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On paper, the Wallflowers' 2012 album *Glad All Over* has the whiff of trying to recapture past glories.

It was the band's first album of new material in seven years, a hiatus that included a rote best-of compilation, a couple tours, and two solo albums by frontman/songwriter Jakob Dylan.

But talking to Dylan last week – and, more importantly, listening to the album – it's clear that the band and its leader aren't crassly trying to capitalize on fondness for the quadruple-platinum *Bringing Down the Horse*

(and its chart-topping single, "One Headlight") from 1996. As the *All Music Guide*

correctly summarized, with *Glad All Over*

the Wallflowers "now feel the freedom to mess around, and they've come up with one of their loosest, liveliest records that not-so-coincidentally is one of their best."

So the long absence of the Wallflowers – headlining [River Roots Live](#) on August 17 – can be explained by Dylan wanting the band to survive and thrive. He obviously views it as his band –

less in the sense of belonging to him than being his primary musical outlet.

“Even when the band was taking breaks, I never really took breaks from Wallflowers,” he said of the group’s history prior to 2005. “I’d be writing for Wallflowers.”

While nobody in the band intended the gap between *Rebel, Sweetheart* and its follow-up to stretch to seven years, Dylan said, “it was important to step back and get off it for a little bit. ... You learn that it’s going to be a long haul, and if you want to have a band, you have to protect the sanity of the group. You do have to stop every once in a while and just figure out what the plot was, what your focus was, where your attention was. You get very easily muddled along the way on the conveyor belt. ...

“There’s no obligation to work every year. There’s no obligation to record. If you don’t have songs, then don’t record. ... You have to have a purpose in mind when you’re doing it.”

One purpose this time, he said, was to involve the band more in the composition process.

“There’s no one way to do it,” he said, but for the band’s five previous studio records, Dylan came into recording with a set of finished songs.

“We decided going into it [*Glad All Over*] that a lot of the arrangements and a lot of the music was going to be born in the studio,” he said. “I went with as many lyrics as possible that were in a form that was flexible. That was something the band wanted to do, and it was something I wanted a bit of help doing. It’s a lot of pressure to go in with a band and have to have 15 completed songs. That’s not how a lot of people do it. ... You get different results – there’s no doubt – but there’s great value to both.”

Approaching an album this way, he said, gave more room to his bandmates. “A lot of time, you write songs that are finished, you bring them in, they’re already dictating what everybody really should be doing,” he said. “They come with a backbeat, they come with a meter. If you’re following the motto that the song is king, ... there’s not as much flexibility as you imagine. The song already kind of wants something specific. If you start from a different angle, the song can

Written by Jeff Ignatius

Wednesday, 07 August 2013 11:53

be a lot more flexible.”



As a result of a different method, *Glad All Over* is a significant departure for the Wallflowers. Had Dylan finished all the songs prior to going into the studio, “they would have been” radically different, he said. “But that’s okay. That’s what you want in a career and a catalog of music – you want variety. I can definitely tell when I hear this record that it does sound different than what we’ve done before. ...

“You start with a lot of grooves” when the band takes a more active role in writing and shaping the material, he said. “It doesn’t become so much about chord sequences, chord patterns. It becomes a lot more about interaction. The structure of a song is not necessarily as important as what the band is doing in chemistry and the groove they’re coming up with. The vocalist can sit on top of almost anything. It’s different; it takes a lot of focus off the vocal – when you’re building it from the bottom up.”

It must be said, though, that aside from a couple of Clash-inspired tracks featuring that band’s Mick Jones, *Glad All Over* is still loaded with timeless and strong songs: sturdy, rootsy rock that could have come from any time in the past two decades – or, in some cases, even longer ago.

The first single from the album, the slinky and bold “Reboot the Mission,” is one of those Clash tributes, and “that’s not something I would have written on my own,” Dylan said. It works as homage, but it also serves its intended purpose of announcing a revitalized Wallflowers, even casting it as the fruit of a long gestation: “We’ve had it coming.”

At the other end of the spectrum is concise wisdom on equal footing with warm, thoughtful arrangement: “Love is a country / Better cross when you’re young.”

