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Old Dominion

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INTERVIEW WITH BRANDI CARLILE

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEWS

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Editor
Zoe Hodges • +44 (0) 1622 823 922
zoe.hodges@hand-media.com

US Editor
Eric Dahl • +44 (0) 1622 823 920
eric.dahl@hand-media.com

Designer
Sophia Kerby • +44 (0) 1622 823 920
sophia.kerby@hand-media.com

Sales Manager
Adrian Major • +44 (0) 1622 391 625
adrian.major@hand-media.com

Group Sales Manager
Duncan Armstrong • +44 (0) 1622 823 926
duncan.armstrong@hand-media.com

Subscriptions Manager
Gemma Creed • +44 (0) 1622 823 920
gemma.creed@hand-media.com

Finance Director
Charlotte Prett • +44 (0) 1622 823 920
accounts@hand-media.com

Publisher
Jon Pittock • +44 (0) 1622 823 925
jon.pittock@hand-media.com

CEO
David Rossiter • +44 (0) 1622 823 920
david.rossiter@hand-media.com

Published by Hand Media International
Goldings, Elphicks Farm,Water Lane,
Hunton,Kent, ME15 0SG. UK.

HAND MEDIA
INTERNATIONAL
print | digital | video

Telephone: +44 (0) 1622 823 920
Fax: +44 (0) 1622 823 933
Email: info@maverick-country.com
Website: www.maverick-country.com

Subscriptions
Maverick is on sale in the UK via the WH Smith & Sainsburys network. Also available in Ireland, Sweden, Norway and the USA. Contact Gemma Creed on +44 (0) 1622 823 920 or email gemma.creed@hand-media.com

Reprints
For reprints of specific pages within this magazine please telephone Sophie Frondigoun on +44 (0) 1622 823 920 or email: sophie.frondigoun@hand-media.com.
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FROM THE EDITOR...

It has been a busy summer here at Maverick despite not having the usual amount of festivals or gigs to attend. In a previous issue, I mentioned that the time away from the stage had allowed artists to dive into writing and recording music; we're still seeing the after effects of that as those artists share with us the finished products.

For some artists though, they have dived deep into the archives of their careers to find hidden gems to share with us. At the beginning of the month Emmylou Harris released a very special recording of a concert she and the Nash Ramblers played back in 1990 - the sound is so sharp and the emotion so raw. She sat down with us to discuss what it was like for her going back to that time and hearing such an incredible show all these years later.

Whilst some artists are just beginning their journey, such as Kameron Marlowe who is our 'One to Watch', others are taking their final bow. The Queen of rockabilly, Wanda Jackson has had a truly illustrious career but her album 'Encore' marks the end of an era as she passes the baton to the younger generation.

One lady who is a part of that younger generation, Sonia Leigh, who co-wrote a song for Jackson's final album, also took time out to chat to us about getting back on the road. Whilst America is beginning to open up and tours resume, we still face cancellations here in the UK.

Luckily the artists who are back to touring the States are keeping us entertained by still finding time to get into the recording studio. Our cover artists Old Dominion spoke to us whilst on tour about their fourth studio album and the special bond they all share, which is the secret to their success.

A highlight for myself in this issue was speaking with Brandi Carlile, who knows all too well the importance of surrounding yourself with the right people in the creative industries. She spoke of her success with twin brothers and writing partners Tim and Phil Hanseroth and her GRAMMY award win as part of The Highwomen.



Speaking of writing partners, our Nashville editor, Eric Dahl brings us a taste of music city as he reflects upon Summer NAMM and fills us in on the latest exhibitions at the Country Music Hall of Fame.

I truly believe that behind every song is a whole team that doesn't always get the recognition they deserve. This issue of Maverick features producers and songwriters as well as talented artists from all over the world. I felt like the creatives that we interviewed took us on a journey through the music so I hope you'll grab a brew and a biscuit and enjoy coming on this journey with us.

