Like pretty much every band on Earth, there was a lot of waiting around going on in 2020 for **The Parson Red Heads**. The completion of their fifth studio album, ***Lifetime of Comedy***, was put on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic freezing everybody in place for months, and a process that had begun just prior to the global closure was forced to reconvene at a snail’s pace once studios could open back up for small, intimate sessions.

But *Lifetime of Comedy*, while forged from within the timeline of such a touch-and-go era, already had a story of perseverance—a sentiment in their music that longtime fans of the Portland-based Americana/psych band have treasured. The band’s founding guitarist, Sam Fowles, departed the band following the release of their 2017 LP, *Blurred Harmony*, and the Parsons were forced to ask themselves some tough questions.

“Picking up and deciding to keep making new music and playing after Sam left wasn’t the easiest thing in the world,” admits vocalist/guitarist Evan Way. “I don’t think we thought we’d fully break up and just stop, but it was still hard to deal with one of the very foundational members of this group no longer being there.”

The band turned to their live guitarist Jake Smith to step in, and quickly realized they wanted to approach their new record through a new lens.

“Jake was pumped to be a full-time member of the band and was really excited to write together,” said Way. “There was an element of the new guy coming in and being like, ‘let’s do this! I’m stoked!’ It reminded us that this is still really fun to do.”

On *Lifetime of Comedy*, Way, Smith and the rest of the Parson Red Heads—Brette Marie Way (drums, vocals), Robbie Augspurger (bass), and Raymond Richards (multi-instrumentalist, producer)—navigate new terrain, excavating the bedrock of their well-honed sound and allowing it to be remolded into an altogether new alchemy of songcraft. While still quintessentially a Parson Red Heads record, *Lifetime…* is, as Way contends, the most collaborative of their recordings to date.

“It’s by far the most collaborative the band has been as far as writing and arranging the songs. I’ve never brought songs to the band in a less-finished state than I did with these ones. Even though there are moments on it that I do think sound fairly like classic Parsons songs, there are also moments that I think are really different and not like anything we’ve ever done before. It’s always fun to do that and not regret it. Like, we tried something new and it still worked!”

Allowing the songs to evolve through the prism of a new dynamic within the group gave space for songs like **“All I Wanted”** and “**Coming Along”** to traverse new thoroughfares of driving, anthemic real estate. Throughout *Lifetime of Comedy*, Way explores modes of self-reflection, expanding on the thematic anchors of *Blurred Harmony*’s nostalgia-driven milieu to put the developmental onus on Way alone.

“I’ve personally been able to be more honest with myself and find more humility in trying to do away with pride,” explains Way. “In a lot of ways I think it’s more me realizing I can be honest about the things I’m learning about myself, not as general lessons but as fairly specific ones sometimes.”

The last track on the record, **“Falling Fading,”** is a direct reaction to years spent striving and scheming to make it or get ahead, only to realize that it’s important to slow down and take your eyes off of yourself for your own good. Similarly, the title track is a boldly personal snapshot that attempts to reconcile the lessons Way has learned, where those lessons have taken him, and hoping to cauterize any subsequent wounds therein.

“That song is a lot about seeing where you’re at, being honest about who you are and trying to become a better person,” said Way.

The journey endeavored through repeated listens to *Lifetime of Comedy* takes the Parsons’ signature harmony-laden psych-roots stew to more uplifting realms, emboldening cathartic moments of moving forward by understanding where you’ve been. Theirs is an amalgam of blustery songwriting, rich in sunny, melodic, intuitive interplay that can only come from playing together for 15 years, which makes the record’s magical symbioses, despite the departing Fowles, all the more remarkable. Fowles, though, wasn’t really all that far away, either, and provides vocal harmonies on the album opener “Heaven Knows I’m Trying” and the raucous “I Never Would Have Changed.”

“There were a couple of vocal parts where Raymond said, ‘Man, Sam’s voice would just be the perfect voice for this harmony,’ recalled Way. “And that felt good to have that there because I miss singing with Sam.”

If there’s ever been a time to foster and encourage self-reflection, it’s probably right now. The Parson Red Heads have absorbed the trials and tribulations of their long career as musicians, family and friends and come out the other side stronger. And that’s what *Lifetime of Comedy* is all about.

“It felt like a good chance to see what this group sounds like when we’re playing together, rather than trying to sound like what we think people want us to be,” said Way. “We all worked together really hard to write these songs and put our egos aside and tried to make the best songs that we could, together.”