

RED WANTING BLUE

“We broke the mold with this record,” says Red Wanting Blue frontman Scott Terry. “Sonically, structurally, professionally; we threw out all the old rules and decided just to trust in each other, and the result is an album that feels like it’s been 27 years in the making.”

Indeed, *Light It Up*, Red Wanting Blue’s triumphant new LP, feels like the start of a distinctly new chapter for the indie rock stalwarts, one built on complete and total creative liberation. Recorded in the hard-touring quintet’s native Ohio and produced for the first time by the band itself, the collection is a larger-than-life ode to hope and perseverance, a celebration of the fire we carry within and the commitment that keeps us going even in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds. The songs are all interconnected here, woven together through intros and outros and interludes that help propel them on a metaphorical journey through the dark of night, and the performances are as muscular as they are meticulous, fueled by addictive hooks and exhilarating instrumental work that shines on an even footing with Terry’s rich and magnetic vocals. More than any other record in the Red Wanting Blue catalog, *Light It Up* captures the spirit and the camaraderie of a band that’s built its entire career on the road, discovering (and rediscovering) itself one exultant, joyous, communal night at a time.

“When it came to making records, we felt we always needed to have a producer in the room who could help show us who we were,” Terry reflects. “With this album, though, we realized that we know who we are and what we want better than anyone. We were finally ready to catch the butterfly and pin it in the book ourselves.”

Hailed as “Midwestern rock heroes” by *American Songwriter*, Red Wanting Blue first emerged from central Ohio in the mid-1990s and would go on to spend much of the next two-and-a-half decades amassing a legion of lifelong fans through a relentless tour schedule that regularly kept them on the road 200 nights a year. Along the way, the band notched appearances everywhere from *Letterman* to *NPR*, garnered praise from the likes of *Rolling Stone* and *Esquire*, and climbed to #3 on the *Billboard* Heatseekers chart, but they did it all while operating largely outside of the confines of the traditional music industry, blazing their own unique trail through the American heartland as they built up the kind of fanatically dedicated audiences normally reserved for arena acts. The band’s most recent album, 2018’s *The Wanting*, took their equally gritty and uplifting sound to new heights, but it also revealed a fresh way forward for a group that had long-prided itself on independence and self-sufficiency on the road.

“I think *The Wanting* gave us a kind of confidence in the studio that we’d never really felt before,” Terry explains. “We could hear the gap narrowing between the demos we were making on our own and the finished product we were putting out into the world, and everyone was beginning to see their respective roles in the process with more clarity and purpose. *Light It Up* is the sound of each of us stepping up and filling those roles in a really exciting way.”

Rather than recording the album in a single, concentrated session, as they often had in the past, Red Wanting Blue decided to tackle the new record in a slower, more

deliberate fashion, cutting just a song or two at a time in a series of shorter get-togethers that allowed them to experiment more than ever before. Where previous records were almost entirely written by Terry, this time around the rest of the band—guitarist Eric Hall, drummer Dean Anshutz, bassist Mark McCullough, and keyboardist Greg Rahm—took a more prominent role in the process, crafting lush instrumental beds, exploring new sounds and arrangements, and reimagining song structures with unexpected twists and turns.

“Without even needing to talk about it, I think we all naturally acted as producers at different times on this record,” says Anshutz. “A lot of these songs were written right before we recorded them, so we were living on the edge and just following our gut.”

“The litmus test for each of these songs was essentially: is it fun to play?” adds Hall. “When you’re having fun, you’re more carefree, which makes it easier to go out on creative limbs without overthinking the ambition out of your ideas.”

That ambition is plain to hear from the start on *Light It Up*, which begins with a lo-fi, meditative introductory track dubbed “First Spark.” “If I’m the fire in your light / And you’re the fuel in my spark / Then let’s illuminate the dark,” Terry sings in an uncharacteristically hushed, almost prayer-like tone. It’s a call to arms as much as it is an invitation, at once a mission statement for the band and a rallying cry for their audience as they embark on a journey through an album that refuses to let the darkness win. The intoxicating “Hey ‘84” revels in nostalgia and the promise of youth as it celebrates the power of love and art to propel us through hard times and beyond; the soaring title track doubles down on faith and resolve, insisting that it’s never too late to become the people we’re meant to be; and the towering “Goliath” rushes headlong into battle for a righteous cause, certain of victory no matter how unlikely it may seem.

“That song came out of watching all these David and Goliath stories play out in the news around us, both at home and abroad,” Terry explains. “But it also felt really personal for us, too. We’re a rock and roll band. We knew the odds when we started, but here we are almost thirty years later still at it.”

That kind of multivalent meaning turns up throughout the record, with character-driven storytelling often giving way to raw, vulnerable self-reflection just beneath the surface. The stirring “Time’s For You,” for instance, grapples with the desire to show up for the ones you love even when you can’t physically be there, while the electrifying “Purpose On Purpose” balances chaos and contentment amidst the accidental circus of life in a rock and roll band, and the dizzying “Run For Your Life” searches for common ground at a time of deep division and mistrust.

“I think we were sick of the sense of separation and isolation that’s permeated these last few years,” Terry says. “We do our best work when we’re all in the room with each other, and I think that’s true of everyone. We’re at our best when we come together.”

Even at its darkest (see the searing “Fine & Dandy” or the pulse-pounding “Killer”), *Light It Up* holds onto that indefatigable optimism, emerging from the journey not just unscathed, but stronger and more confident than ever before. “The stars will all be

out of jobs / When we take over the night / It's gonna be a special kind of light," Terry sings on hypnotic outro track "New Morning." It's a full circle moment, both musically and thematically, an ending that begins the album's cycle of night and day all over again.

"Something about that loop just felt right with this being our first self-produced album," Terry concludes. "After all these years, we know where the pieces go, how to assemble the parts of this band into something bigger than the five of us."

With *Light It Up*, Red Wanting Blue didn't just break the mold; they lit the whole damn thing on fire.

Red Wanting Blue is:

Scott Terry (Vocals, Tenor Guitar, Ukulele)

Mark McCullough (Bass, Chapman Stick, Vocals)

Greg Rahm (Guitar, Keyboards, Vocals)

Eric Hall (Guitar, Lap Steel, Vocals)

Dean Anshutz (Drums & Percussion)