

Shane Nicholson

BAD MACHINES

by Jeff Apter

Shane Nicholson is a liar. I know, I know, it seems harsh, but, seriously, does the guy really expect us to believe that 'music is dead', a cut-the-crap statement he makes on his latest album? And yet the words and music on the very same long player, **Bad Machines**, are true and real and darkly funny and deeply felt. Music is dead? No way, unh-uh. If that's not enough, then the tall, lean Nicholson goes on to tell us that country legend Jimmie Rodgers was a vampire. Is his tongue wedged in his cheek? Or has he been over-indulging in Twilight?

Maybe the Singing Brakeman really was a creature of the night. Old Jimmie isn't taking any calls these days. 'Jimmie Rodgers suffered from tuberculosis for many years until his death,' explains Shane. 'There's a thought that many years ago, people who had contracted TB showed symptoms that resembled what was believed to be signs of a vampire, and these symptoms continued and even escalated after death. This exacerbated the belief that vampires were real. I drew those two things together to use as a simple metaphor for getting things completely wrong.'

Such is the nature of Shane's new album, **Bad Machines**, a record that sifts the facts from the fiction and is set to confirm what a lot of pundits and punters have long been telling us: that Nicholson is one of our pre-eminent singer / songwriters. He's a guy that over the course of three solo records — 2003's *It's a Movie*, 2006's *Faith and Science* and *Familiar Ghosts*, a collection that emerged two years later — has displayed a broad, anything-goes musical scope that encompasses rock, pop, folk and country, especially country. And there's enough twang and grit on **Bad Machines** to clog up the cleanest of air filters. There's also a sizeable cast of characters that includes primates, desirable pastry chefs, spooked household tools and more.

There may only be one vampire in the house, but there are plenty of ghosts on the record, such as the hammer Shane picked up at a 'dead man sale', which comes back repeatedly to haunt him during the song '**Hammer and Nail**'. Shane picked up the term 'dead man sale' from highly-rated US songwriter Kim Richie, and the song grew from there.

'I constructed a kinda Stephen King horror story around that idea, featuring a haunted hammer. I might turn it into a short story one day. It'd probably make a cool slasher movie, too.' (Remember, this is the same guy who described his nourish number 'Summer Dress' as a 'missing person ballad'.)

And then there's the spectral voice of his partner in matrimony and music, **Kasey Chambers**, who chimes in during '**Broken Things**', 'a declaration of love to someone in suffering,' according to Shane. They make a good team: the last time they collaborated, on 2008's *Rattlin' Bones*, they scooped various prize pools and rattled up sales of more than 100,000 copies domestically. When Shane sings '*Babe, I love all the broken things*', Kasey's voice looms in the background like a ghost. It's a musical peak on an album that has more highs than Nimbin.

Another high-profile cameo comes courtesy of revered singer / songwriter, **Paul Kelly**, who helps out on the stark, ominous '**Whistling Cannonballs**', proof, if it was needed, that Mr Nicholson is highly regarded by his fellow singer / storytellers. Paul Kelly isn't the kind of guy to turn up and sing if he doesn't feel a strong connection with the music he's playing. But who wouldn't want to contribute when the songs are this strong and soulful and the emotions feel so very true? 'As she pulls her skirt above her knees,' Shane and Paul sing, 'I'm thinking bad things always come in threes.' It's a cautionary tale of loathing and longing; roots music with a serious case of the Raymond Carvers. Lantana comes to Tamworth.

'This song arrived fully formed,' explains Shane. 'It wrote itself in less than 45 minutes. When it was finished, I instantly thought of Paul Kelly — I could hear his storyteller's voice relaying the lyric — and having him sing this with me is a special thing.'

Bad Machines turns decidedly rowdy during '**Everywhere You Go**', an end-of-night, round-the-jukebox singalong. Shane and seemingly a cast of thousands — OK, whoever was in the studio at the time, including musicians James Gillard, John Watson, Mark Punch, Bill Chambers and possibly even Shane's manager — chant 'everywhere you go' until long after last drinks are served. Move over Chumbawamba. 'Tubthumping' has nothing on this baby.

Mind you, Shane's not quite sure about the song's message, if it has one at all. 'This was just a bit of fun,' he insists. 'We had everybody we could find crammed into one small room, shouting into a microphone at the top of their lungs. I don't know exactly what it's about — but it rhymes in all the right places.'

And sometimes that's all that matters. Good rhymes. Great songs. **Bad Machines**. Shane Nicholson.

Shane Nicholson's *Bad Machines*
is released 25th March 2011

More information available at
www.shanenicholson.com

For further media information and interview opportunities
with Shane Nicholson please contact:

Mushroom Group Promotions Melbourne :

+61 3 8687 1353 Sydney: +61 2 8356 1299

Email: info@mgpromotions.com.au

Web: liberation.com.au

National Publicist and Media Contact:

Sarah Morgan

sarahm@mgpromotions.com.au

P: +61 3 9695 7824

