

THE CONJURER

Dana Cooper Works “Magic” On New Album

NASHVILLE, Tennessee — “The idea of a conjurer, of someone who pulls something out of the air, makes me laugh,” says Dana Cooper. “It definitely describes how I see myself as a songwriter and performer. There’s a mystery and magic in songwriting. You have to keep believing you can pull the next idea out of a hat. In another way, someone who performs for the public has to be a conjurer, too. You have to be able to stand there and believe you can dazzle people with your next trick.”

Cooper has customarily named his albums after song titles. The Conjurer departs from that tradition, and rightly so, as it’s a singular album within the veteran singer-songwriter’s canon.

The title was inspired when the album’s art director, Jeff Thorneycroft, envisioned a CD cover designed to look like an old magician’s poster. It displays Cooper in a turban gazing with concentration into a crystal ball, while small images of travel, time, musicians, money, wine and a midnight moon swirl in the crystal light. On the road for more than three decades, Cooper recognizes that stepping on stage in front of a different crowd night after night takes no small amount of trickery.

But here’s where the metaphor ends: Cooper’s new set of songs prove once again that there’s no sleight of hand involved in crafting and presenting music this powerful and meaningful. The seasoned singer-songwriter has grown into a master craftsman where every word has a purpose, every chord has a reason. The Conjurer represents his best work because, with each album, Cooper has grown more incisive in his songwriting and more confident and nery in interpreting his own material.

Understandably, improving one’s craft comes with age. What’s remarkable about The Conjurer is how inspired and energized Cooper sounds. Like any great artist, he has responded to his times, penning uplifting songs about perseverance and about finding the positive in life during an era when economic pressures have once again made many lives tougher. Of course, Cooper’s gift is in finding fresh, often personal ways to speak to universal feelings, as he does in “Good Place to Begin,” “Leave a Little Mark” and “Enough.”

“I’ve always liked songs about hope,” he explains. “I think particularly in times like these, you want to uplift people. There’s plenty of darkness in the world, it’s all around us. I don’t avoid that in my writing, but I like to point out that there’s light even amid the darkness. I’ve found people respond to those songs, they want to hear about others who make it through and who look for the positive in everyday things.”

Similarly, The Conjurer deals with being alive during wartime, and a moment in history fraught with uncertainties and unforeseen dangers. Cooper deals with these themes with inventive allegories and with age-old tales of men who deal with the problems brought on by the adversity of doing battle.

“I wanted this record to be less polished and more reckless in a way,” he said. “I wanted to get a live sound, something really ragged and rough at times, and my co-producer and guitarist Thomm Jutz proved perfect for that. It really worked well for this set of songs.”

Cooper praised Jutz’s preparation, saying his thoroughness in working up the songs ahead of time, and in setting up the musicians in the studio, helped provide a comfortable atmosphere where Cooper and his collaborators could be spontaneous. “I can be a perfectionist and drive everyone crazy in the studio,” Cooper relates. “But this time I let that go, and we cut every song in two or three takes. In the end, I like how in-your-face it sounds. It’s wonderfully engineered, it has a nice balance to it, but there’s also a real live up-front energy to it, too.”