

The Moth & The Flame

Brandon Robbins (vocals, guitar) * Mark Garbett (keyboards/vocals) Andrew Tolman (drums)

Hailed by *The Guardian* for achieving “moments of transcendence and transplendence,” The Moth & The Flame was poised for the next level, earning acclaim and a swiftly increasing audience with their distinctive approach towards skyscraping, emotive alternative rock. But when a friend’s life was in danger, the Provo, UT-by-way-of-Los Angeles-based band put everything to one side and helped resolve a potential tragedy. Now, with their long awaited new LP, RUTHLESS, The Moth & The Flame deliver on their promise with a song cycle that casts a sonic light on depression and anxiety. Songs like “The New Great Depression” and “Only Just Begun” are haunting and affirmative, their cinematic approach both heightening and underscoring the album’s inventive exploration of loss, and existential malaise. Produced by Peter Katis (The National, Interpol), RUTHLESS sees The Moth & The Flame reaching deeper than ever towards creating their own distinctive, defiantly humanist sound.

Founded in the high desert of Provo, UT, Brandon Robbins (vocals, guitar), Mark Garbett (keyboards/vocals), and Andrew Tolman (drums) came together as The Moth & The Flame in 2011 and quickly earned a fervent fan following and worldwide applause for their heady brand of lush, atmospheric indie. 2016’s YOUNG & UNAFRAID followed a series of increasingly well-received EPs and indeed proved their breakthrough, spawning a top 40 Alternative hit single in the LP’s title track. A complex and inventive live outfit, The Moth & The Flame spent considerable time on the road, including countless headline shows, tours alongside Wolf Alice, Neon Trees, Big Data, and longtime friends Imagine Dragons, and festival appearances around the globe.

Though the band’s future burned bright, RUTHLESS almost never came to be. A series of unimaginable events proved a crucible for The Moth & The Flame, an experience that saw Robbins make a decision that would change his life – and the band’s – forever. In 2016, Corey Fox, founder of Provo’s influential all-ages venue, Velour, was told by doctors that the kidney disease he had been diagnosed with as a teen was progressing rapidly and that he should make a public plea for a living donor. Velour had been the epicenter of the Provo scene, presenting early gigs from such rising local acts as Imagine Dragons, Neon Trees, and of course, The Moth & The Flame. Robbins visited medical facilities while touring with The Moth & The Flame and found he was a perfect match. So, on December 20, 2016, Fox and Robbins underwent kidney transplant surgery. The surgery was a success.

“Everybody’s doing great,” Robbins says. “Corey’s got a perfect bill of health right now, it’s pretty amazing.”

Close to two years later, both friends are feeling at the top of their game. The transplant surgery led to a number of drastic changes in Robbins’ life, both internally – becoming more

aware of his health and diet – and externally, connecting him with Fox and the transplant community.

“It’s still very, very surreal,” Robbins says. “Even now. And maybe even more now, the further it gets away from the actual surgery. My wife and I have to kind of pinch ourselves sometimes. ‘Remember? That actually happened. It wasn’t a dream.’ I only have one kidney in me now. It’s crazy.”

Needless to say, Robbins’ surgery also presented massive consequences for The Moth & The Flame. The band was wrapping up its biggest tour to date, poised to begin work on their next recording, when Robbins made his decision to do the transplant.

“It completely transformed every aspect of the band,” Robbins says. “I have a huge and profound respect for Mark and Andrew, for their patience and essentially their willingness to let me do this knowing it would lead to such a long break for the band. Knowing it would put everything on hold, especially at a time when things were going really well for us. I think it really strengthened our bond as a band but I’m not going to lie, it was really difficult. For sure, we could’ve not been a band anymore. It got to a point where we said, are we going to continue doing this? But you take it one day at a time until you realize you can make it through.”

The Moth & The Flame resumed songwriting sessions as soon as Robbins was back on his feet, working together at a converted church in Salt Lake City. They revisited notes and ideas accumulated over the past year and a half, moving forward whenever they found a joint connection.

“We had the building to ourselves,” Robbins says. “The mood there was really powerful. We went in with just an acoustic guitar and piano, really stripped it down to the basics of songwriting. We just let the emotions of what we’d all experienced kind of leap out.” In TK, The Moth & The Flame headed to producer Peter Katis’ residential Tarquin Studio in Bridgeport, CT where they spent HOW LONG recording the bulk of what would become RUTHLESS (two tracks from on the LP come from an earlier session produced by longtime friend Nate Pyfer). Together they crafted a detailed sound world that fit the scale and scope of the stories they hoped to tell, melding electronics with live instruments, to give it breath and a distinct, defiant human touch.

“It’s very basic, really,” Robbins says. Piano and acoustic – it’s hard to get more basic than that. We started from there and then added in what we felt was needed, like bass guitar and analog synths, to get these very rich, dark, brooding movie sounds that matched with the soundscape we were trying to build.”

Songs like “Red Rising” and “Beautiful Couch” see Robbins using his craft to examine the effects of depression and anxiety, issues he himself has grappled with.

“What we wanted to show people was the journey through anxiety and depression,” he says, “not just the lows but the highs as well. There are peaks and valleys – the peaks are these moments of clarity and hope before you drop back into the valley of anxiety and stress and paranoia, the worst of it. We really wanted to take people through that journey in as honest of a way as possible but also without necessarily making other people depressed.” For Robbins, the key to RUTHLESS can be found in “Do What You Love.”

“That lyric has been with me for a long time,” Robbins says. “But we never did anything with it. We finally found the music as we were writing this record. ‘Do What You Love’ has always been kind of my theme for my life – when I decided to go into music, I had no reason other than I was passionate, music is what I love so that’s what I’m going to do. Even though family members, friends, were saying, don’t you think you should get a real job? But do what you love and everything will always work out.”

Having always given equal care to their live performances, The Moth & The Flame are eager to hit the road after making their return to the stage at the 2018 Donate Life Transplant Games of America Opening Ceremony.

“I actually feel better physically than I did before,” Robbins says. “It’s cool because even though we hadn’t performed in so long, we picked up right where we left off. There was a great energy on stage, man, the connection was awesome. It was exactly what we needed, we’re all really excited to get back out.”

Stronger, and full of renewed inspiration, The Moth & The Flame are back and ready to continue their journey as a band. “Having a friend come so close to losing his life made me realize that life is short and you need to be honest with people,” Brandon Robbins says. “And from that, I gained this confidence in myself – no one is perfect but I’m going to at least be comfortable talking about my issues because I know that other people are struggling and the connection that you build with people when you struggle together is unbelievable. That’s brought so much meaning into my life, into the music, into every facet of the band. Appreciating the struggle and just being honest with people. Not trying to hide. If you love somebody, tell them. If you’re struggling, tell them. Exposing your secrets is something that makes life worth living.”

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