

NEED TO BREATHE

THE HEAT

Bear Rinehart: vocals, guitar, piano * Bo Rinehart: guitar, backing vocals

Seth Bolt: bass, backing vocals * Joe Stillwell: drums

Atlantic recording group NEEDTOBREATHE makes a powerful homecoming with their eagerly anticipated second album, "THE HEAT." Co-produced by the band alongside Rick Beato (Shinedown, Jump Little Children) and Collective Soul mastermind Ed Roland, the record sees the South Carolina-based rock outfit digging into their down-home roots to create a remarkably passionate and personal new collection. Songs such as the acoustic-tinged "Again" and the rejoiciful "Signature of Divine (Yahweh)" see the band melding warm, organic textures to their powerful brand of skyscraping, heartfelt rock. With "THE HEAT," NEEDTOBREATHE blazes a new musical trail, revealing not just the depth of its spirit, but the far reaches of its soul.

"There are moments in music – maybe it's a whole song, sometimes it's just a portion – that when you hear it, it just breaks you down," says singer/guitarist/pianist/songwriter Bear Rinehart. "We really wanted to get those kinds of moments on this record. We wanted this record to hit people in a really strong way."

Raised up in Possum Kingdom, South Carolina, the sons of an Assembly of God pastor, brothers Bear and Bo Rinehart developed an early enthusiasm for music, learning piano from their mom, then moving on to guitar in their teens. As they grew older, the brothers walked different paths – Bear pursued college football, earning several all-time Furman University records and winning the 2002 Banks McFadden trophy, while Bo studied architecture at Clemson (though he too excelled on the gridiron, appearing in a supporting role in the 2003 football drama, *Radio*).

Despite their respective successes, the Rineharts still dreamt of making music. After graduation, Bear and Bo returned home to Seneca, South Carolina and, with drummer Joe Stillwell and bassist Seth Bolt completing the quartet, devoted their considerable energies to NEEDTOBREATHE. The band's expressive songwriting and aggressive regional touring saw an ardent fan following – known as "the Breathers" – rise up around the band in ever-increasing numbers.

Upon signing to Atlantic, NEEDTOBREATHE headed to the UK to record their debut album, "DAYLIGHT," with British producer Andy Green (Keane, KT Tunstall). The band toured nearly non-stop following the album's 2006 release, criss-crossing America as headliners as well as supporting such artists as Train, Jars of Clay, Edwin McCain, and Collective Soul.

"I feel like we haven't been home since we first got signed," Rinehart laughs, but the constant touring proved productive in many ways, helping NEEDTOBREATHE define its sound while also inspiring a ream of new songs. In the fall of 2006, the band began work on "THE HEAT," initiating pre-production at Old Plantation, the studio that Bolt – who has a degree in record engineering – opened when he was just 16. Over the next six months, NEEDTOBREATHE divided their time between Seneca and Atlanta, recording at both Rick Beato's Black Dog Studio and Ed Roland's Tree Sounds. Having recorded their debut in England, NEEDTOBREATHE found that working nearer to home allowed them to be more at ease, with their lighter spirit having its effect on the album's overall tone.

"It's nice to stay connected to home while you're making a record," Rinehart says. "It makes the process a little less insane, and I think that comes across in the music."

Working alongside two producers enabled NEEDTOBREATHE to refine and spotlight the diverse aspects of their musical vision. Known for his work with Atlantic's own Shinedown, Beato was enlisted primarily due to his production work with cult South Carolina combo, Jump Little Children.

"Their music was so haunting and beautiful," Rinehart enthuses. "They had a pristine acoustic sound which we thought was just different from any other record. Since Bo and I had written a bunch of songs that were more delicate and musical than anything we'd done before, we felt Rick was the perfect choice to help us capture those raw moments without going over the top."

A genuine icon of modern Southern Rock, Ed Roland encouraged NEEDTOBREATHE's melding of pop melodies and rock 'n' roll power. The Collective Soul frontman also gave the musicians free rein over his collection of vintage gear, allowing them to add classic colors to their developing sound.

"Ed's got crazy stuff in his studio," Rinehart says. "Guitars from every era, every amp imaginable, which were all a lot of fun to get to use. Mainly, he made us feel really comfortable. We laughed a lot more making this record than we did on the first one."

In addition to the partnership with Beato and Roland, the sessions also saw the band taking the reins by producing a number of tracks on their own. For all involved, the process of recording "THE HEAT" was a remarkably relaxed and collaborative effort.

"There was this vibe that we were all working on this record and nobody had any real ego things, which is very rare," Rinehart says. "It was a completely fluid relationship, which I think made the record a lot better."

Though Bear's increasing interest in piano added what he calls "a different texture" to NEEDTOBREATHE's already melodic approach, both Rinehart brothers felt the effects of the road on their songwriting. Playing to diverse audiences outside of their comfort zone gave them the courage to not be afraid to explore their own musical heritage.

"We felt like we could be more ourselves," Rinehart explains. "When we were in places like San Francisco and played a song with a southern vibe, people still got it. It gave us a confidence that those things have a universal appeal. So making the record, if we wanted to use harmonica or slide guitar, things that are more southern, we went for it."

The use of such instruments as an antique 1800s pump organ (on the band-produced closer, "Second Chances") are striking but completely right, adding history and depth to the album's rich texture. Songs such as "We Could Run Away" and "More Time" sound heartfelt and alive, given strength and identity from a musical approach that Rinehart describes as adding "a little grit to things."

Having grown up in church, the sounds of gospel are intrinsically woven into the Rineharts' musical DNA. As NEEDTOBREATHE reached inward, inspirational sounds began to inform their work, notably on "Washed By The Water," which recasts an old time spiritual as rousing modern rock, and the self-described "worship song," "Signature of Divine (Yahweh)." Anthemic yet down-to-earth, the track seamlessly knits touches of gospel and R&B into the band's cinemascopic sound.

"The first time we played it, someone looked at me and said, 'That hurts so good,'" Rinehart says. "That kind of real emotion and power was something we always wanted to get across and finally have been able to do."

While "DAYLIGHT" was marked by its cerebral, often opaque lyrics, the new album sees NEEDTOBREATHE investing its music with a truer sense of honesty and real circumstance. Having stripped off the intellectual veneer, songs such as "Streets of Gold" reveal further aspects of the band's unique humanity, including a richer, more overt depiction of their faith.

"Our music is supposed to reflect who we are," Rinehart says. "From what we've seen, people respond to you caring about something, singing passionately about whatever it is you're passionate about. If your subject matter is something that's important to you, whatever it is, that comes across to the audience."

NEEDTOBREATHE is now ready to return to the endless highway, eager to bring "THE HEAT" to the people. The connection between audience and artist is not only the key to the band's remarkable growth thus far, it is a bond that will allow NEEDTOBREATHE the chance to flourish and fulfill its infinite promise.

"We're interested in building a career in music," Rinehart says, "and playing live lets you develop the fan base that allows you to do that. I tell people all the time, 'Oh, to be Wilco.' That to me is a great career model. Bands that have a close, ongoing relationship with their fans are able to do more because it allows them to change and grow and make better and better music."

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www.NEEDTOBREATHE.net

www.myspace.com/NEEDTOBREATHE



Atlantic Recording Corporation
1290 Avenue of the Americas New York, NY 10104
212.707.2000 Fax: 212.405.5475
3400 W. Olive Ave. Burbank, CA 91505
818.238 6800 Fax: 818.562.9211
<http://www.atlanticrecords.com>