

Over the past three decades, A.J. Croce has established his reputation as a piano player and serious vocal stylist who pulls from a host of musical traditions and anti-heroes — part New Orleans, part juke joint, part soul. While his last album, *JUST LIKE MEDICINE*, paired him with soul legend Dan Penn and an all-star cast of players, his new album was born of memories — of favorite artists and shows, but mostly, of late-night gatherings with groups of friends, many of them fellow musicians, with Croce at the piano taking requests. Croce revisits these musical evenings on *BY REQUEST*, 12 personally curated covers that traverse decades and genres, propelled by his spirited, piano mastery and emotive vocals. It's a tribute to Croce the music fan as well as Croce the musician that both the variety and execution is inspired, aided by a full band and horns. Available to pre-order now, the album comes out February 5 via Compass Records.

BY REQUEST is the first album Croce has released since losing his wife of 24 years, Marlo Croce, after a sudden heart ailment. It's also the first album by Croce to feature his full touring band: **Gary Mallaber** on drums (Van Morrison, Steve Miller band), **David Barard** on bass (Allen Toussaint, Dr. John), and up-and-coming guitarist **Garrett Stoner**.

From sharing an obscure song by Motown artist **Shorty Long**, "Ain't No Justice," to his funky, dead-on version of **Billy Preston's** "Nothing from Nothing," Croce keeps the virtual party hopping. While he delivers faithful recreations of such nuggets as **The Five Stairsteps'** "Ooh Child" and **Allen Toussaint's** "Brickyard Blues," he puts his own spin on piano-driven arrangements of songs by **Neil Young**, **The Beach Boys**, **Sam Cooke**, **The Faces** and more. Young's "Only Love Can Break Your Heart" is reinterpreted as a gospel song, and The Beach Boys' "Sail On Sailor" becomes a trippy, rollicking ride.

Over his ten studio albums, it's clear that A.J. Croce holds an abiding love for all types of musical genres: Blues, Soul, Pop, Jazz, and Rock n' Roll. A virtuosic piano player, Croce toured with B.B. King and Ray Charles before reaching the age of 21, and, over his career, he has performed with a wide range of musicians, from Willie Nelson to the Neville Brothers; Béla Fleck to Ry Cooder. A.J. has also co-written songs with such formidable tunesmiths as Leon Russell, Dan Penn, Robert Earl Keen and multi-Grammy winner Gary Nicholson. His albums

have all charted, and done so on an impressive array of charts: Top 40, Blues, Americana, Jazz, College, and Radio 1, to name a few. The Nashville-based singer/songwriter also has landed 18 singles on a variety of Top 20 charts. While it's clear A.J.'s recordings and shows span many aforementioned genres, his tastes and extended influences reach even further to classical styles and world music styles from Latin Jazz to music of Africa, Eastern Europe, or India.

The late, great New Orleans piano player and Croce hero, Allen Toussaint, summed him up best: "In such a crowded music universe it is a pleasure to witness triple uniqueness: pianist, songwriter, singer and at such a level, and who does he sound like? The answer is himself...A.J. Croce."

A.J.'s last two albums epitomize these qualities: 2014's *Twelve Tales* found him working with six celebrated producers — "Cowboy" Jack Clement (Johnny Cash, Elvis Presley), Mitchell Froom (Los Lobos, Crowded House), Tony Berg (Fiona Apple, Bob Dylan), Kevin Killen (Elvis Costello, Peter Gabriel), Greg Cohen (Tom Waits, John Zorn), and Toussaint (Dr. John, Lee Dorsey) — who each chose two songs (a single's "A" and "B" sides). The resulting collection was recorded in five cities with six different bands. *American Songwriter* wrote: "Regardless of the genre, Croce slides into these songs with an easy charm."

In 2017, A.J. enlisted legendary Muscle Shoals producer/songwriter Dan Penn and an all-star backing crew that included Steve Cropper, Vince Gill, David Hood, Colin Linden, Bryan Owings, The Muscle Shoals Horns, and The McCrary Sisters for his album *Just Like Medicine*, which ABC News praised as sounding "like it was crafted with the influence of greats like Van Morrison, Bob Dylan and Elvis Costello in mind."

A.J.'s deep love for music is understandable considering that his mother, Ingrid, was a singer/songwriter as was his father, the late Jim Croce. His father died in a tragic plane crash just before his second birthday. A.J., who started playing piano at a young age, purposely avoided his father's music in order to establish his own identity as a musician. A.J.'s relationship with his father's music began changing around a dozen years ago, when he began

digitalized his father's tapes. One old cassette contained a bar performance of Jim Croce playing blues tunes that had influenced him. These were deep-cuts by folks like Mississippi John Hurt, Blind Blake, Brownie McGhee & Sonny Terry, and A.J. was amazed since these songs were the ones that he had been playing since he was 12.

After more than 25 years making his own musical mark, he began performing some of his Dad's songs live and forming a special show out of it. In the past couple years, A.J. has begun periodically performing a "Croce Plays Croce" concert, where he does Jim Croce songs, his own tunes, and songs that influenced the two of them. He loves seeing "the joy it brings audiences," as well as enjoying that he can keep the shows fresh and exciting because he has the flexibility to change up the set list each time out.

A.J. Croce's family musical legacy is just part of his very unique life story. Born outside of Philadelphia, A.J. moved with his mother and father to San Diego just before he turned two. Around the age of four, he went blind due to horrific physical abuse from his mother's then-boyfriend. A.J. was hospitalized for half a year and was totally blind in both eyes for six years. It was during this time that he started playing piano, inspired by blind pianists like Ray Charles and Stevie Wonder. Croce, who regained sight in his left eye when he was ten, went on to spend his early teen years performing, including at his mother's establishment, Croce's Jazz Bar.

As he celebrates 30 years of a music career, with his newest album he says, "*BY REQUEST* is my way of inviting you over for a private gathering at my place. We listen to great music, laugh, make great food and after a few drinks and maybe a few more we end up in my music room and I start taking requests of every genre and era. The music is always fun and completely diverse. We'll play and sing all kinds of music. Some of my friends are professional musicians, some do it for fun and many friends are just serious music fans. So you'll fit right in.

Welcome to my home, by request, you're hereby invited to join the party."