

NEVER TASTED SO SWEET

AUSSIE ARTIST EXPLORES HIS FEMININE SIDE

It's true. Ben Lee is a woman.

But so is the American, the Messiah, this planet, and you. At least that's what he tells us in a song off his new record, *The Rebirth of Venus*.

A daring statement for a man, but Lee understands the deeper meaning of what society has deemed as feminine, which are characteristics like nurture, compassion and warmth. "It seems to me, that in the world right now, all of those things are signs of the unfashionable," Lee says. "We live in sort of a chemical world. We war with anyone that disagrees with us at the drop of a hat."

The Australian native's sixth official studio album, *The Rebirth of Venus*, features 13 pop/alternative tracks dedicated to femininity. "I just wanted to make a record that was a tribute to feeling and a tribute to tenderness and to the feminine." Lee's second album to be released off of New West Records, it features contributions from fellow artists Misy Higgins, Nic Johns, Cary Brothers, Patience Hodgson, and his future stepdaughter (on pots, pans and backing vocals), to name a few.

How is New West promoting *The Rebirth of Venus*? Why of course, through the help of the Music Business program students at UGA. Bruce Burch, Administrative Director and co-founder of the program says, "We are very excited about the opportunity of working with New West Records and their artist, Ben Lee on his new album. It is such great experience for our students to get to be involved in a 'real' record release and to see all that it entails. Plus it looks great on their resume to be associated with a label that has the reputation in the business that New West has." And



Photo: Ione Skye

what a great reputation it is. The independent record label has had 12 releases debut in the Billboard Top 200 and has worked with notably successful artists like Rickie Lee Jones, Old 97's, and Athens' own, the Drive-By Truckers.

With politics on the mind, Lee wanted to make a statement about all of the crazy things happening in the world (global warming, oil prices, world hunger), but in a way that was entertaining and with a little bit of a wink to it. The result is the second single off *Venus* called, "I Love Pop Music".

"I realized I had this idea for a song, a tribute to pop music as being something made of sugar, like 'yummy yummy yummy, I got love in my tummy' and I could feel it. I was like, what if I just combine these two ideas, and that's how that song came about."

This past December, Lee and his fiancé produced a video to go along with Lee's cover of John Lennon's "Woman Is The Nigger Of The World," which received high praise from Yoko Ono (an obvious idol of his since there is a song on *Venus* with her name on it) through an email and a response on Youtube. He's never met her, but was ecstatic when he saw her e-mail. "It was just really cool because that song isn't on the album or anything. It's not like it's going to make me any money," he says. "It was just purely creative and often when you do things like that, that's what people really respond to."

Leading up to the release of *The Rebirth of Venus*, Lee is co-producing a record for 14-year-old singer/songwriter, Gabriella Cihomsky. "I remember at that age, you have a million ideas and sometimes I just couldn't focus on them.

BEN LEE

WHO'S WHO
Ben Lee

FORMED
1995 in Sydney, Australia

LABEL
New West Records

LATEST RELEASE
The Rebirth of Venus (2009)

ON THE WEB
www.ben-lee.com

She brings in all these amazing ideas and I'm just kind of helping her enter them I guess." Lee has spent enough time in the studios making records now that it doesn't intimidate him anymore, and could see himself doing more producing in the future, whether it be his own stuff or someone else's. "It's quite fun and creative, I enjoy it."

Like Cihomsky, Lee started making music at a young age (just 10 years old), and lucky for us, he has never stopped. Before embarking on a solo career, Lee was a part of the Sydney band, Noise Addict, scoring a record deal before he even graduated high school. 17 years and five solo albums later, Lee has made a huge name for himself on both Australian and American soil.

By the time you read this, Ben Lee will be a married man and says he will continue to collaborate with friends and fellow artists, and has a tour scheduled to kick off this spring. "Basically, I bat the highest average when I am just doing what I like. So that's pretty much my plan."

— Kristen Lee