

DANKO JONES

WILD CAT

If you've been following the Danko Jones saga at all for the past two decades, then it should come as no surprise that the man's new album, *Wild Cat*, opens with a song called "I Gotta Rock." This is, after all, a man whose oeuvre includes such R-word directives as "Rock Shit Hot," "Do You Wanna Rock?," "Rock 'n' Roll Proletariat," and "Rock 'n' Roll Is Black and Blue." Just as cows moo and cocks crow, Danko Jones exists to rock. It's his innate, guttural mode of expression. His daily ritual. His life's work.

But as "I Gotta Rock" cuts the leash off *Wild Cat* and kicks into its furious sprint, what strikes you is not so much the self-evident message as the desperation in Danko's delivery. You'd think that after 20 years, nine albums, world tours with the deities like Ozzy Osbourne, Guns N' Roses and Motörhead, and countless main-stage appearances at the world's premier music festivals, Danko Jones would have had his fill of rocking. But when he declares, "I want it now!" you can instantly feel the nervous energy his jittery hands, the cold sweat streaming down his face, the hunger stewing in his stomach. It's as if the electrical shock he experienced when he first heard KISS' *Destroyer* as a six-year-old is still coursing through his veins. And by the time the song's breakneck opening verse explodes into that anthemic woah-oh-oh chorus, you've been treated to a crash course in what Danko Jones does so well: He takes the decaying corpse of rock 'n' roll, jolts it back to life, and makes you believe it can once again conquer the world. And like any endangered species, this wild cat has only become more tenacious and ferocious the longer he endures.

You could hear that survivalist instinct in full effect on Danko's previous album, *Fire Music* (2015), which featured some of his more bruising, blood lusty songs to date (and fulfilled Danko's bucket-list goal of providing the theme song for a WWE Royal Rumble with "Gonna Be a Fight Tonight"). And when you consider that the record was Danko's highest charting to date in several European countries (and also yielded a career-best Top 5 Active Rock single in his native Canada with "Do You Wanna Rock?"), there was good reason not to fudge with the formula. With drummer Rich Knox now firmly ensconced behind the kit for his second go-round with the band, Danko and long-time bass-wielding associate JC once again tapped the production prowess of Eric Ratz, who doused *Fire Music* in premium diesel.

But, as long-time fans know, Danko has always been more of a lover than fighter. And though *Wild Cat* boasts its share of riot-starting rave-ups (see: the Van Halen-via-Misfits blitz of "Going Out Tonight"), it's been a while since we've heard Danko sound this unabashedly romantic. He has, of course, flirted with more delicate songwriting in the past—think of My Love Is Bold's dramatic power ballad "If I Were You," Never Too Loud's acoustic-strummed serenade "Take Me Home," or Rock 'n' Roll Is Black and Blue's arm-swaying anthem "Always Away." But these always felt like weird, one-off curveballs—surprise displays of tenderness that contrasted sharply with his usual crotch-rock come-ons.

On *Wild Cat*, however, affection and aggression are no longer mutually exclusive qualities. On the surface, "My Little RnR" may seem like yet another ode to the music Danko loves, but it's actually a shrine to a bewitching woman built atop the "she's my little rock 'n' roll" hook of the early-'80s Rolling Stones chestnut "Little T&A" (whose source album is given a further nod when Danko declares, "I'm gonna tattoo you on my shoulder"). And "You Are My Woman" may be Danko's most reverential act of Phil Lynott worship in a long history of Thin Lizzy love, capturing not just the Irish legends' gritty riffage and streetwise swagger, but their soulful sincerity, too.

Even *Wild Cat*'s fiercest strikes get soothed by aloe-vera melodies. "Let's Start Dancing" charges out of the gate with a metallic chug that feels like a tribute to Danko's late friend and frequent onstage sparring partner Lemmy Kilmister, but the rapid-fire repartee and cowbell-kissed chorus turn the Motörhead memorial into a joyous wake. And though the title track is a rollicking blues-punk rumble fashioned in the mould of early Danko classic "Love Is Unkind," it sells its seething sentiment—"she's a steely, wild cat killer!"—with Beatlesque bonhomie.

You could be forgiven for thinking that Danko Jones exists in a self-contained universe (or, rather, boudoir), with the band's bone-breaking boogie seemingly immune to contemporary influences or topical talking points. (Back in 1999, Danko's friends in the Montreal power-rock band Bionic honoured this impervious quality by titling a song "Political Song for Danko Jones to Sing"—a cheeky homage to the Minutemen's "Political Song for Michael Jackson to Sing.") But *Wild Cat*'s seismic closing track suggests the anxiety we're all feeling about the state of the world is starting to weigh on his shoulders. The solution he presents on "Revolution," however, is not to smash the system, but provide you with the ultimate motivation to do so—once we topple the tyrants, just think of how great the celebratory sex is going to be! Because if Danko Jones has learned anything during his 20-plus years in the rock 'n' roll trenches, fighting to uphold the honour of the music so dear to his heart, it's that the hippies got it all wrong. With *Wild Cat*, Danko Jones presents his prescription for a better world: make war, then love.

