

ENDRICK BROTHERS

It was a quiet night in The Niagra in New York's East Village. The bar's landlord, cult singer-songwriter Jesse Malins, was back from his European tour. He was glad of the peace and the quiet, and keen to introduce his patrons to some of the cracking music he'd gathered on his travels. He'd stuck a selection of the best stuff on the pub's soundsystem.

Also in The Niagra that night was Malins' best buddy, Ryan Adams. The super-prolific singer-songwriter was resting his ears between recording sessions. But as the clock ticked towards midnight, Adams' ears pricked up. What was that tune blaring out of the speakers? Adams thought he knew every outfit worth their salt on the Americana and alt.country scene. But this song was new to him. It was tremendous. 'Hey Jessie. Who the hell is this?'

The band were Endrick Brothers, and the song was 'XXX'. Malins told his dumbstruck pal that no, they weren't a bunch of backwoods siblings from the South, nor Midwestern brethren from the same landscape as Uncle Tupelo and The Jayhawks. They were Scottish, and they weren't even brothers. Malins had met them when the Scottish band had supported him at a gig at Glasgow's Garage. They'd got on famously, and Endrick Brothers had handed him a copy of their debut album, *Built To Last*. It had received glorious reviews in Mojo and the Scottish press, and had also attracted much attention on Holland and Germany, where it had been picked up for release by well-regarded 'heritage' label Hypertension. Malins was equally impressed.

And now, so was Ryan Adams. Over another couple of wee hours beers, the pair agreed that this was some of the best country-rock music they'd ever heard.

It was a rowdy night in Park Lane studios in Glasgow. Ryan Adams was fresh – and refreshed – from a gig at the city's big Academy venue. Niall Holmes had been working for the gig promoter that day, and had helped Adams source a snare drum and electric guitar. Backstage after the gig they'd got to talking. Holmes told Adams he was singer in a band. In fact, he'd met Adams' buddy a couple of years previously... Adams face lit up as the dime dropped. 'You're in Endrick Brothers. I know you guys! Jessie and me love your record!' In the post-gig boozy bonhomie, Adams had a proposition – either Holmes take him to a haunted castle (when in Scotland...), or they find a studio for an impromptu late night jam... For Holmes and the rest of Endrick Brothers – like Adams, inveterate musos and obsessive players – it was a no-brainer.

'A bottle of whiskey later,' says Holmes, 'we're in Park Lane with Ryan, his drummer, Roddy Hart and a couple of other musician pals. When we first started Ryan said, whatever happens tonight, one thing's for sure - it's gonna be better than that Babyshambles album. We were pishing ourselves!

'Ryan strapped on a bass and was just coming up with great ideas. He had this one really cool bassline, and myself and Yorick (Cormack, Endrick Brothers' guitarist) jammed a song round it and recorded a demo of it. The crack initially was that we were gonna get him to sing on it. But we were too drunk. His drummer was saying, you should do something with it.'

The session, recalls Holmes, finally wound down about four in the morning. 'It was like that Almost Famous thing when we went outside. There was Mercedes with tinted windows sitting outside, two drivers sitting there sleeping, waiting for the Famous Rock Star. It was some night. We had the beginnings of a great song, and I think Roddy Hart might have something up his sleeve from that session too...'

A few months later, Endrick Brothers took Adams' drummer at his word. Cormack tightened up his guitar part, and Holmes wrote some lyrics. Their ad hoc, late-night writing and playing session with Ryan Adams had resulted in a thumping song: Thorns On Every Rose. With the go-ahead from Adams, his publisher and his label, his spontaneous co-write with Endrick Brothers would burst into life as the opening track on the band's second album, Attraction Versus Love.

'The theme of the song,' says Holmes of Thorns On Every Rose, a rollicking rock'n'country number, 'is about this frankly very hot – but very young - girl I was going out with. I wasn't into it any more, and she turned up on my doorstep one rainy October night, drunk, confronting me with what she thought was wrong with our relationship – hence the lines about "the vodka on your breath/is stinging with regret/and the questions I deflect/are fast becoming more direct..." I was feeling the pressure of somebody confronting me on the spot; well, on my doorstep. It was a difficult time, but after things quieted down a bit, the rough idea for the song came that same night.'

As well as opening the album, the song set the theme – and eventually the title – of Attraction Versus Love. In Holmes' unflinchingly honest lyrics, he lays open the emotional turmoil he – and also Cormack – have experienced in the last few years. Is this girl the right girl? Should staggering beauty drown out nagging doubts about true love? Is it OK to have a trophy bird just mebbe sometimes?

