



NICK ENGBERS

BY MONICA ALBERS

AGE: 30 // HOMETOWN: ROCK VALLEY, IOWA // SPECIALTY: SINGER & SONGWRITER

Pressing "play" on the latest album by NICK ENGBERS takes listeners down a path of big ideas and big dreams, written under big Midwestern skies. Nick has wandered across the country and across industries over the last 12 years, returning to South Dakota to make music he feels compelled to share. Sioux Falls gets a new chance to listen this month at an EP RELEASE PARTY taking place at ICON LOUNGE on MARCH 17 at 8 P.M., in anticipation of his album, THE INNER WORLD.

You describe your music as "Brainy Indie Folk Rock." What does that mean?

N.W. Engbers: I developed that myself, I guess. The lyrics are plainspoken, but they're more complex than the typical song you would hear on 104.7. All of my songs, I think, will make you think. So that's where the brainy comes from. But indie folk rock describes the music pretty well. It's melodic, it's hummable. But at the same time, I really like to toe that line between some of the underground alternative stuff and then also the poppy stuff. I think this record more than other records I've done in the past has a very pop potential. The lyrics are probably more uplifting than I typically tend to write, and I just think it has the ability to connect with people.

Your newest album, *The Inner World*, is released March 24. What topics do you write about on this record?

N.W.E.: It's sort of a natural progression from what I've done in the past, and it's not morbid, but I write a lot about death. That kind of plays into the path of doing what you love to do and being the person that you're made to be in this short little span of time that we have. I

always quote Ray Bradbury, who says that you kind of have to reflect on your obituary daily. Not in a negative way, but in a way that's motivating. You can kind of write it on a daily basis- what do I want people to say about me after I'm gone? I don't want to be super dark, but it's that deep for me. That's why I do it.

Do local places or issues play a role in your creative process?

N.W.E.: There are some songs I've written that are heavily influenced by here [South Dakota], and I love being from South Dakota. I just feel like this is one of the best places to be a writer and to make things, because the landscape just inspires creativity. I think the wide-open spaces kind of make room for the big ideas. I would say musically I'm inspired by the Midwest, and I'm just super proud to be from here.

Have you always lived in this part of the country?

N.W.E.: I grew up in northwest Iowa, in Rock Valley. I spent 18 years there and then moved away to Chicago and Philly, and lived around and ended up back here. I've been here [Sioux Falls] since 2010.

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When were you first introduced to music?

N.W.E.: I've been singing since I was a kid, started writing in high school, and got serious about it in college. I moved to Chicago after college and came back to Sioux Falls when [my former band] Amos Slade started.

Why did you take a break after the Amos Slade years?

N.W.E.: I don't know, frustration, sort of. Music is hard. To make something and put it out and just have it be kind of "meh," you start thinking, maybe I need to do something else. And then you do something else, and all you want to be doing is writing music and playing music.

What made you return to music?

N.W.E.: I would find myself trying to find time to do it. And I just feel like it was what I was born to do. I'm a singer - that's what I would say, that's who I am. Or I'm a

songwriter. I feel like if I had to describe myself, that's how I would do it. So it just kind of killed me a little bit not to be doing it.

What been something that's challenging or unexpected about your return to music?

N.W.E.: Making records is expensive. I'd love to work with a label or whatever, but that's never been something I've had the opportunity to do. My wife sold her car to pay for the recording time... so this record costs a Toyota Camry. She's the most supportive person I've met in my entire life.

You also made a documentary on the experience. What made you want to show fans how it's all done?

N.W.E.: I feel like recording studios and writing music and being a musician has sort of a mystique to it. I think when people see a musician on stage, most people think they would like to do that

if they had the opportunity. And by giving people insight into what's inspired a song, I feel like I can connect to people better. I found that the songs have a greater effect and mean more to people if I kind of clue them in on what I'm writing about.

What advice do you have for aspiring musicians, maybe especially for people making music locally?

N.W.E.: Make things. Be happy that they exist and find joy and meaning in that product. I think if you do that then good things happen, and you make better things with that being your end goal. I try to write an awesome song because I want an awesome song to exist, instead of writing a song to see what it can do for me. I think just being happy with that end product is so important.

To download *The Inner World* and watch behind-the-scenes footage, visit nwengbers.com.