

Patrolled By Radar

*“I know it’s all the same to you/Everyone is looking for the thing they were meant to do/I’ll sit and sing a lonesome song/Until I’m carried away and gone.”—“Carried Away,” from **Be Happy***

LOS ANGELES, CA — Jay Souza has been carrying around those lonesome songs inside his heart since his mom — whose great-great-grandfather was first cousin to Irish poet William Butler Yeats — sent him a present of three cassettes that he played incessantly — Johnny Cash, Neil Diamond and the Carpenters.

The Boston-born singer-songwriter, who has lived in L.A. since 1990, has exhibited qualities of all three in his music, first in his band 50 Cent Haircut, and now alongside the same musicians in Patrolled by Radar (guitarists Bosco Sheff and Bryan “BC” Coulter and bassist Bryan “Reno” Stone), with a timeless, narrative style that takes its cue from classic Americana roots: equal parts folk, rock, country, blues and soul. Their Knitting Factory debut, **Be Happy**, will sit comfortably in your collection alongside such contemporary acts as Mumford & Sons and the Avett Brothers.

Produced by Los Straitjackets member Peter Curry in his Culver City Powow Fun Room studio the old-fashioned way, with the veteran ensemble showing how years on the L.A. scene has solidified them as a band, *Be Happy* could well be termed songs for the New Depression, with songs like “Widow Next Door” and “Dressed for the Drought” telling stories that could have taken place at any point during the last two centuries, as sung by troubadours such as Bob Dylan, Kris Kristofferson, Ray Davies or Townes Van Zandt. Still others reflect the many tales Souza hears on his day job as a bartender or as a musician, including the Irish feel of “Carried Away,” written from the point of view of a soldier serving in the Middle East; the classic country lament “Coat of Disappointment,” about losing someone to illness; or “Fast Life Slow Death,” in which he tried to put himself in the head of his dying dad, who would never live to hear it. Elsewhere, Souza and Patrolled by Radar show themselves equally capable of creating the lush pop choruses of the Beatlesque title track, the slinky sexual double entendre rockabilly blues in “Walking” (“The first verse is about Adolf Hitler and the second, Johnny Cash,” he explains), the whimsical psychedelic folk of the *Babar the Elephant*-inspired “Pachyderm,” or even full-throttle rock and roll, which comes across loud and clear in the anthemic (and aptly named) “New Fight Song.”

“I try to write stuff that I would like to listen to myself,” says Souza, whose passion for playing started when he was a 15-year-old in the Boston punk band Boys Life, whose influences included Elvis Costello, Graham Parker, the Jam and the Clash. “There has to be some infectious underpinning to it. I like great melodies that surprise you, going to places that you might not have expected, but are ultimately satisfying. I love great records made by great writers.”

Music has been Souza’s refuge ever since his mother split when he was five, leaving him to be raised by his truck-driver father and an extended working-class clan that had little appreciation for the arts. “Music was her gift from afar,” he says of the three well-worn tapes she left him. “She was very creative, but the rest of my family wasn’t.”

Unable to afford college, Jay enlisted in the Army, putting himself through Bridgewater College in Massachusetts. After graduation, he dabbled in public relations, then decided to pursue music in L.A., putting out a solo album, *Face for Radio*, in 1996, and two years later forming 50 Cent Haircut, whose eponymous debut was recorded in one take at Cal State. The band quickly found the Sunset Strip scene a depressing rat race, but soon discovered other local venues that were more hospitable. They released a series of albums in the process, including *Brood or Change* (2002) and *Shadow of the Noose* (2007). In all, Souza has penned more than 150 individual songs, while his band has played over 1,000 shows, opening for the likes of one of

his idols, the Kinks, as well as the late country legend Porter Wagoner with Marty Stuart just four months before Wagoner's death.

"The live thing is insane," laughs Jay. "We're a fine band to see. My guys are just ridiculous. It's dynamic, but still song-oriented, and different every time."

The band had the closing song in two of the three MGM/Sony *Walking Tall* movies, with two of the tracks on *Be Happy* heard on the TNT show *Men of a Certain Age*, where they were placed by noted music supervisor Gary Calamar.

"I'm proud of the depth of my catalog. I love that I can look back on our stuff and not cringe," Souza says, in typical understated fashion, his own harshest critic. "That's pretty amazing for me."

That attention to craft can be heard throughout *Be Happy*, which will be released under the name Patrolled by Radar because Souza got tired getting confused with rapper 50 Cent. Knitting Factory CEO Morgan Margolis, remembering the band's yearlong residency at the Hollywood club, was so impressed with *Be Happy* he offered not only to manage them, but release the album on his label. It's a story that could have come straight from one of Souza's own songs, based on real life.

"The whole record was meant to be like that," says Souza. "I wanted it to be rich in melody, dynamism and nuance. I'll rewrite the words over and over until the allusion is just right. I try to make it less literal and more poetic. There's always a better way to say something."

Be Happy is a rather ironic title, given some of the grim stories Souza recounts in "Dressed for the Drought," "Coat of Disappointment," "Fast Life Slow Death" and "Carried Away."

"I see people having a hard time. It's a strange time we're in. The haves and have-nots are being drawn together in a way that's weird," he says, though he's finally seeing light at the end of the tunnel. It could just be that Jay Souza's own story is headed for a *Be Happy* ending.