

## derek chafin: bio

Turning back from the mixing board in the dark control room of his Barn Studio outside Philadelphia, singer-songwriter Derek Chafin flicks his cell phone closed, tuning out the world as he pushes the volume up on his latest CD, *The Gladhouse* (a|i|r, www.airrecords.com) and turns his attention to the sound pulsing out of the speakers.

Chafin's voice whispers, then effortlessly soars with a powerful intensity, evoking candlelit warmth. Along with chiming guitar, a delicate chamber orchestra slowly enters your consciousness. Drums and bass morph from a soft glow to a white-hot bolt from the sky. "I just wanted to make something beautiful, something a little deeper than just 'happy or sad.'" The listening experience touches on Van Morrison's *Astral Weeks*, *Zeppelin III*, Nick Drake's *Pink Moon* and *Rubber Soul*.

Swooping, soaring musicianship is contrasted by incisive and insightful lyrics. Ruminations on sorrow, wonder and redemption bend perceptions of truth and reality.

This record, unlike any of his career (one of them, X's+O's *Alright*, was produced by Prince's longtime engineer, Steve Durkee, at Prince's studios) had an almost accidental beginning. This album marked many departures. The spontaneous approach to recording, coupled with making his debut without the collaboration of a band, makes *The Gladhouse* Chafin's most personal effort.

"As my band's last record hung in the air waiting on contracts (Superstatic's *Echoplexed*), we mutually decided to end the band," says Chafin. "I suddenly felt free."

He immediately turned full attention to the solo record he'd sketched out earlier. He needed a quick demo to start hitting the coffeehouse and acoustic club circuit – "just me and a guitar and no fuss," he says. Time was limited, as Chafin had to juggle recording his record with other commitments – he's an in-demand producer for such acts as reggae band Riddem Nation and fresh voice Seth Kallen. His range as a producer includes a variety of genres, including work on bossa nova legend Astrud Gilberto's record.

The first call to help make this "quick demo" was to childhood friend and former collaborator Jon Cooper. Chafin recorded his first songs in Jon's little studio in Boston. When he formed The Darrows, a seminal force on the national scene, Cooper produced the band's first record. It was only natural and fitting that Jon played a part.

They brought in two familiar faces for the sake of speed, efficiency and exceptional talent. Drummer Tim Reeder and bass player Chris Seidel are both experienced with Chafin's style of writing and working.

Recording took place in a house on the remote eastern shore of the Chesapeake Bay over a 24-hour period. It's the same place Chafin and Reeder recorded the stellar "Flinty Loam" with their band Head and producer Durkee. "That

house is a magical place, no other way to describe it," he says. It was familiar, removed from reality and inspiring – it was the perfect choice. With the recording room lit with scores of candles, and the control room set up in adjacent room, the musicians simply walked in and started playing.

"On purpose I didn't let anyone hear the songs before we were recording. Literally," he says. "They had to play by instinct and rely on their abilities as musicians, feel the material rather than think it through. "Come With Me" and "Don't Wait" were the first to be recorded. "Come With Me" a sinuous, sensual tune of longing, is almost a blueprint for the record, a journey waiting to be taken – quiet yet by turns explosive. "Don't Wait" can be read as a transitional conflict between lovers, but also speaks to the tantalizing and sometimes cruel pull of music on musicians. "Serviced by the things that you want no more"... You hate it when it keeps you coming back for more, what for? Don't wait ... you're forever changed."

This process, in itself, was a departure for Chafin, who admits to occasionally being a control freak. Maybe. Sometimes. "It was such a joyous thing recording those tracks, it almost shocked us," he says. "Everyone else had gone to bed, and Jon and I were listening to the takes. He looked at me and said, 'You know this is a record, don't you?' I hated that he was absolutely right."

Derek and Jon went back to the Barn and began polishing. Jon wrote string arrangements – eventually recorded in Madison, WI – just a few overdubs that stay true to the record's live and in-the-moment feel. Chafin also added several songs where he was unaccompanied, including the beautiful "Send You Love" and the fated-to-be classic "Close Your Eyes."

The resulting record is beautiful, honest and stripped down to its essence, hinging on references to light, dark and dreams that become tangible.

Back in the Barn, what might be his most personal song, "Huntington," plays. "We got it one take, with everyone kind of shaking at the end. As we were playing, the band realized it was a requiem for my father. Something transforming happened." The song takes its title from the town in West Virginia where Chafin was born. Derek and his mom left for Philadelphia when he was young. The song ties together the town and his father, their concurrent decline and conflict, and the eternal, indomitable beauty in a goodbye. "There's no mystery/To what you don't say... Well I miss you now/But I do not regret... To hate the father/And still love the man."

As the last note hangs in the air, the door to the studio opens. A bracing rush of outside air enters the space as Jon Cooper ambles in and promptly knocks over a candle. They both jump toward the candle to stomp out the spreading flames. With tragedy averted, Chafin looks at Cooper and asks, "What's next?"