



Robert Forster Strawberries

May 23, 2025
LP / CD / digital



Picture one of our greatest living singer-songwriters in a kitchen. He is on holidays, he's just had a swim. His wife is out on the beach, and he finds himself faced with a bowl of irresistible strawberries. They're meant to be shared, of course, but their taste is "out of the ordinary", so he just can't help himself. Minutes later all of the delicious fruit are gone, but there's the germ of a song as the phrase "Someone ate all the strawberries" has just popped into Robert Forster's mind, sounding "so weird, but normal". Thankfully, he has taken his guitar with him.

As the story goes, his wife Karin Bäumler not only forgave her husband, she actually joined him on a duet of what was to become the title song to his ninth solo album. "What can ordinary be?" is its wistful question, befitting the life's work of Robert Forster who has perfected the art of being outré in a least ostentatious way, from his time in the Go-Betweens to his solo career, now spanning almost three decades, interrupted only by the old band's reformation in 2000 which ended with his songwriting partner Grant McLennan's untimely death in 2006.

As that traumatic blow struck almost two decades ago, let's bring you up to speed: Since then, Robert Forster has maintained a solid career on his own terms through tireless touring, writing (the books *Grant & I* and *The Ten Rules of Rock'n'Roll*, a forthcoming novel) and recording. *Strawberries* follows a recent spate of deluxe reissues of four of his older solo albums as well as the 3rd and final volume of the career-spanning series of *G Stands For Go-Betweens* boxsets with a much awaited helping of new material. Next to admittedly bigger names such as Bob Dylan or Nick Cave, Robert Forster is the rare case of an artist with a celebrated past whose current work evokes genuine interest among a faithful fan base.

But back to our scene in the kitchen, to Robert, Karin, a guitar and an empty bowl: As a straight-up personal song, "Strawberries" is a bit of a red herring in the context of this new album that, unusually for Forster, deals almost exclusively in observational character studies or, as the author would have it, "story songs".

"The last album was very personal," says Robert, "I didn't write anything for about a year after I'd finished 'She's a Fighter' for the last album. And then I just started to write songs that were something a little bit else. They just came naturally. I didn't really have a theme, it was just sort of lighter, a situation a little bit outside of myself. And I thought that was good. That was a place I could go to."

The first song to point in this new direction was "All of the Time", starting with the ominous couplet "There's propaganda and there's truth / And there's a feeling that I get when I'm with you". We never quite learn what sinister plot lurks in the background, but these words combined with the subtle suggestion of a glam boogie groove imply a certain clandestine sexiness not usually associated with the Forster canon. "It was just this sort of language that I normally didn't use," says the man himself, "It meant I wasn't going into my present situation. It just pushed me out there and made it less confessional. A lot more playful and and a lot more story-orientated as well."

As it turns out, this storyteller who sees the world through the eyes of a film director, has a way with romantic fiction that is as emotionally involving as it is economical and free of all sentimentality, as showcased on "Breakfast on the Train", the obvious centrepiece of the album. At almost eight minutes length, it tells the story of a not-so casual romance between the two odd ones out in a bar full of rugby fans who end up spending the night in a hotel, laconically retold with possibly the most perfectly timed use of the word "fuck" ever encountered in a pop song.

Inspired by an actual train journey through Scotland touring the previous album *The Candle and the Flame* with his musician son Louis, this epic is an indisputable addition to the pantheon of Robert Forster's best ever songs while "Foolish I Know", a tender tale of unrequited same-sex attraction, has to rank amongst his bravest and most beautiful. Louis Forster, by the way, also makes an impressive appearance on lyrical lead guitar in "Such a Shame", the moving story of an exhausted young rock star ending on the beautiful line "No one I've met has seen me yet at my best / No".

As on most of the album, the narrator clearly isn't Forster himself, just as he's not the English teacher meeting a French woman in the album's bouncy opener "Tell it Back to Me". "Your world so different to mine", Forster sings, "I was corporate, you were folk." Clearly, this relationship was never going to last, but then again, as Robert observes in the next song, it's "good to cry". As his slapback echo vocals tuck into the rockabilly vibe of the song, you can hear Forster enjoying the company of his Swedish backing band: Producer Peter Morén (of Peter, Björn and John fame) on guitar, Jonas Thorell on bass and Magnus Olsson on drums, crucially augmented by Lina Langendorf on various woodwind instruments and Anna Åhman on keys.

The idea, writes Forster in his liner notes, was "to arrive in a town with a clutch of songs, to rehearse, record and mix an album with local musicians over a number of weeks, and then leave with the record done." In this spirit, almost all of Strawberries was rehearsed and arranged to be tracked live, with very few overdubs, at Stockholm's INGRID studios. Forster and Morén, a long-time fan from the times of the Go-Betweens, had met and bonded at an Australian festival they both played in 2016. They had toured together with the core of the Strawberries band (Olsson and Thorell) the year after that, so their musical common ground was well explored years before recordings began.

"It's great working with someone who is truly an auteur," says Peter Morén, looking back on the intense, focussed four week period working on the album in September/October 2024, "That sense of direction that 'This is what I do, and this is who I am as I perceive it.' He does what he does in the only way he can and changes and evolves in that sphere, but never loses sight of his own personality and strengths."

"I wanted to explode the sound of my records to an extent", is Robert Forster's somewhat different assessment of the collaboration, "I wanted to just bring in new colours."

Nowhere is this more evident than on the album's monumental closing track "Diamonds", which starts off as a cross between Lou Reed and Buffalo Springfield, then takes off via Astral Weeks into an (almost) Albert Ayler direction, with Lina Langendorf given free rein on the tenor sax and Forster himself relinquishing his trademark understatement for some unexpected outbursts of falsetto. It might just be a challenge for the more conservative end of Robert Forster's fan community, and that, he says, is "a good thing. I really love it. It's the last song. And you think you know the album, and you think you know Robert Forster. And then this last song comes in that's not like anything I've done, you know, sonically and musically."

It all sounds much like the musical equivalent of a 67-year-old man standing in front of a bowl of strawberries that taste out of the ordinary who can't help himself but gobble them all up. After all, what can ordinary be?

Tracklisting

- A1** Tell It Back To Me
- A2** Good To Cry
- A3** Breakfast On The Train
- A4** Strawberries

- B1** All Of The Time
- B2** Such A Shame
- B3** Foolish I Know
- B4** Diamonds

Promotion

Sean Newsham
+49(0)40-88166663
sean@tapeterecords.de
www.tapeterecords.com

TR584
CD 267702
4015698846867
LP 267701
4015698867756