Take the folk-tinged lament Questions And Answers. 'I finished writing it just when started with a new girlfriend,' says Holmes. The lyrics "is the boxer in the wrong ring/ punching above his weight" are his admissions of doubt. 'Like, I couldn't believe my luck,' he laughs. 'Is this really happening? The song is about wanting the relationship to work, but being worried that I'm not good enough for her. A lot of the songs on the album seem to be about that kind of thing – you're at that stage of life, questioning whether you're making the right choices.' Beautiful Rejection, a beautiful ballad built round aching keyboards and harmonium [SORRY, MIGHT HAVE THAT WRONG – WHAT'S INSTRUMENT AT START?], covers similar territory. 'Yorick came up with the first line – "Is this the best I've got/is this the best that I can do/this is the voice of doubt/that's singing..." You're questioning who you're with and what you're doing and if you can't see that lasting, why waste your time doing it? It's quite a hard, cynical way of looking at it. I was going out with this younger girl – she was beautiful, a real Natalie Portman/Kiera Knightly lookalike. Beautiful. But there was never any chat.'

Ironically, Holmes actually met Knightly during the writing and recording of Attraction Versus Love. His girlfriend at the time (another one) (CORRECT?) was wardrobe assistant on the thriller The Jacket, which was partly filmed in Scotland.

'I ended up at party with Adrian Brody and Keira Knightly. She was sat there very quietly and I was having second thoughts about the girl I was with. Keira didn't seem to be all that happy either - nobody was speaking to her. I was thinking it must be hard when people when are standoffish 'cause they're intimidated by your fame.'

Holmes, too, bottled out of speaking to her. Instead this committed observer did what he often does: he put his thoughts into a song. Star Of The Silver Screen is the supremely catchy, heartfelt result.

Endrick Brothers recorded Attraction Versus Love in several bursts the last two years. On producer duties was gifted musician and studio genius Chris Gordon, whose own band, Union Of Knives, recently released their debut album on Relentless (home of KT Tunstall and Joss Stone). They used different studios in their adopted base, Glasgow, but their home

locale looms large in their music. The band members all grew up in towns and villages strung along the River Endrick (hence the name) in Stirlingshire.

'Almost subconsciously,' reflects Holmes, 'the biggest factor in the way we play and now we sound is the environment we come from – that rural thing feeds into our love of artists like Neil Young ANOTHER KEY/TOTEMIC INFLUENCE. We're always going to hang on to where we're from.'

The wilds of Stirlingshire in central Scotland actually find vivid form in one of the album's pivotal songs. Susannah's Garden is about an area on a country estate near where Holmes grew up. It's named after the daughter of the owners of the estate, who died at sea while snorkelling. In her memory, and in keeping with one of her unfulfilled plans, her family landscaped a wild, overgrown area in the woods, and named it Susannah's Garden.

'It's so much more than a gravestone in a graveyard. It's an everlasting thing.' And so it is with the song, which is alive with keening fiddle and lively rhythms.

And in the end, for all the talk of failed relationships and the perils of serial monogamy, Attraction Versus Love is an album with a positive, forward-reaching outlook on life. You can hear it in the Niall Holmes' rich, caramel voice and elegant falsetto, and Endrick Brothers' subtle harmonising. In the hypnotic melodies and rich rootsy musicianship given a modern twist by Chris Gordon's exquisite production. And you can hear it the album's first single, the rollocking So Last Night. Listen to it and you might be forgiven for thinking that Rod Stewart has not been lost to cheesy LA balladeering, and that his old mucker Ronnie Wood isn't just that boozy auxiliary player in the Stones.

'It's quite a laddish song so we thought it'd be good to make it kinda Faces-sounding,' says Niall Holmes. Indeed, with those crunchy riffs and strident fiddle, the song is already a huge live favourite with Endrick Brothers' passionate Scottish – and German and Dutch – fanbases.

'The song starts with me not being in a relationship and doing what you do in that situation: sleep around – see what happens at the end of a drunken night. But just as that's changed for me, it's changed for other guys in the band too. You might wake up next to somebody and be unable to remember their name – but very quickly, you realise this actually is someone, and something, special. Something good and positive and hopefully long lasting comes out of that night. So Last Night is all about that positivity and romantic hope.'

This is Endrick Brothers and Attraction Versus Love: all emotional life is here. And so are a dozen brilliant songs.

ENDRICK BROTHERS "Attraction Versus Love" HYP 7252