

# Blindsided

## Mark Erelli

*"All the things that brought me comfort, they just seem tired and worn, what always used to work ain't working anymore,"* sings award-winning, Massachusetts-based singer/songwriter **Mark Erelli**, a few songs into his 2020 release *Blindsided*. It's a realization that has washed over many of us, like headlights sweeping across the bedroom ceiling on a sleepless night. But for a songwriter, such an appraisal is a call to action.

**Erelli** rose to the occasion with a writing streak, generating well over 30 new songs to choose from for his newest record. He ultimately gravitated toward those that wrestled with the questions we encounter in the "middle," the certain point in life when you reflect on your hopes and dreams and what you thought were certainties. *"One glance at the headlines and anyone can see that we are questioning the stories we've told ourselves and, in many cases, they aren't proving as durable as they once seemed,"* he explains. *"Do the things I took for granted as truth when I was younger still hold up? What can I still lean on? Am I strong enough for the ones I love to lean on me? The answers, if there even are answers, can be both unsettling and reaffirming."*

The aptly-titled *Blindsided* was forged in this process of reckoning, of taking stock of the soul, and being pleasantly surprised. Mining the same gritty yet soulful territory as John Hiatt's *Bring The Family* or Bonnie Raitt's *Nick Of Time*, **Erelli** contemplates the delicate tension between love and commitment, faith and family, disillusionment, and hope. But this isn't a confession from the therapist's couch, it's rock 'n roll, and **Erelli** is clearly taking his cues from heroes like Petty and Prine. Over the course of *Blindsided*'s 11 tracks, the message of each song is distilled to its purest form, as fearlessly honest in perspective as it is straightforward in its delivery.

To create the soundtrack that reflected this reinvigorated approach to songwriting, **Erelli** consulted his mental list of fellow musicians with whom he had forged connections in recent years and realized they all lived in Nashville. So he made the trek to Music City, with best friend and multi-instrumentalist/producer Zachariah Hickman in tow, curious to see what effect a change in geography, personnel, and context would produce. With the help of drummer Jamie Dick (Rhiannon Giddens, *Our Native Daughters*), guitarist Sadler Vaden (Jason Isbell, Josh Ritter), Kai Welch (Molly Tuttle, Kacey Musgraves) on keys, producer Hickman on bass, and Dan Knobler (Lake Street Dive, Caroline Spence) recording and mixing, the result couldn't have been more unanticipated. Against the backdrop of *Blindsided*'s hungrier, hook-laden sound, with the inspired addition of a string quartet on half of the album, **Erelli** has never sounded more passionate or vital.

**Erelli** has forged a colorful career by making the art of "being everywhere all the time" seem effortless. It's hard to think of another artist who seems equally at home serving as a sideman for GRAMMY-winning artists like Paula Cole, Marc Cohn, and Josh Ritter, or producing albums for Lori McKenna, as he does writing and producing his own material, like 2019's "By Degrees," on which he was joined by a host of voices including Rosanne Cash and Sheryl Crow. That song was nominated for "Song Of The Year" at the 2019 Americana Music Awards, and served to reintroduce **Erelli** to a wider audience. And just in time, because *Blindsided* combines the exuberance of **Erelli**'s signature sound with the wisdom that comes with over 20 years of songwriting, capturing an artist at a point in his career where he is clearly digging deep and swinging for the fences.

*"In one of my favorite Tom Petty songs, he sings 'it took a world of trouble, took a world of tears, it took a long time to get back here,'" Erelli says. "I think I know exactly how he felt."*

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