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When I talked with Nathaniel Rateliff earlier this week, he was driving a dump truck for his job as a gardener, and closed the interview with these pronouncements when asked if there was anything he'd like to mention: "I love to swim. I like poultry."

Aside from hinting at a dry sense of humor, these things suggest that Rateliff is grounded person. And that's reflected in the path that he's chosen.

The Denver-based singer/songwriter, who will perform two Daytrotter.com shows on August 27, had an opportunity to have his rock band (Born in the Flood) and perhaps his current folk-ish outfit signed to the Roadrunner label. But he chose instead to follow his heart.

"We had been doing it [Born in the Flood] for so many years that we were kind of over it, and didn't really know what else to do," Rateliff said. "We didn't really want to do it anymore. ... The older I got ... it got harder to sing that way every night, and I just didn't feel like I was connecting with it the same way that I did when I was younger."

While the transition from rock music to a more-sedate, more-song-based style was natural, he said, he had an epiphany at the South by Southwest festival. (He's unsure of the year, but it was likely 2009.) He said he and his current band (which now performs under his name alone) played a Brooklyn Vegan show "for a pretty large audience of completely quiet people. And then went across town afterwards and played a [Born in the Flood] show for 15 people that were totally uninterested."

Rateliff, who will be performing solo in the Quad Cities, suggested that he would have rather remained unsigned than pursue Born in the Flood further. When he was approached by the Rounder label, Roadrunner had already had an offer on the table for several months, he said. "Rounder kind of came out of nowhere, really."

His Rounder debut, *In Memory of Loss*, was released this past spring to strong notices. *Paste* said the album "rings with the ease, tenderness, and lightness of heart that often mark a new romance." In a four-star review of the album, *Mojo* said that the song "Oil & Lavender" "impels the listener to listen intently," and closed by praising the record's spareness: "It's that voice and the accompanying silences that stay with you." HearYa.com's reviewer was obsessive about the album, calling it "heartbreaking. His voice is powerful, defiant, warm, and delivers stunning lyrics that cut like a knife."

There's a precision to both Rateliff's singing and songwriting voice, and you can get a sense of his writing skills with one phrase, describing some fight opponents in "You Should've Seen the Other Guy" as having "fists like cinder and stone."

Raised in a small town in Missouri, Rateliff said the religious music of his youth didn't resonate with him. "If God had created music, then why weren't songs we were singing in church affecting me the same way 'Imagine' did when I was a kid?" he said. (For what it's worth, Rateliff said one of the first songs he really liked was Roger Miller's "Chug-a-lug," which is as silly as it sounds.)

Rateliff said he wrote most of *In Memory of Loss* to woo the woman who is now his wife, but he doesn't consider any of his songs private: "It's a shame when people write great songs ... and never do anything with them. ... I just think it's important for people to share music with one another."

Nathaniel Rateliff will perform two Daytrotter.com shows in the Quad Cities on Friday, August 27. He'll play a free show at 7 p.m. at Borders (4000 East 53rd Street in Davenport). He's also on a bill with headliner William Elliott Whitmore and supporting acts Old Scratch Revival Singers and Centaur Noir at RIBCO (1815 Second Avenue in Rock Island); that all-ages show begins at 9 p.m., with $10 advance tickets (available here) and $12 day-of-the-show tickets.

For more information on Rateliff, visit NathanielRateliff.com . Rateliff's two Daytrotter sessions are available here and here .

For a 2009 River Cities' Reader *interview with William Elliott Whitmore, click here . For a 2010 article on Centaur Noir, click here .*