

ANTHONY D'AMATO - THE SHIPWRECK FROM THE SHORE

Sometimes the best music is like a photograph. Anthony D'Amato's songs feel like Polaroids, brushed with golden-hued vintage tones of heavy-hearted folk and electric streaks of rock and roll. Like snapshots, they capture specific moments in time, moments of enlightenment and resolution, elation and despair, darkness and light. They're inextricably tied to the spaces in which they sparked to life and reveal raw portraits of their subjects, unvarnished and intimate.

For his New West debut, *The Shipwreck From The Shore*, D'Amato veered away from the homemade DIY production style that marked his early work, a pair of self-recorded albums cut in a Princeton University dorm room and a New York City apartment that NPR called "a modern folk gem" and Paste hailed as "unforgettable." In the fall of 2013, he traveled to rural Maine to collaborate with a producer for the first time, seeking out Sam Kassirer at the Great North Sound Society.

"Great North is this incredible 1700's farm house," D'Amato says of the studio. "There's no cell service, no internet, nothing to do but record and cook. And they've recorded so many recent albums up there that I love like Josh Ritter, Langhorne Slim, Lake Street Dive."

The isolation was a welcome moment of focus for D'Amato, who lives in the socially peripatetic environs of New York City. In Maine, he completed tracking the album in just 11 days, a radical departure from his usual year-long recording process.

"Up to this point, I'd produced everything myself," he says. "I recorded it all with a single microphone in my bedroom and friends' apartments and mixed it on a beat up old laptop, but I was ready to explore a new approach. Sam's always been one of my favorite producers, so I jumped at the chance to work with him and dove into it headfirst. I love the textures he creates, how he brings out so many different shades of colors in all the arrangements."

The Revolution-era home made for an unusual recording process, too, where each band member was often stationed in a different room of the house. "When we were tracking songs live as a band, I could be in the attic by myself, and the drummer -- Matt McCaughan from Bon Iver -- he was in the live room in the adjacent carriage house. Brad Cook from Megafaun would be in the live room playing bass with Matt, but he was wired up to an amp on the complete opposite side of the main house. There weren't isolation booths, so we did isolation by distance. And on top of that, Sam would be monitoring everything from the living room, so he couldn't see any of us. We were all just connected by headphones and microphones. It forced us to really listen deeply to each other because there were no visual cues about where we were headed."

While the recording was physically dislocated, *The Shipwreck From The Shore* is a wide-ranging but unified collection. "Captivating and catchy" (Refinery29) opener "Was a Time" is a barnburner propelled with raucous drums and a lonesome harmonica slicing through layers of distorted analog keyboards. D'Amato says, "It started out as a folk song, but we decided to take it someplace a little more punk, with a Pete Seeger meets Suicide vibe. Writing this song kind of felt like the tumblers in a lock falling into

place, and once I finished it, the door opened and a whole avalanche of others songs poured out in a very short period.”

The soulful “Back Back Back” blares with trumpets, shimmering tambourines, and an Afro-beat guitar line, while D’Amato’s voice climbs to the rafters in an almost big-top gospel sound. “Mavis Staples has always been a huge influence, and I wanted to write something that would live up to her endless positivity,” he says. “It’s a song about keeping your head up and moving forward at all times.”

Themes of hard times and heartbreak weave throughout the album, but D’Amato never wallows into melancholy. Instead he celebrates the catharsis of moving on, “turn[ing] heartbreak into cheery folk,” as SPIN puts it. “If it don’t work out / you take the bed and I’ll take the couch” he sings later on the album, recounting the aftermath of a crumbled relationship. “I don’t think I’ve ever written a more nakedly open and honest song,” he reveals. “Sometimes the end of a relationship doesn’t line up neatly with the end of a lease, and you wind up living as roommates with your now-ex. I went out on the road for dates with Pete Yorn while I was living it, and playing songs like ‘If It Don’t Work Out’ was a way of processing what was waiting for me at the end of the run. I didn’t give myself the opportunity to censor the material or the luxury weighing how much of myself I would feel comfortable opening up. The music got such a strong reaction from the first time I played it live that I knew it was striking a nerve, which was really gratifying.”

D’Amato grew up in rural New Jersey and honed his songwriting skills working with the Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Paul Muldoon while attending Princeton University (where he wrote his senior thesis on Bruce Springsteen). “I’d been a fan of Muldoon’s poetry before I met him,” D’Amato says. “There’s a song-ish element to his writing, and it turns out that he’s a huge music fan and he’s written lyrics for Warren Zevon and plays in a band. We worked out an independent study where I’d bring him songs and he’d critique the lyrics and give me books of Paul Simon and Leonard Cohen’s writing to read. I still think about all the lessons I learned from him every time I pick up a pen.”

The resulting album, ‘Down Wires,’ earned praise everywhere from NPR and The New York Times to Paste and American Songwriter, along with a nod from The World Cafe for their emerging artist series “Next” (past artists include Fleet Foxes and Dawes). He followed it up with another home recording, ‘Paper Back Bones,’ which BBC Scotland called “one of [our] favourites of all time.” Dates in the US and Europe with Josh Ritter, Rhett Miller, Pete Yorn, Ben Kweller, Alejandro Escovedo, Joe Pug, Gretchen Peters, Mary Gauthier, and more ensued, in addition to performances at the iconic Newport Folk Festival and Glasgow’s Celtic Connections.

The Shipwreck From The Shore is D’Amato’s label and studio debut, and it’s his most realized work yet, revealing intricate harmonies powered by uplifting, often ecstatic rhythms. Throughout, he preaches his epiphanies, relishing the breakdowns and the strength to build it all back up again. “There’s that old saying ‘Let go or be dragged,’ and I think that’s the heart of this album,” he says. “When the storm hits, it’s the trees that can bend that live to see the next day.”