**Casa Loma**

While there are a few Man Overboard songs that teeter on the edge of acoustic-driven dream pop warmth, the stuff Nik Bruzzese tackles with CASA LOMA just wouldn’t work within the context of his main band.

“I’m not like a ‘serious’ person by any means,” the vocalist, producer and multi-instrumentalist says. “I’m a very sarcastic Italian ballbreaker from New Jersey. But this record is the exact opposite of all of that.”

Across the half-dozen songs of shimmering, saccharine sweet, expansive and atmospheric indie-rock that comprises the debut EP from Casa Loma, Nik’s vibrant voice explores loss, longing, and connection.

Taking a page from the sublime and laidback storytelling of critical darlings Foxwarren and singer Andy Shauf, with the haunting melodicism of …And You Will Know Us By The Trail Of Dead, Casa Loma makes strikingly effective use of acoustic guitar and minimalistic drums, with flourishes of horns and piano.

The sudden passing of Cold Collective singer Tim Landers sent shockwaves through the punk and post-hardcore community in February 2019. The outpouring of public sympathy from bands like Neck Deep, Taking Back Sunday, and The Story So Far demonstrated how much love there was for Landers. Man Overboard had a particularly special connection via their long relationship with Landers’ old band, Transit.

The songs that would become the Casa Loma EP began as a means for Nik to process his grief. He initially locked himself away with his guitar with no idea of what sort of stuff would even materialize. “These songs were not supposed to see the light of day, at all,” he explains. “When you have young children, you can’t go through a tragedy wearing your heart on your sleeve and take care of your kids at the same time.”

Nik lost more than one friend, back to back, in what he describes as “crazy, crazy ways.” Casa Loma provided an outlet for him to explore his feelings about the passing of his father, as well. “I don’t want to waste any time, because tomorrow isn’t promised,” he says. “I wished I had that letter in the desk, you know, ‘If you’re reading this, I must be dead. Just know that everything is going to be okay,” he says.

“I started looking at my kids. What can I give them for that eventual day when I’m no longer here? A lot of this record is a way of saying, look, when I’m gone, listen to these songs, and know that you’ll be fine.”

The Casa Loma EP was made at The LumberYard, the New Jersey recording studio Nik shares with Ace Enders of The Early November. The Wonder Years, Grayscale, and Fairlane have all made music there. “It was a pretty calming experience,” Nik says of the two to three weeks he spent tracking by himself. After the songs were finished, he played them for a friend, who added piano and string arrangements.

The solitary creative process was particularly effective given the deeply personal nature of the lyrics. “Olivia, Marley, and the Duck Pond” is named for his two daughters. “Travelers” is about buying the house he grew up in, driven in part by the search for a continued connection with his late father. Like the song written for Tim, “Famaglia” is about the loss of another friend, told through the perspective of his widow.

Despite the gravity of the subject matter, Nik is quick to point out that Casa Loma isn’t all doom and gloom. A hopeful optimism permeates the contemplative compositions, with a reassurance to keep going.

“I’m a very happy go lucky and positive person who will talk to anyone,” he says. “I wanted to put myself out there and use that positivity in a way that can help somebody else get through a difficult situation.”