**VIOLENT SOHO - EVERYTHING IS A-OK**

After having wrestled with a decade and a half worth of demons across four albums; each crammed full of wry suspicion, ageing angst, flippant cheek, existential despair, plaintive hope, pie-eyed wonder and worry — along with metric tonnes of neck-snapping riffs — in 2020 Everything Is A-OK for Violent Soho.

Well, in reality, that’s never exactly true, is it? The story now goes that after several years of playing the part of “those kids who don’t seem to fit in anywhere” with their first two records (2008’s We Don’t Belong Here & 2010’s self-titled) Violent Soho finally announced themselves into the public’s consciousness with 2013’s Hungry Ghost. It came in a hail of riffs and ‘HELL F\*CK YEAH’s scrawled on arms, desks, and bathroom walls the world over. 2016's WACO, meanwhile — despite earning a No.1 chart debut, ARIA awards, festival headlining spots and sold-out tours to the biggest crowds of their careers — came amid personal upheaval for drummer Michael Richards, bassist Luke Henery and guitarist James Tidswell.

But now with Everything Is A-OK, Mansfield’s favourite sons have drawn a metaphorical line in the sand: five albums into their career, equipped with a renewed self-confidence, they know not to follow a rule book written by other people. That’s what Everything Is A-OK is: a declaration that THIS is who Violent Soho are as a band. As musicians. As mates.

“It’s honest,” explains guitarist/vocalist Luke Boerdam. “It’s doesn’t claim to be anything it’s not: it’s apolitical, slacker, cynical, and trying to connect with people over a shared experience in pointing out society’s failures and the personal shit that follows.”

Everything Is A-OK seethes with harsh reflection on the way the world has become obsessed with creating social media simulacra where everyone is repping their own ‘brand’, and how connection is fleeting and shallow. It ponders the ideas of agency, emotion and how they’re being sold to advertise who we want people to think we are, not who we actually are.

That’s why they worked with Australian producer Greg Wales (You Am I, Sandpit, triple J’s Like A Version): to capture the essence of who they are. “His approach was exactly what we needed,” explains Mikey. “To make something that’s an honest piece of art that you as a collective group are stoked on — and we are — you have to do the hard work and be truthful to yourselves, but also - there has to be no bullsh\*t.”

“He really knows how to get to the essence of a band,” adds Tidswell. “Also, he produced a band from our high school called Dumpster in, like, 1998. So he gets where we come from. I mean, if you told 14-year-old me “we’re working with the guy who did the Dumpster record”, I’d be stoked. And with so many other rock bands out there now, we wanted to make sure we captured who we are, where we come from, and what we want this band to be.”

With the studio where they’d crafted Hungry Ghost and WACO (Brisbane’s The Shed) no more, the band decamped to The Grove Studios in New South Wales — “a great decision,” reflects Henery. “All of us just getting away, hanging out together, focusing specifically on making something we could be super-proud of” — with Wales joining them for four weeks of recording, surrounded by bushland, each other and little else.

“We spent an entire day getting the guitar sounds right, so it’s probably the first time I’ve ever been completely happy with the guitar sounds,” grins Boerdam. “But also, Greg comes from a world of Australian music that we really revere, and sonically look up to: he got us.”

Of those four weeks, Wales reflects that “There’s a reason Violent Soho are so popular and so loved by their fans: they love being a band and making music together. They have an incredible understanding about who they are and are quite unique in the way they operate. They all have amazing musical instincts,” he adds, “and care a lot about the expression and tone of their work. There is a hell of a lot of musical intelligence running under the hood of this beast.”

And the result is an album that floats like a smoke ring and stings like a spark in the eye. Everything is A-OK roars and yowls, full of lessons learned and emotions scalded. Lead single [‘Vacation Forever’](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=petCM7yvhGo) sets a tone for an album that’s a headlong cannonball-ride into the darkness of suburban abandonment and decay. It also contains some of Boerdam’s finest lines (‘There’s a baby boomer across the street / And it won’t stop staring at me’) while the air-punching crunch of ‘Pick It Up Again’ is like as if the word ‘grouse’ came to life and rocked up at your backyard barbie in a singlet & thongs toting a full esky.

Like Pinkerton-era Weezer, it drops memorable lines as if it were a tree shedding leaves in autumn. There’s the neglect of responsibility in ‘Lying On the Floor’ (‘I don’t want to be a photograph / They’re like handing out brochures that a rapture is close’), the escape of ‘Canada” and sedate, plaintive meditation on ‘Slow Down Sonic’. The album sparkles with the life of a late afternoon sun filtered through a fresh-poured cold one.

Because regardless of this wholesale rejection of pretence, there is still plenty of heart, and perhaps a bit of closure. As Boerdam explains, “A lot of the songs on this record were triggered from personal experience that I’ve gone through over the past few years. Writing and recording these songs has been a means of catharsis for me. I’ve never really felt that way with music on previous records. This time it’s a renewing for me, both a rejection and acceptance of the world how it is and moving forward from personal tragedy.”

But that’s what happens when you have a band comfortable in their own skin, who challenge themselves to be true to who they are, no matter what. You get an album that reflects over 18 years of being in a band together and that emulates how four mates — and their producer — clearly understand and know what Violent Soho is meant to be: them.

“The title of the album really explains where the band is,” says Henery. “Even after all this time, all we’ve been through, we’re still here. We’re still who we are as a band.”

As Tidswell says, “All we ever wanted to do was play shows at Ric’s (bar in Brisbane) and play music we love. 18 years of being in a band with the exact same members — if it wasn’t the goal to press into who we naturally are… then we wouldn’t be a band.”

That’s what’s always been at the heart of Violent Soho: a steadfast refusal to be anything other than who they are. If it means taking time off to be with their families, to write an album only when they’ve got an album worth writing… then so be it: that’s who they are. Violent Soho are still four blokes from Queensland who just want to shred some riffs, play some shows and make the music they love. Their music. And this is them at their best.