

Man on a Mission

Mountain Home Music Company's **Darren Nicholson** is a man on a mission – and if you think, based on his membership in **award-winning bluegrass quintet Balsam Range**, that you know what it is, his new EP is going to come as a mighty big surprise.

The aptly titled ***Man On A Mission*** – now available for pre-order, add and save ahead of its **November 26** release – shows the singer, songwriter and mandolin player in a brand new light, and the revelation comes less than a minute into the searing opener, **“Love Is War,”** when the sounds of old-time mountain banjo and fiddle give way to a flourish of drums and a muscular country-rock rendition of a lover's plea to “call a truce – I can't take it anymore.” From there, with expectations readjusted, the concise, six-song set offers a portrait of **Nicholson** as a musician as comfortable behind an electric mandolin as a vintage acoustic version, writing songs tailor-made for country-flavored Americana settings.

Working mostly with fellow Western North Carolinians, from songwriting partners like **Charles Humphrey III (Songs From The Road Band)** to the A-team session players and producer/keyboardist **Jeff Collins**, **Nicholson** boldly fulfills his redefinitional mission, serving up a variety of rootsy material – from the lonesome country ballad, **“All Night Long”** through the tongue-in-cheek boogie-woogie of **“Them Hateful Woman Blues”** to the gritty R&B of the closing title track (complete with wailing harmonies from local soul singer **Leeda Lyric Jones**) – without a moment's hesitation or a single false note. To be sure, there are echoes of predecessors and heroes like **Marty Stuart** and **Darrell Scott**, but in the end, this is music that reflects a lifelong musician's deepest creativity.

“This album is a journey into the human condition, with relationships and feelings turned into an Appalachian

Americana roots tapestry," **says Nicholson**, who uses a songwriter's vivid imagery to convey the album's breadth. "It's a Saturday night raucous party with dancing, electric guitars and fiddles twangin' feeding your energy. It's rockabilly attitude, and it's tongue-in-cheek. It's the heartbreak of things not working out and having to return home to regroup. It's triumph, hope, and positivity set to mountain soul. It's breaking deals with yourself, and it's also learning from your mistakes and looking for the bright spot. It's a lonely Sunday morning, saying goodbye to an old friend. Saying hello to new ones! It's up, it's down. It's a wide mix of music and emotion with the common thread of truth and honesty. It's from the heart.

"I write about life and the human condition," **he concludes**. "I write about things I've lived, and I just try to perform them as best I can."

DARREN NICHOLSON
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