



BEN WEAVER MIREPOIX & SMOKE

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"Spent almost a year writing songs that didn't feel real. Started working in a kitchen. First job in nearly seven years besides touring. Cut buckets of mirepoix. Two parts onion, one part carrot, one part celery. A significant component to stock, which I learned is the backbone to much of the alchemy that takes place in the kitchen. Fell asleep with the smell of it on my hands.

For 31-year-old Minnesota-native Ben Weaver, the follow-up to his lauded 2008 album, *The Ax in the Oak*, came from a somewhat unexpected series of life choices and experiences. In the spring of 2009 Weaver decided to take some time away from touring to pursue his interest in food and cooking. It was while working as a prep and garde manger cook at a farm-to-table restaurant in Minneapolis, that the songs on his latest album, *Mirepoix and Smoke*, started to take shape:

"Eventually the good songs started to come. Ones that felt real, had their own legs. They came like all good things do. When I ceased looking. Connected to my surroundings, my past, my life, for what it all was, without romanticizing what I thought it should or could be. I found a new perspective. Let the birds in my head fly free.

While *The Ax in the Oak* was more complex in its sound—the result of a collaboration between Weaver and **Brian Deck** (Califone, Iron and Wine)—*Mirepoix and Smoke* is a decidedly more bucolic affair; its songs are barely accompanied by more than Weaver's guitar or banjo and his voice, allowing for a more sensory experience of Weaver's signature lyrical poetics. You just don't hear *Mirepoix and Smoke*—you smell it, taste it, feel it and see it.

"I got divorced, was taking care of my kids, walking the dog in the woods, planning a garden. Grateful to be home, to be in the Midwest. The space. The rivers. The tall grass. Went back

to the folk and blues, back to Townes and Dylan, Jim Harrison and Sam Shepard, driving instead of flying. Still holding tightly to the torch I have always felt compelled to carry. The responsibility to the story, to the song. Myself as a doorway, a fisherman. So many others have said this same thing before me. You do it because you have to, because it is coming through you. Because you believe the voices in the dark. If it's cliché, it's because it's true. The songs had lives of their own, inspired by what was most important to me in my life. Animals, Food, Kids, the woods, relationships, the wild. The wild. It is always about the wild. Covered in earth.

In a way, *Mirepoix and Smoke* is a coming-of-age album for Weaver. He'd gone through a divorce, was working his first job in nearly seven years, and found that life for what it was, rather than the romanticized version of it he had written about on past albums, was worth exploring: "I'd rather have scars from the life I lived / than have none from the one I missed," Weaver sings on the sparse folk song, "Drag The Hills."

"I spent three days in Chicago recording and mixing with Neil. Erica sat across from me in the room and we did all the songs live in one or two takes, after practicing for the first time the night before. I overdubbed some bass and drums.

As with Weaver's previous two releases, *Mirepoix and Smoke* was recorded at Chicago's **Engine Studios**, and was engineered by **Neil Strauch** (Bonnie "Prince" Billy, Iron and Wine, Margot and the Nuclear So and So's). **Erica Froman**, formerly of the dream-pop collective **Anathallo**, joins Ben on vocals and piano.

"Left the songs alone for the most part. Wanted them to be like unbroken horses that had never known a saddle, with burrs and river water in their manes. That's how they felt truest to me. So that's how I left them. Wild."

—Ben Weaver, July 2010

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