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Wednesday, 07 August 2013 11:53

Most of the other songs bridge the gap, particularly standouts “The Devil’s Waltz,” with its persistent rock tension balanced by Dylan’s measured singing, and the other Clash nod featuring Jones, “Misfits & Lovers.”

The album still has the longtime Wallflowers core of Dylan, keyboardist Rami Jaffee, and bassist Greg Richling. Guitarist Stuart Mathis joined the band after *Rebel, Sweetheart*, and the new face belongs to drummer Jack Irons, a founding member of the Red Hot Chili Peppers who has done stints with Pearl Jam. (He also, as “Reboot the Mission” notes, “jammed with the mighty Joe Strummer.”)

The band is “really is a vehicle to get behind the songs that I’m writing,” Dylan said. “It’s a certain sound that I can keep intact with various players. It doesn’t have to be always the same players.”

He said getting the group back together for recording was primarily a logistical challenge. “We’d been talking for at least a year before,” he said. “The schedules were difficult. ... Getting everybody back in the same place at the same time for a few months’ work on a record – that was the biggest complication. Actually getting us all to agree to do it was fairly easy; we all wanted to.”

And Dylan said he embraced the new composition process, even though it meant he stepped back a bit. “I can’t tell you how I feel about the results,” he said, because it’s still so fresh. “I don’t know how it’ll last for me in the future, ... but I do think of myself as a vocalist as well, not just a songwriter. I was interested in the challenge of fitting on top of something rather than having everybody fit around me.”

That’s a function of his solo albums, 2008’s *Seeing Things* and 2010’s *Women + Country*. “Just about all the pressure is put on the song itself, and you,” he said of those outings.

And despite being the son of one of the world’s most celebrated songwriters, Dylan sounds as if he’s more comfortable as a bandleader than a solo artist. “That’s not really where I come from,” he said. “When I started out, I was one of five. I wrote the songs and usually cleared the path

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Wednesday, 07 August 2013 11:53

where the vision was going to be. But there was a lot of camaraderie and there was a lot of collaboration in a band. Everybody filled a spot that's necessary and needed to create that sound."

The new album, he said, "allowed me to kind of fit in the fold a little bit and not have to make every decision and not worry that the song was the only thing that mattered. There are a lot of things people like about bands' records other than just songs" – such as the latest album's emphasis on group dynamics.

While the band is more front-and-center this time around, the songs still shine, and the Wallflowers are perfectly comfortable with the roots-rock wheel – although Dylan said there are still plenty of variations worth trying.

"I'm not avoiding any trends or sounds," he said. "You just follow your nose; you do what sounds good for the songs you're writing and what is believable. You should also be ready to fall off the cliff and totally fail. That's part of it, too. And if you're embarrassed years later or you wish you hadn't done it, that's all right, too. It's better to have tried and explored things. ... That all adds up to a greater whole and greater picture. You're just supposed to follow your instincts every time. ...

"I've certainly been a part of things where you're being persuaded to adjust something because somebody seems to have some kind of motive that it'll fare better for somebody else's ears, but through experience and time, you learn that that's never going to work, and you're always going to be disappointed in the results. If you make records that you believe in and that you care about, you're never going to be sorry about that. Your fans won't be sorry about that. No matter what level they succeed artistically or commercially. If you do that, you just won't be disappointed.

"The people who really chase some version of success in placating other people, they take risks, but they're confused. They're not actually artistic risks; they're acts of desperation. Those are the ones you'll regret more than anything else. ...

"I'm ... a great fan of traditional music, so I'm not somebody who goes into a recording process and wants to hear something that no one's ever heard before. ... I don't really think that's ever

Looking at the Greater Whole: The Wallflowers Headline River Roots Live, August 17 at 9:30 p.m.

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been my drive.

“There’s so much music to get to. We haven’t done a polka song yet. We haven’t really done a bluegrass song yet. Figuring out how this band can play a lot of traditional music and be believable and explore those sounds, that still moves me and still gets me interested in going into the studio.”

The Wallflowers will perform on Saturday, August 17, at 9:30 p.m. at River Roots Live (RiverRootsLive.com) in Davenport’s LeClaire Park.

For more information on the Wallflowers, visit TheWallflowers.com .