

CARTEL BIO

Will Pugh – vocals, guitar
Joseph Pepper - guitar
Nic Hudson - guitar
Jeff Lett - bass
Kevin Sanders - drums

Twenty seconds into “Let’s Go,” the opening track on CARTEL’s third full length CYCLES, singer Will Pugh declares, “I’ve got so much left to do but I’ll start with this song.” For the Atlanta, GA pop-rock quintet to be prioritizing, to have their collective gaze so firmly focused on the horizon, the future and all its possibilities is both incendiary and inspiring. Incendiary and inspiring as this, after all, is a band that has toured the world over, from Tokyo to Toronto, from Brisbane to Bristol, had a smash single in “Honestly,” has had over 36 million MySpace plays as well their own MTV mini-series chronicling the recording of their second album and has amassed coverage in Rolling Stone, Alternative Press, USA Today, and the New York Times. CYCLES could have easily been the staid soundtrack to a victory lap, but rather than rest on their laurels and bask in the comforts of history they chose instead to go forth, to grow, to cohere into a singular unit (fused together through dedication, perspiration and elbow grease) and, over the course of the eleven tracks that make up CYCLES, to create a sterling collection of hook-laden modern rock, succinct and self-assured.

The writing and recording of CYCLES was a transcontinental effort that took Cartel (completed by lead guitarist Joseph Pepper, rhythm guitarist Nic Hudson, bassist Jeff Lett, and drummer Kevin Sanders) from Atlanta to Los Angeles to New York City and back again several times over. Pugh says, “We had four months living together in New York while recording which really helped to lubricate the creative mind. With nothing to distract or detract from the endeavor, I think it focused all of our energy into each song every day.” This sense of focus is evident in the exhibited song variety, from the anthemic stomp of “Let’s Go” to the plaintive longing of “Only You,” to the cascading crests of album closer “Retrograde,” Cartel successfully plants their flag into previously uncharted territory. Utilizing the triple guitar attack of Pugh, Pepper, and Hudson the songs swell with layers of ferocity, melody, and precision. The rhythm section of Lett and Sanders ups the presence of their partnership by showcasing a profound fluency in poise and dynamics.

CYCLES is an explosively vibrant and vital work, co-produced by Cartel and Ross Petersen and featuring co-production from Troy “Radio” Johnson and Rick “Dutch” Cousins on lead single “Let’s Go” and Brent Paschke (guitarist of N.E.R.D.) on “Faster Ride,” “Only You,” and “Deep South.” It is the closest a recording has come to capturing the supernova intensity of Cartel live. “We’ve built our career on non-stop touring,” says Pugh, “and having music that makes for amazing shows is our first goal, we wanted to craft a record that represents the energy we bring into our live performance.” This goal coupled with the flourishes of the studio coalesce into a full and

powerful sound, a slab of guitar-centric pop-rock worthy enough to name check influences as grand as the Beatles, Oasis, and (a little closer to home) the Get-Up Kids.

Culled from over 30 songs, “We really got down to the root of what makes a song a ‘Cartel’ song as we narrowed down the choice cuts,” says Pugh. Friends since attending elementary school together in Conyers, GA and a band since 2000, the songwriting process for CYCLES marked a departure for the group. This was the first time they had written an overabundance of material before entering the studio. Allowed to experiment and explore Cartel honed in on a batch of songs that reflect their own maturation and expanding world-view as individuals and as artists. Themes of responsibility, purpose, and independence abound. From the call-to-arms manifesto of “Let’s Go,” in which Pugh implores the listener to “Get up people, stand up with me,” to the confident kiss-off of head-in-a-hole conservatism in “See Me Now,” there is a worldly scope and audacious swagger throughout the album.

Says Pugh, “CYCLES is our most informed album, thus far, it is indicative of not only life processes but learning processes.” It is their dedication to the advancement and elevation of their craft as well as their willingness to confront challenges through innovation and perseverance that makes CYCLES such an effective release and Cartel such a potent and electrifying band.