear," Barber says. "I just want to keep the electricity and hunger in everybody going."

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**Ben Harper**

**By My Side**

Virgin Records
BenHarper.com

**Ramneek Tung**

**ARTS & CULTURE WRITER**

Career retrospectives are usually reserved for artists who are well past their prime, now settled comfortably into the market's grasp. And while Ben Harper's glory days are behind him, likely warranting a career recompilation, he decides to take an unconventional approach on his latest release, *By My Side*. Rather than issuing the standard hits package, Harper focuses on one simple aspect of his 18-year career—ballads. It's an odd choice, resulting in an incomprenhensively different compilation, but there's no denying the quality of music on this release.

With its retro cover art, Harper's album evokes the spirit of the great singer-songwriters of the 1970s: James Taylor, Cat Stevens, and Leonard Cohen. While he's never achieved the cult status of some of his musical predecessors, he manages to hold his own with sublime guitar playing, soulful vocals and lucid lyrics.

While *By My Side* would have benefited from a chronological selection of Harper's most successful numbers, the reliance on ballads results in a mellow, consistent listen. And with tracks like "Diamonds on the Inside," "Morning Veil" and "Gold to Me" making appearances, Harper's aforementioned glory days are well represented. "Crazy Amazing," the only brand new song recorded specifically for this compilation, has a simple chyew with an irresistible charm, making for a welcome addition to the musician's catalogue.

*By My Side* is a bit of an acquired taste, but it's perfect for several different settings: bedtime, breakfast, make-out sessions and chilled out atmospheres. While the album might have been stronger with just Harper's career-defining songs on it, his unusual approach to the inevitable great hits release results in a succinct and cohesive listen.