

Life on the road is easily glamorized: the joy of playing shows, the wonder of new places, the stories. Yet the lifestyle is also a trying one: the suffocating isolation, the misery of being separated from loved ones, the unspoken tensions. If unprepared, this life can become your downfall. For Boston's The Ballroom Thieves, it became their sophomore album, *Deadeye*.

The harmony-rich folk on the Thieves' debut, *A Wolf in the Doorway*, led to guitarist Martin Earley, cellist Calin Peters, and drummer Devin Mauch spending the last two years in a sustained state of touring, taking stages across the country, including venerable ones like at the Newport Folk Festival. Though they were prepared for the sudden lack of a sedentary existence -- even packing their apartments into storage units -- it wasn't long before nearly nonstop touring began to take its toll.

As the stability of home faded along the relentless road, fresh anxieties came into focus: depression, financial burdens, illness, crumbling relationships. Instead of addressing these troubles, the Thieves doubled down on the band, and the edges began to fray. "I think if you give everything to something for long enough, you have nothing left for you," Peters says, "and then you break down." Resentment and stress built up; the only thing that would provide temporary reprieve was taking the stage to perform the music they so dearly love.

That need to play through the pain led to the band crafting new songs, ones written in the midst of all their bitter feelings. What couldn't be spoken between the bandmates was put down into fresh material that transmuted the drama of the past few months into a weightier, expanded sound. All that pent up negative energy was unleashed as the fiercest music the band has ever recorded.

It's evident in the beaten dirge of "For Mercy" and the thick grunge of "Pocket of Gold", tracks bristling with both regret and resolve. Peters' voice sears with confident fire on the venomous "Blood Run Red", as does Earley's on the bluesy romance of "Anybody Else". "Noble Rot" kicks like a tethered mule, as if the instruments are expressing every heated thought that had ever crossed the musicians' minds.

These are the songs The Ballroom Thieves needed to write. Although they're not proud of how they've handled these issues, they're immensely proud of the music that has come as a result. Rough times have helped them explore the darker corners of their sound -- which is why they've chosen to forgo the standard label release cycle to put out *Deadeye* on October 21st by themselves. Sharing it now is exposure therapy, letting their fans pay witness to these hardships and the resulting creative growth while simultaneously helping the band move on. The struggle is still very real, but these songs are a reminder that for this band, the only course is forward.

*Deadeye* captures the band at a time when they were at their absolute lowest, but it may also prove to be the album that saves The Ballroom Thieves.

-Ben Kaye