Johnathan Rice has done his best work to date on his third full length LP Good Graces (SQE Music). When asked about this collection of songs, Rice spoke candidly about his attempt to make what he called “healing music.”

“Some people really close to me had been going through an exceptionally rough time, therefore I was going through a rough time,” he admits. “People that I love very much were struggling with extreme darkness. Thoughts of suicide and deep hopelessness. Fundamental questions like: do I want to be here or not? That absolutely informed the writing of this record. It wasn’t about exploring how difficult and dark things were and lamenting the situation. I tried to heal myself and the people around me with the music. It was about finding the frequencies, the melodies, and the words that would help. That was in the front of my mind. That was the best I could do for the people I love the most.”

In order to collect his thoughts and focus the writing, Rice crossed coasts, leaving his Laurel Canyon home for a friend’s New York City abode. Having just wrapped up a year of touring the world behind his collaboration with Jenny Lewis—Jenny and Johnny’s I’m Having Fun Now—January 2012 in the Big Apple proved oddly peaceful for the singer, songwriter and producer. It would be the first solo material since 2007’s Further North.

“I had been so busy recording and touring that it was necessary to take a month away from home and write,” he goes on. “It was a conscious choice – I had been exploring writing and making records with other people – I really wanted to return to my own sound, which I feel is clearer than ever. It was time for another solo album.”

Even though the LP is unequivocally his vision, he wasn’t entirely alone. Over the course of seven days, he tracked the album alongside Dawes bassist Wiley Gelber and longtime drummer Jason Boesel at engineer Pierre de Reeder’s Kingsize North Studio in North Hollywood. Rice handled most of the production and guitar duties, but Rice’s frequent collaborator and friend Farmer Dave Scher also added some crucial finishing touches at his studio in Venice Beach—in between night surfing sessions and parties at Mollusk Surf Shop. In fact, longboard legend Chad Marshall lends vocals to the surf-rock-noir “Surfer’s Lament.” Rice’s long-standing obsession with the female voice is further explored throughout Good Graces – the record features major contributions from Jenny Lewis, the Watson Twins and Z Berg.

The record’s first single “Nowhere at the Speed of Light” marries organic instrumentation with the hammering insistence of an EDM track.

He explains, “I’ve always loved juxtaposing happy upbeat melodies with darker lyrics. I think the character in that song feels like his life has stalled, and his dreams have lost value. Life is at a standstill, so to speak. As far as the music goes, I’m a rock or folk musician, and I live in that world, obviously. I do love dance music though. I tried to write a rock song that had a similar energy to a dance song.”

Elsewhere on the album, he teams up with Jenny Lewis and the Watson Twins for “Lou Rider,” which “has that title because the vocal is kinda Lou Reed and the groove is kinda Low Rider” and the album’s standout track – “My Heart Belongs To You” – an unadulterated and uncynical song of love.

Everything has led up to Good Graces for Johnathan Rice. Growing up between America and Scotland, he moved to New York in September of 2001. His first solo album Trouble Is Real dropped four years later, and he’d formally arrived. Seeing song placements everywhere from Grey’s Anatomy to The O.C., to the Hangover 2 Soundtrack, he has toured the world as a headlining artist and also supporting R.E.M., Ray Lamontagne, Pavement, Belle And Sebatastian, Bright Eyes, Death Cab for Cutie, Phoenix, and more. Rice’s achievements extend outside of music, including channeling Roy Orbison in the Academy Award-winning film, Walk the Line.

Good Graces is by far the most revealing portrait of Rice thus far. “I want everyone to feel what I felt while making the record,” he leaves off. “It was my intention to put something positive out there. I hope you can feel the sincerity of that attempt.”