

Simon Spire

From his native New Zealand to his newly adopted home in New York, Simon Spire has long been on a path towards fully capturing his artistic vision. Now, with 'ALL or NOTHING,' the Auckland-born singer/songwriter has crafted a powerful and evocative debut album, firmly establishing him among today's best new artists. Songs such as 'Dying Daily' and the buoyant 'Inside Out' are made indelible via Spire's engaging vocals, masterful guitar styling, and his impressively crafted arrangements, highlighting a lyrical gift that is simultaneously deeply personal and wholly universal. Moving through straight-up rock 'n' roll to energetic powerpop to lush balladry, the album leads the listener through this new artist's striking impressions of life and uncompromising relationship to it, one that could aptly be described as 'ALL or NOTHING.'

"A friend asked me what the record was about," he says. "After reflecting on it, I realized that what really sums it up for me is *transformation*. The songs are about moving through experiences and expanding into something new. A song such as 'Hiding So Long' deals with that sometimes elusive connection to a place of personal authenticity, while 'Alive' feels like a celebration of having sailed beyond the horizon of one's known world."

Spire played piano while growing up in Auckland, but didn't discover his true passion until hearing Nirvana at the age of 13. He immediately made the musical shift from the eighty-eight keys to the six-string. Now "completely guitar-obsessed," Simon fell in thrall to axe masters like Steve Vai, Joe Satriani, and Metallica's Kirk Hammett, their "intensity" touching something deep in the young musician's core. Spire spent his high school years exploring the guitar, serving in a variety of outfits ranging from cover bands, original rock groups, and of course, the school jazz band.

In time, Spire began to write his own material. Inspired by such confessional tunesmiths as Alanis Morissette, John Mayer, and Neil Diamond, Simon put pen to paper, embarking on a new chapter in his musical journey. Spire soon teamed up with a drummer/sound engineer friend and made his first demo, learning the intricacies of vocal performance, musical arrangement, and recording techniques in the process. Still, he hadn't yet realized that music was going to be his life's work. He attended the University of Auckland, receiving senior prizes in both finance and economics. "It was a direction I was seriously considering," he says, "but eventually I realized it wasn't what I was looking for."

After graduation, Simon understood that his creative drive left him little option but to pursue music as a full-time vocation. His father, then living in Los Angeles, proved his support for his son's occupational decision when, by chance, he made the acquaintance of Lenedra Carroll, an accomplished artist and businesswoman known for her work developing and managing the career of the multi-platinum artist, Jewel.

Carroll agreed to give Spire's demo a listen, and Simon was soon on a flight out of New Zealand to meet with her. Upon landing in Los Angeles, he was stunned to find Carroll and his dad waiting for him at the arrivals area. "It was all very sudden," he says. "We made our way to the LAX parking garage, sat in the car and listened to my demo. I was incredibly tense, sitting in the back seat and not knowing how the music was coming across, but in the end, Lenedra agreed to give me some guidance and advice. It was such a breakthrough; I couldn't believe that someone in the industry who really knew what she was doing would actually be interested in me."

In time, Carroll would become a mentor to Simon after selecting him as the first recipient of her Artist Advance project's 'Main Stage Award,' an artist apprenticeship program that provides new artists with the many kinds of resources needed for the further development of their talent and careers. Her wise counsel included connecting the young songwriter with producer/arranger Joe Mardin, known for his work with such diverse artists as Jewel, Raul Midon, and Queen Latifah. When Spire returned home to Auckland, he and Mardin continued their musical exchange via e-mail. "It was cool to get an objective opinion on where my songs were," Spire says. "Joe saw something in my music that he liked and pushed me to develop as a writer."

In 2004, Spire returned to Los Angeles in order to further his musical career. The next year he headed north to Orcas Island, the largest of Washington's San Juan Islands, to record a demo with the help of producer Jim Bredouw. Simon indulged himself in the many options a modern studio has to offer, providing further fuel for his expanding musical vision. It wasn't long before Spire's enhanced musical understanding called out for the next step: a full-scale album. Carroll suggested her protégé team with producer Ralf Illenberger at his studio in Sedona, Arizona. Illenberger, a Grammy-nominated guitarist/composer hailed for his rich soundscapes, proved an ideal foil for Spire, the perfect producer to help the young artist achieve his ambition.

"Initially, Ralf seemed like an unusual choice, given the range of music he's covered," Spire says. "But it was this diversity that I think made for a great pairing – he understood both the instrumental emphasis that was important to me, as well as the delivery of the songs themselves. He reminds me of producers like Brian Eno and Patrick Leonard—producers with a wide range of musical interest, and musicians in their own right, whose personal musical arenas are deep and varied soundscapes. More importantly, Ralf encouraged me to try things I may not have otherwise tried. I think we complemented each other well. As a team, we came up with something pretty cool."

Accompanied by a cadre of AZ-based backing musicians, Spire was able to bring brightness and texture to songs like 'No More Words' and 'You, You, You.' Melding styles and sonic approaches, 'ALL or NOTHING' is alive with inventive musicality, irresistible melodies and intimate lyricism, all ten tracks having been written by Spire himself. From the punchy 'More or Less,' to the closing title track, the album is animated and upbeat, not unlike its creator. "It's everything I wanted it to be," Simon says. "It has the guts and the drive I was aiming for, it has the color and variety."

With recording completed on 'ALL or NOTHING,' it wasn't long before Spire's traveling jones took hold of him once more. As 2007 came to a close, the young tunesmith packed his things and left LA for the bright lights of New York City. "The more I visited here, the more I fell in love with it," the brand-new Big Apple resident enthuses. "The music scene, the vibrancy of the whole city, it's so alive. It feels so strongly at the center of it all. Plus, I've never lived in a place where it snows."

Spire is now poised to set out on the next leg of his artistic expedition. 'ALL or NOTHING' captures a gifted new artist exploring his craft and his soul in an effort to reach a place that's both true and transcendent. Where Simon Spire's path will lead him is as yet undetermined, but as his songs make evident, the journey is the destination.

"Making music has always opened new doors and challenged me to explore unanticipated directions," Spire says. "Who knows what doors will open next?"

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