**Lydia Loveless (she/her/they/them)**

***Nothing’s Gonna Stand In My Way Again***

**Bloodshot Records**

Endings are messy. Falling in love is messy. Change is messy. Perhaps, change is the messiest of them all. Especially when eyes are on you; when you blast out of adolescence onto stages across the country, then into your twenties, onto more stages and, finally, into your thirties—all on those same stages. The stages that Lydia Loveless has sung her heart out on, has collapsed on, and laughed on, all mirror the stages of her life thus far for the world to see. When Loveless released her first album over a decade ago, she was still a teenager whose songs of debauchery, guzzling alcohol and doing cocaine were an audio wet dream for a certain type of listener who not only wear their music tastes on their (tattooed) sleeve, but in the lifestyle that they emulate: “outlaw” music with brains - akin to Steve Earle, Drive-By Truckers and Lucinda Williams, vintage country heart with a heartland rock soul.

In the end, the music industry is still sadly a man’s world and, as such, Loveless grew up in the spotlight (or perhaps, more accurately, the bar lights) while she was placed on a pedestal. Her voicemail greeting is a tongue-in-cheek ode to this: *“Hi, this is Lydia Loveless, savior of cowpunk. Please leave a message and I will get back to you.”*

The time between their late adolescence to now is defined by a shelf full of records, hundreds of thousands of miles on the road, and a ribbon of heartbreaks pockmarking their trail. Loveless is a fiercely brave writer who bluntly assesses their life in song: their struggles with alcohol and depression, and the uncertainty of not only the future, but what piecing together the past will mean for the present.

In 2020, they put out their excellent fourth full-length *Daughter* on their own label, Honey, You’re Gonna Be Late Records, with encouragement from their friend Jason Isbell, but could not tour behind it; the one consistent throughline in Loveless’ life was impossible due to the pandemic. They were living in North Carolina with their boyfriend at the time, stuck, away from the stages they grew up on, isolated from their family, and going stir-crazy. As the world came undone and then back together again, Loveless returned to Columbus, where their career first began. Starting anew, Loveless found part-time work at a recording studio (Secret Studios) and began processing the last two years of their life. The title of their new album, *Nothing’s Gonna Stand In My Way Again,* came easy—like a mantra from the heavens.

*Nothing’s Gonna Stand in My Way Again* continues the evolution of Loveless. The artist who once sang that she would rather stay home and drink gallons of wine is now on the other end of the bottle, where a bit of resignation resides. She sings on “Feel”: *“I’m getting older and my jets are starting to cool, if I ever get sober it’s really over for you fools.”* Though a melancholic weight rests on the record—as it was written after the breakup with her longtime boyfriend and following a period of isolation and depression during the pandemic—it also feels like a triumphant moment from an artist who’s continuing her stride. Loveless has always been a brutally honest songwriter, one whose articulation of love, heartbreak and bad habits is wrapped not only in catchy melodies but also her finesse with words.

*Nothing’s Gonna Stand in My Way Again* musically retains the spirit of Loveless’ previous records, but also moves past the chunky drunk and almost out-of-control riffing of their earliest work. Present here is something more akin to *Rumors* and *Tusk-*era Fleetwood Mac—and it works incredibly well. Their voice is more controlled and wiser. Although the subject matter that they are mining is, at times, desolate, they mask it with the smoother production. It’s as beautiful and tragic as a woman crying in the rain, with make-up streaming down her cheeks: at once real and mesmerizing.

Gently crushing standout “Runaway” opens with a floating piano chord, slowly building with detailed, multifaceted flourishes to a memorable chorus: “*I don’t like to run, I just like to run away.*” It’s a stunning showcase of Loveless’ powerhouse vocals and heart-wrenching lyricism. On “Toothache,” she sings about the mundanity of daily life feeling catastrophic enough to precipitate a breakdown, as kinetic, dynamic arrangements add to the track’s intense and claustrophobic mood. Album highlight “Sex and Money” was made for driving with the windows down on a sunny summer day, and Loveless’ wry and self-deprecating sense of humor sparkles: “*I know I’m not saving the world / But I gotta live in it so I might as well splurge / On 200 cotton t-shirts with my face on the front.”* “Poor Boy” recalls the excitement, energy and rebellion of bands like The Replacements, but Loveless makes the mood her own with a subtle twang and a lot of vulnerability: “*I need to clean up my mess and leave the poor boy alone*.”

*Nothing’s Gonna Stand in My Way Again* is not only a break-up record drifting back to some of the best of its kind, like Richard & Linda Thompson’s *Shoot Out the Lights*, Superchunk’s *Foolish* and of course, Fleetwood Mac’s *Rumors,* it’s also a reminder to keep improving oneself, taking ownership and moving forward—alone, if needed. Complex and captivating, *Nothing’s Gonna Stand In My Way Again* is a brave declaration from a person who has survived a lot. Here they lays bare not only their raw pain, but also the strength and resiliency they’ve earned along the way, that only Loveless could hold.