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**L to R: Tim Lopez, De’Mar Hamilton, Dave Tirio, Mike Retondo, Tom Higgenson**

**PLAIN WHITE T’S**

***AMERICAN NIGHTS***

Forget everything you think you know about the Plain White T’s. This hard-working band—which began life bashing out Green Day and Weezer covers in a suburban Chicago basement while still in high school way back in the late ’90s—is in the midst of what may well prove to be a game-changing evolutionary step. Following a three-year stretch on the heels of the release of 2010’s Wonders of the Youngerthat found the quintet evolving as artists and human beings, while experiencing their share of personal tumult and along the way, the veteran rock band returns not just recharged but reborn. The proof is all over **American Nights**, the quintet’s fourth album for Hollywood Records, hitting in early 2014.

This is a totally unified piece of work bearing a distinctive sonic signature—banks of cascading acoustic guitars locked in with driving rock grooves building toward widescreen choruses set off by billowing harmonies. The album’s aggressive yet welcoming sound immediately sets the T’s apart from the pack in a display of four-on-the-floor, top-down rock ’n’ roll that’s both timeless and *right now*.

**American Nights** contains six songs from T’s founder/leader/driving force Tom Higgenson and four from the emerging Tim Lopez, whose dramatic growth as a writer and singer brings an intriguing new dimension to the band, known and beloved for such compelling takes on modern-day mating rituals as Higgenson’s “Hey There Delilah,” the 2006 chart-topper that put the PWTs on the map, and Lopez’s “Rhythm of Love,” the platinum-selling track that marked the guitarist’s coming of age as a songwriter and lead vocalist.

What these 10 songs have in common is their immense relatability, as Higgenson and Lopez candidly and intimately describe situations pulled directly from their personal experiences. These detailed real-life narratives are set against the cinematic backdrop “**American Nights**,” a rousing, Springsteen-like celebration of good times and old friends. “We’re gonna light up these streets baby,” Higgenson promises amid a volley of jangling guitar chords and propulsive drums, “Shake the dust off all your dreams baby/We’re gonna lose a little sleep baby/On these American nights.”

The classic-rock vibe extends to the Lopez-penned, horn-laden “**Here Come That Sunrise**,” which has a life-affirming message embedded in the chorus: Well here come that sunrise/Here come that feelin’/Here come them blue skies/Here comes that healin’*.* On this musically dynamic, crisply contoured cut, Lopez lives up to the nickname his bandmates teasingly bestowed on him—Tim Petty.

“That song is about letting go of the darkness I’d been going through for the last couple of years—a divorce and dwelling on my unhappiness when it came to relationships,” Lopez explains. “Then I met someone great and started to feel like there was finally something hopeful on the horizon. So the lyric basically makes the point that there’s something good coming, and I’m gonna run towards it and embrace it. I think it hit home with Tom, too, in terms of his past relationships. So I’m very proud of that one.”

Higgenson’s emotionally charged yet buoyant **“Time to Move On”** frames the end game of a long-term relationship in a vividly cinematic tableau, as the narrator vacillates between pushing himself to make the final break and giving in yet again to the romantic entanglements that both lured and entrapped him for so long. “Erased all your numbers and I’m changing mine/So I’m not tempted to call,” Higgenson sings with a mixture of resignation and anticipation. “Threw out every letter from you I could find/I think it’s time to move on.” The sense of liberation and sheer relief he feels at having made up his mind is evident in another resonant line: “These Chucks were made for walking baby.”

In the epic rocker **“Haven’t Told Her**,” Lopez zeroes in on the conflicting emotions of exhilaration and anxiety triggered by the blossoming of new love. The song is bookended by the resonant line, “She hit me like a blinding light and I was born.”

These four tracks rock more powerfully than anything the T’s have released to date, with the ace rhythm section of drummer De’Mar Hamilton, bass player Mike Retondo and rhythm guitarist/original band member Dave Tirio bringing the kind of calibrated muscle to these open-hearted anthems that they display on concert stages.

Deftly poised between self-mockery and poignancy, Higgenson’s **“Should’ve Gone to Bed**” recounts what a treacherous and retrospectively humiliating combination too many drinks, a smartphone and an empty bed can be in the aftermath of “striking out again.” Against his better judgment, the song’s narrator dials his ex’s number. “Here I go missing you again,” Higgenson sings ruefully. “God only knows what I said/I should’ve just gone to bed.”

“Should’ve Gone to Bed” has been widely embraced since making its initial appearance this spring on a preview EP bearing the same title. “So many people tweet us and tell us at shows how much they relate to that song—mostly women,” says Tom. “I need to find those girls so we can drunk-dial each other!”

Like “Hey There Delilah,” “**You Belong**” describes that moment of electricity when a guy meets a girl and is instantly captivated—but Higgenson shows that he’s gained a bit of self-awareness over the last few years when he briefly pauses in his starry-eyed advance to call himself out, acknowledging, “I don’t know why/I’d sell my soul away/For a girl I don’t even know.” On **“Love You Right Back,**” by contrast, the song’s narrator and his woman of interest can’t seem to decide whether to “keep it in the friend zone,” as Tom puts it, or give in to the intense attraction they feel for each other.

Lopez dramatically evidences his maturation as a songwriter with “**Dance Off Time,**” employing a mathematical motif to set up an intensely romantic statement. “Well me plus you is greater than or equal to/The sum of every love we knew/Back when we were young,” the song begins. “And if we multiplied/I hope to God they get your eyes/And we get something that you can’t divide/Cause baby you are the one.”

Other songs are deeply reflective in nature. Higgenson’s **“Helium**”ponders mortality—spurred by memories of a near-fatal accident in 2001 in which he was thrown from his van, suffering internal injuries and breaking several vertebrae, and intensified by the deep emotions brought out by becoming a parent—he’s the father of a three-year-old son. The song resolves into a powerful chorus: “So when the day comes/That I don’t wake up/I’ll float away full of love like helium/From heaven I won’t worry/’Cause I left behind one hell of a story.”

Lopez’ metaphorical ballad **“Giving Tree”** describes a dysfunctional give-and-take relationship—he gives and she takes—by applying the premise of Shel Silverstein’s children’s book of the same title, which Tim remembers being read to him during his formative years. “If all you wanted was love/Why would you use me up/Cut me down, build a boat and sail away?” he sings with palpable feeling. “When all I wanted to be/Was your giving tree/Settle down, build a home and make you happy.”

These are memorable songs indeed, impeccably crafted and shot through with hard-earned self-knowledge. “Personally, I’m in a good place—my head is clearer now,” says Higgenson, recalling the difficulties he’s worked his way through since the last album. “I’m in my 30s now, I’m single and I’m just writing songs about everyday experiences—and that’s what the magic of the Plain White T’s has always been. With a song like ‘Should’ve Gone to Bed,” it doesn’t get much more real and honest than that. And Tim’s stepping up and writing some great songs.

Higgenson describes **American Nights** as “a perfect snapshot of where we are in life right now,” but the album also looks back in the rearview mirror at what the Plain White T’s have been through, as well as setting this immensely appealing young band in motion toward a beckoning, wide-open future.

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Plain White T's – Should've Gone to Bed – Spotify link

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e7L-2eW46SA> – “Should’ve Gone To Bed” lyric video

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