

LOS DOS - NOCONA

By Chris Morris

Chris Isom - Lead Vocals, Lead Guitar

Adrienne Isom - Bass, Vocals

Justin Smith - Drums, Vocals

Elan Glasser - Harmonica

Xander Hitzig - Fiddle

Dan Wistrom - Pedal Steel Guitar

Carl Byron - Keys

Los Dos, the third album by the Los Angeles band Nocona, finds the band digging deeper into its bracing melding of hard-edged Americana and a keen punk-bred sensibility.

Vocalist-guitarist-songwriter Chris Isom says, “We’re heavily influenced by a lot of Americana – country, bluegrass, and folk, everything going back to Harry Smith’s Anthology of American Folk Music, and all the different ways that everything on that record split off into country and blues. But, also, I grew up in New York going to a lot of shows at CBGBs, in the punk and hardcore scene, and also acid rock and psychedelic pre-grunge stuff. There’s part of me that’s always wanted to freak people out, and have them walk away from our band thinking they’d never heard anything like that before.”

The new release – which succeeds Nocona’s self-titled 2014 debut and its 2015 sophomore effort Long Gone Song – was co-produced by Jay Braun and Adrienne Isom, with engineering by Braun and Kevin Jarvis. Sessions were begun in the Isoms’ garage, with work completed at Jarvis’ studio, the Sonic Boom Room, in Venice, California.

The mission for the band’s third album, Chris Isom says, was to keep it real: “We wanted to record as a band. We wanted to depart from the digital world as much as we could. We wanted to record without a click track, and we wanted the core of the recordings to be us playing in a room together – the way they used to do it in the punk days.”

Featuring 10 new originals written by Isom and a track, “Post Apocalyptic Blues,” penned by Isom and co-producer Braun, Los Dos is led off by the single “Stabby Mike.” Isom says of the song, “‘Stabby Mike’ was a joke that a friend and I had. He was like a dime-store hood. Back in the punk days, people had nicknames. I take something like that and tried to riff on it.”

He says of his songwriting philosophy, “I don’t write narratives. I try to write things that will have some longer-term poetic value, that aren’t tied to the times we’re living in. I try not to indulge in confessional songs. There are a light voice and a dark voice – different voices in my head – and I try to create some dialogic poetry in the writing.”

For some direction for the new recording, Isom – who grew up in New York, and played there with such acts as the garage unit Mooney Suzuki -- turned to his high school friend Braun.

“In New York, Jay played with a band called the Negatones, who were a pretty heavy punk outfit,” Isom says. “He ran a really great recording studio in Williamsburg called Melody Lanes for years. We know where each other are coming from, in terms of what I’m going for. Jay had always been saying, ‘Let’s do a record, let me come out there, I’ve got some ideas for how you can approach things a little differently.’”

“Adrienne was really all about recording in the garage, too, and rejecting some of the way we’d been doing it. Previously we recorded our music in raw sessions, and then we’d take those into a big studio. On this, we recorded everything live. We wanted to be really organic.”

Nocona’s music reflects Isom’s eclectic ear. He says, “There are certain bands that have never gone out of my playlist: the 13th Floor Elevators, the Kinks, the Sonics, Link Wray. When I was in 7th grade, my cousins in Texas turned me on to the Minutemen and FIREHOSE and Can and the bands that were on the Nuggets boxed set, and also ZZ Top and Mississippi John Hurt and Elizabeth Cotton and Townes Van Zandt. Of course I love all the California country stuff, the bands that played the Palomino in North Hollywood. It’s all over the place.”

While working in New York, Isom met his wife-to-be, who is a native Angeleno. “Adrienne turned me on to X and some of the L.A. bands,” he says, “and that opened my eyes to the crazy aesthetic of L.A. One of the fascinating things about L.A. punk rock was that it was so much more engaged in rock ‘n’ roll and the blues and country.”

The Isoms – who played in New York, Austin, and Toronto before finally relocating to Los Angeles -- founded Nocona as a successor to their previous L.A. group, Paladino, with former Old Californio drummer Justin Smith, who like them worked regularly at the Grand Ole Echo, the city’s Sunday roots music showcase.

“Justin and I hit it off really well,” Chris says, “because we have the same garage rock backgrounds, but we also like a lot of the Americana stuff. He’s really a much more encyclopedic store of music than I am.”

The core members have found simpatico players in harmonica ace Elan Glasser, steel guitarist Dan Wistrom, and fiddler Xander Hitzig.

“I can’t give Xander and Dan enough credit for what they brought to the table,” says Isom. “Xander plays in a great band called the Hitzig Brothers – he’s a polymath, an amazing banjo player, an amazing mandolin player, guitar player. Dan’s the man. He approaches the pedal steel in an unorthodox way. He’s ready to go out in a crazy, psychedelic place that a lot of pedal steel players won’t go – it’s not their comfort zone if you want them to do super-weird stuff.”

The album also features the talents of the busy L.A. keyboardist Carl Byron.

Expansive, thoughtful, and hard-rocking, Los Dos is an exciting serving of forward-looking roots music.