

Let's get this on the table now- Eddy Lawrence is a major, but overlooked talent. Why this sorry state of affairs persists, I don't know. But if ever there was a case to be made that Lawrence deserves to be heard – and that folks would love his stuff if they heard him – this new album is it.

Based in upstate New York and Vermont, Lawrence has been kicking around for a few years, releasing a small but steady stream of albums on which he plays every instrument, and writes every song. These albums are lost gems – they contain melodic hooks, witty lyrics, and crisp production. A one-man band is he. But on this newest release, Lawrence has outdone himself.

Recorded around the time of his divorce, *Inside My Secret Pocket* is actually two albums in one. But the tone and sound blend so seamlessly that it really doesn't matter what he set out to do; the finished product is sterling: an album filled with moving, catchy, literate songs. And he lays it all out with the sentiment of a folkie who smartly knows when to shift gears and indulge a talent for a power-pop riff or two.

With a cynical eye and wry sense of humor, Lawrence exudes a world-weary attitude that is reminiscent of John Prine at his smarmy best. He dissects his failed marriage and the bitter aftermath on many of the songs here, but in a way that actually allows us to feel his feelings. His images are vivid. His use of language is unflinching.

In fact, Lawrence can be devastating as he goes about pouring out his pain, such as on "Jersey," a beautiful, although heart-wrenching ballad defined by simply guitar picking. No matter where he and his ex may have attempted to create a life together, he laments that "anyplace would still be lonesome if she were living there with me." On "Bad About You," a low-key, wistful song with a pretty melody, Lawrence sings about hating himself for hating his ex, but his consolation is figuring she's just as tired and bitter as he is. But he doesn't just sing – he really does sound exhausted and spent by this emotional rollercoaster that doesn't seem to stop for him.

Occasionally, his sense of humor breaks through. It's hard not to laugh when he compares his ex to a toilet-bag camera. "You only see me when my pants are down, you're the only one looking when there's no one around...you see all of my hidden faces, you know all of my public faces, someone the world doesn't know." But mostly, there are some nasty sentiments here. This album is not a love letter. As he sings, "I'd Rather Eat Dirt (Than Be Treated Like It)." But by doing so, Lawrence has used his experience to create something positive – beautiful music. Making this album was clearly cathartic, but it's also completely accessible. Throughout the 22 tracks here, Lawrence masterfully conveys universal emotions – anger, sadness, confusion, hurt, relief. And, yet he also expresses hope. The closing number, for instance, "I Got The Power," is a power-pop anthem to inner strength, which also happens to sound like it could have been a 1970s rock radio fixture. Generally, though, Lawrence is simply cranky, trying to make sense of what happened as his life unraveled into an unforeseeable series of events that are now captured in these songs. Like any gifted artist, though, he wants to let it out. And we should be very glad he did. This album is a pure delight, even if it was a heart-breaker for him to make.

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First and foremost, Eddy Lawrence is a story teller. A skilled musician, Lawrence first lays down a comfortable bed of instrumentation then settles in and tells a series of captivating stories that have both personal and universal appeal. There is a sparcity to his tales that belies the depths to which he reaches into the human spirit. And the songs of Eddy Lawrence also make easy listening simply as music. This is a winning combination.

There's something about the mood of these songs that always suggests there's a country boy somewhere at their core, but the sound ranges easily across any number of genres. Travelling through folk, country, jazz, rock, blues, and other territories, these songs manage nonetheless to maintain a consistent sound. This is not a disparate scrapbook of short-stories but single, thematic collection.

The eighth release by this prolific songwriter, *Inside My Secret Pocket* maintains the consistent high quality for which Eddy Lawrence has become known. Listening to his recordings, it becomes clear that each song is written and recorded with consummate care. Beneath the artistry of Eddy Lawrence lies a lifetime of finely-hewn craft that can't help but shine through.

Lawrence has described the songs on this release as "the diary of a divorce" and the emotions of this divisive process lend power to stories that would have been powerful and emotive in any event. These are stories that can be understood and felt by any one of us who has been involved in a human relationship or who has loved and lost.

It would be difficult to pick any one of these 22 songs as standing out above the rest. Each has its own merits and each tells its own part of the larger story. The strength of this release is not in one individual song but in their cumulative effect. The quality is consistently high throughout.

If you haven't already discovered Eddy Lawrence, then this release might be a good place to start. Eddy Lawrence stands in a long tradition of American storytelling. Although he's one of the finest modern narrators of American life and does have a certain niche audience, Lawrence remains largely unknown. That's a shame.

Bob Mackenzie's Roots Music Reviews

Some songwriters, musing on the end of romance and the problems of starting anew, would produce an album of heartbreak and self pity. Eddy Lawrence reaches *Inside My Secret Pocket* and pulls out an album and a half of spine-thrilling, blood-pumping folk-rock.

Relationships on the skids make an appearance, along with cheating, selfish lovers, uncertain new friends and some good old-fashioned self-loathing. All are handled with refreshing energy and unusual insight.

"Selfish" explores the corruption of personal beliefs caused by betrayal, in a very direct and pragmatic way. "I'd Rather Eat Dirt" is bitter but also a proud protest against suffering love. And there is hope -- pragmatic and honest rather than romantic -- heard in the solid "Bulletproof Friend" and the triumphant finale "I Got the Power." "She Doesn't Like Poetry" delivers the feeling of giddy delight that comes in discovering a sympathetic partner in a very personal way, without once mentioning the word love or any of the standard romantic tropes.

Most of the songs fit into the theme of romances and heartbreaks, but all can be taken as singles with no loss of context. "She's Psychic" will remind almost everyone of at least one woman in their lives. My favorite track, "Mithras," has seemingly nothing to do with the rest of the album, being a very direct hymn to a widely forgotten god. But it ties in with one of the album's finest songs, "The Truth is Always Female." Sympathetic and lyrical, "The Truth" ties the confusions of a single relationship into the myths of human history, never losing a contemporary feel or a sense of immediate intimacy.

That constant sense of familiarity is the greatest strength of *Inside My Secret Pocket*, more even than the galvanizing guitar licks and feverishly infectious hooks. Lawrence has a rare gift for making the personal universal, summoning strong emotion without resorting to sentiment. If you're looking for a thoughtful album, a set of music to jam with, songs to make you think, or even a few laughs, look *Inside My Secret Pocket*.

Sarah Meador, Rambles