

Ben Lee

Having spent half of his life in the music business, Ben Lee's quintessential niceness stemming from his Sydney-bred roots has never faded. Call it maturity, but it's that natural ability to sing from the heart without losing it in the process that makes Lee a true artist. His grasp for the charm of life has never strained, and his mission in crafting meaningful pop music continues on his seventh LP, the very feminine-centric effort *The Rebirth of Venus*.

"It's a very eventful time in my life," Lee beams. "I'm married and I just turned 30, so there's a lot going on. It feels like you make records around a milestone and this certainly feels like one of them for me. I have a lot to talk about and I want to share some of this."

The 13-song set is a celebratory look at female energy. Lee, who married British-born actress Ione Skye - daughter of '60s folk songster Donovan of "Mellow Yellow" fame -- in India in December 2008, relishes in love's many sides, and is unafraid to embrace femininity's inimitable influence. Part of that, too, is Lee's new role as a step-father to Skye's six-year-old daughter, Kate. Such a personal shift has only enhanced Lee's professional approach, as echoed on *Venus* tunes such as "Blue Denim" and "I'm a Woman Too." The playful synth-tailored "Boy With a Barbie" and the cheeky sweetness of "Yoko Ono" also channel Lee's tribute to women.

"I feel we live in a society that's fallen out of touch with elements of beauty, love and compassion," says Lee. "You can call those feminine qualities – they're not necessarily qualities exclusive to women, but psychologically they're feminine qualities. The idea of this record having so many songs about gender roles is kind of about opening yourself up to lead a more three-dimensional life."

"The biggest shock for me was, that within this security of this love, I've been more productive than ever," he adds. "I think that's real meaning of team work, you know? You can suddenly go further because you really do feel supported, and that was something I hadn't felt to this extent before. My life feels incredibly rich and full."

His passion is unwavering thus the strong message layered within *The Rebirth of Venus*, one of truly recognizing the splendor of femininity, is incredibly significant for Lee. A portion of the proceeds made from the album will be donated to FINCA, a microfinance campaign providing work assistance for women in third-world countries.

"With this record, it was very important for me to stand behind my words a bit more," Lee explains. "I believe that we're still catching up from a very long period of women not having equal opportunities in this society, and I like the idea of helping narrow that divide in third-world countries. FINCA completely cuts across any kind of political outlooks, and whether you're conservative or liberal, everyone appreciates that micro-finance is the idea of empowering people to make their own life better."

Since issuing *Awake Is the New Sleep*, in 2005, Lee hasn't strayed from the notion that we – every man, every woman – are all reaching for that space where immersing oneself in the joy of life is a goal worth striving for – it's absolutely real. Feel-good anthem "What's So Bad (About Feeling Good)?" reveals that exact enthusiasm. Other vibrant standouts such as "I Love Pop Music," featuring guest vocals from Aussie songstress Missy Higgins, and call and response tunes like the jubilant piano-driven "Sing" and longtime live favorite "Surrender" capture Lee's bright message.

“At times in my career, people have called me naïve for making joyful music, you know?” Lee says. “But I am not someone who thinks there’s no sadness in life. I can clearly see there’s a lot of suffering, but I also see that there’s nothing wrong with giving people music that gives them hope, and ‘What’s So Bad’ is like coming to my own defense and saying, ‘I really do believe that art doesn’t have to be dark to be meaningful.’ There’s something to be said for just letting yourself go and not worrying what everybody thinks, and celebrating your own existence.”

Producer Brad Wood (Liz Phair, Smashing Pumpkins, Pete Dinklage), who first joined Lee for his 1995 solo debut, *Grandpaw Would*, and again two years later for *Something to Remember Me By*, returns to the fold for *The Rebirth of Venus*. Here, Lee credits Wood for providing that space to rediscover one’s roots without repetition. Such a spark was first ignited on Lee’s ARIA-award winning LP, 2005’s *Awake Is the New Sleep*, which ultimately made Lee a star in his native Australia as well as a growing indie pop favorite worldwide. On *The Rebirth of Venus*, Lee once again finds comfort in re-exploring Wood’s back-to-basics approach.

“Working with Brad just feels like coming home. There seems to be some kind of magic combination when Brad and I work together. We have both changed a lot since we started working together; back then, it was all on tape and we just threw the record down pretty much on the first take. Nowadays, we are both a little more thorough, but the principle is the same: keep the sounds natural and authentic.”

The Rebirth of Venus, rich in spirit and rich in sound, and that’s exactly what Bee Lee has been going after since day one. After 16 years in the business, he still knows how to keep it real, and this album is an unabashedly fun album, one that champions a message that’s not long lost. “I’ve always inspired to have fun no matter what themes I’m talking about,” Lee says. “And I’m proud of the fact that I’ve made a record that works both as purely a piece of pop music that also adds a statement on kind of where we’re at collectively and individually.”

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