

Being Green

Blame Canada for **City and Colour's** arresting pursuit of darkness and light

by EMILY TRACE

DALLAS GREEN, WRITING AND RECORDING UNDER THE moniker City and Colour, is set to release his fourth studio album *The Hurry and the Harm* on June 4 from Dine Alone Records. Undeniably one of the biggest groundswell success stories in Canadian music, his long-time fans may notice that he is more at ease with himself than ever before. What began as a side-project, an outlet for the Alexisonfire vocalist's undiluted sentiment, has matured into the deeply beloved City and Colour we know today.

Garnering widespread critical acclaim and numerous awards – three Junos, including two for Songwriter of the Year (in 2009 and in 2011) and three Platinum albums – one of the most intrigu-

ing things about City and Colour is his very sense of journey, of a man in perpetual transit finally accepting himself as a traveller who need never reach a destination. On this new album, you will find a succinct articulation of what has been Green's greatest gift and curse: "I've always been dark with light somewhere in the distance." With *The Hurry and the Harm*, it becomes clear that both his darkness and pursuit of a light on the horizon are indispensable to what makes City and Colour so uniquely engaging.

Perhaps some of City and Colour's particular history can be accounted for by the telltale 'u' in the band's title; there is something distinctly Canadian in how Dallas Green continued with his main band while gently allowing City and Colour to become his primary focus over the course of several years. There are no dramatic tales of Alexisonfire's members fighting in hotel rooms, hurling insults and HD televisions at one another. Green confesses that while he had felt divided between the two bands since the release of *Little Hell* in 2011, he still felt obligated to support his band mates. "I wanted to be in one place, but I didn't want to let my friends down." However, the singular focus given to this album has paid off: never has Green been more in touch with his own emotional core.

Crafted with an inimitable mix of dulcet folk, instrumental sweep and deft injections of aggression, *The Hurry and the Harm* is Dallas Green presenting himself with complete honesty. From the strident momentum of the first single "Thirst" to the introspective lyrical elegance of "Two Coins," there is not an indecisive note on the record. Vocally, Green is in outstanding form - listen to the supple flex of his signature falsetto on "Of Space and Time" - and he's recruited a powerhouse collection of players including Jack Lawrence on bass (The Raconteurs, The Dead Weather), Bo Koster on keys (My Morning Jacket), Spencer Cullum Jr. (Caitlin Rose) on pedal steel and both Matt Chamberlain (Pearl Jam, Fiona Apple) and James Gadson (Bill Withers, BB King) on drums. These new dimensions have not been acquired abruptly; it took almost a decade of cautious musical experimentation and personal growth for Green to be ready for *The Hurry and The Harm*, a passage which is charted in the development of both lyrics and melody since the release of his first solo album.

Even before *Sometimes* debuted in 2005, Dallas Green's mournfully beautiful voice shone noticeably within Alexisonfire's jagged electric guitar and guttural vocals, like an orphaned archangel adopted by a screamo band. The interplay between George Pettit's gravelly howl and Green's clear, soaring voice proved that even within a hormonal hurricane of angst and alienation, many teenagers still crave beauty. This juxtaposition was unique among contemporary bands, and it's what made City and Colour's first album an instant success when it dropped, certifying as Gold in March and Platinum by December of the same year, with a sold-out international tour in between.

Besides being a critical and commercial success, *Sometimes* explored an unusual meditation on the nature of sadness. Confessing that he often writes sad songs knowing the process will leave him feeling happier, Green's lyrics and melody hint at the idea of melancholy as its own reward. The most well-known line from the album, "Save your scissors for someone else's skin", describes a wound that Green is suffering from but also proactively invested in healing.

For *Bring Me Your Love*, released in 2008, Dallas Green invited

many more instruments into the studio: harmonicas, drums, bass, even a mandolin. And as the music acquired new dimensions, his lyrics became correspondingly more complex. Green was much more honest on this second album with himself and fans about his flaws; while *Sometimes* could easily paint a picture of a tortured, gentle 19th century Romantic poet, *Bring Me Your Love* contains darker confessions of alcohol dependency and unfaithfulness, as well as a fear that he may always be this way. However, the desire for redemption is present in every self-rebuke, as well as a need for validity, authenticity, confirmation that all his sadness and yearning has a purpose.

Inner clarity and self-worth seem to matter much more to Green than the album's swift rise to Platinum status and the success of his first American tour, which sold out six weeks in advance. But by the 2011 release of *Little Hell*, which debuted at #1 on the Top 200 SoundScan chart in Canada (#2 in Australia and #26 in the US), it was beginning to be clear that Green's genius is fuelled by the very dissatisfaction he longs to escape. Only two Canadian albums went Platinum that year, and *Little Hell* was one of them. Green's fanbase was rapidly expanding, but something else may also account for the album's popularity: these songs were no longer just about himself. Green's melancholy since City and Colour's debut had been primarily focused on himself and occasionally a love interest; with *Little Hell*, he had begun to know his own wounds so well that he could now identify wounds in others and want to help them. He asks himself, "What if I could sing just one song and it might save somebody's life?"

Now that Green has officially left Alexisonfire, *The Hurry and the Harm* will be fans' first opportunity to get to know a Dallas undivided, focused singularly on City and Colour. Green articulates his sense of unfulfilled searching with new authority and with an electrifying lack of sentimentality. "I don't have a lot of faith in myself, so it is hard for me to have a lot of faith in something I have created," he says. "But I've never been happier or prouder about something that I have done."

Modest words from a man whose last Canadian tour sold out in minutes, hot on the heels of an international run with sold-out shows across the US, UK and Europe. Widely recognized for his live performances, City and Colour has played countless high-profile venues to capacity crowds: New York's Terminal 5, London's Royal Albert Hall and a three-night stay at Toronto's Massey Hall. He's also performed at Bonnaroo, Coachella, Sasquatch, Austin City Limits, Lollapalooza, the Newport Folk Festival, the Calgary Folk Festival and the Glastonbury Festival. After his appearance at SXSW this year, City and Colour headed to the US where Green was invited by P!NK to open three arena dates on her US tour, before he landed in the UK to perform as direct support for Biffy Clyro. Green is back on the road this summer for an 8-week stretch in the US.

The Hurry and the Harm shows that Green's wounds have been worthwhile since the very beginning, generating music that contains a healing sadness and a sense of being at peace with one's own journey, whether it ends or is better left unfinished.



The Hurry and the Harm is available June 4 from Dine Alone Records