ZOE HODGES
EDITOR

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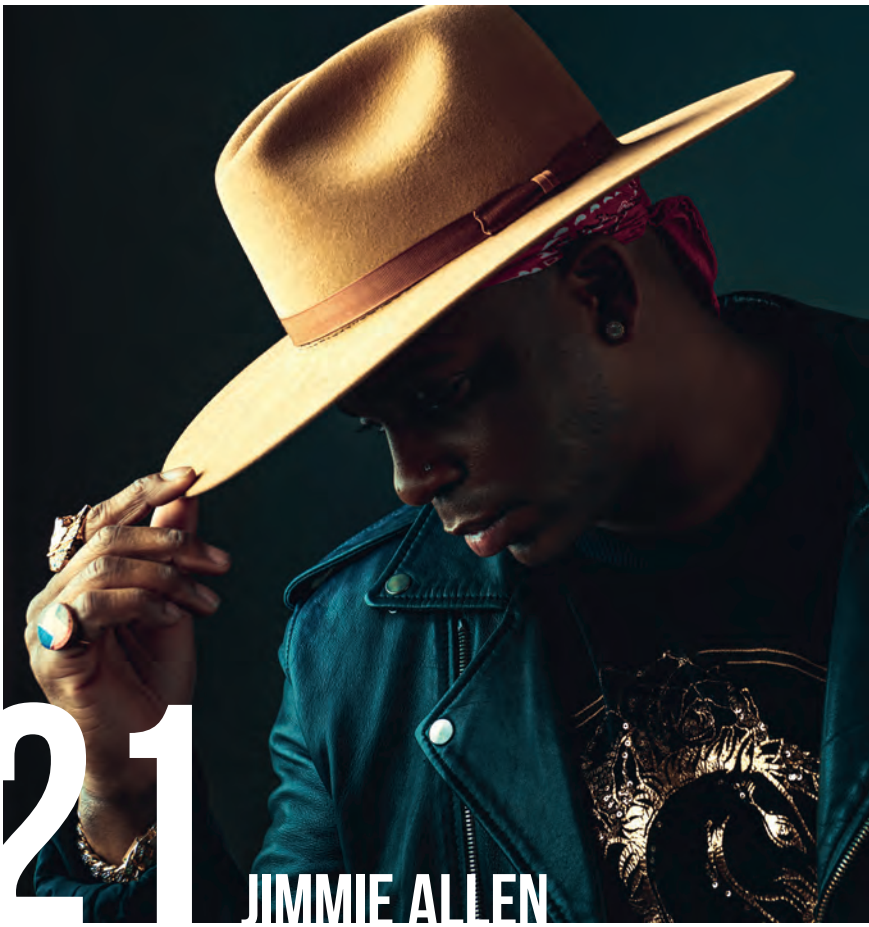
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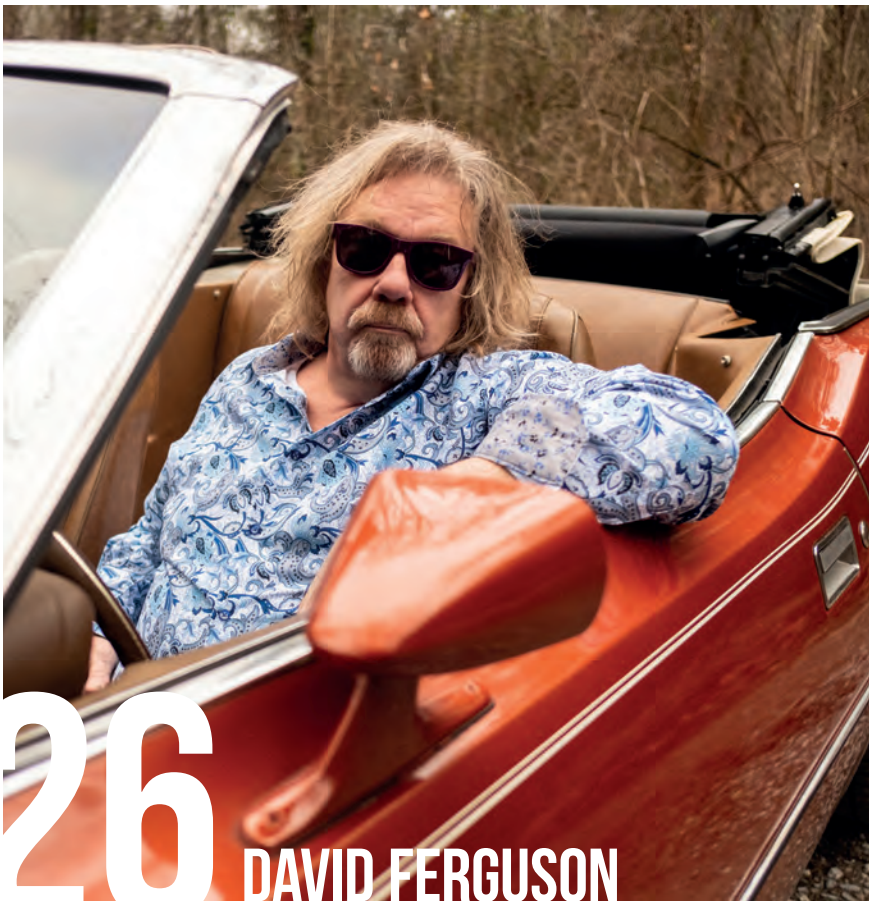
Contributors: Eric Dahl (Tools of the Trade, CMHoF, NAMM, Chairman at the Board, Slane Concerts)
Photos: Matthew Berrinato (Kameron Marlowe, Niko Moon), John Shearer (Cassadee Pope, Jimmie Allen, Tenille Townes), Jeff Johnson (Kameron Marlowe, Chris Young), Johannes Garblinger (Yonder Boys), Alexa King (Sam Williams), Jason Davis (CMHoF), Mason Allen (Old Dominion), Scott Simontacchi (David Ferguson), Jack Spencer, Kat Villacorta (Emmylou Harris), Neil Krug (Brandi Carlile), Lauren Morrell (Sonia Leigh), Emma Lee (Wanda Jackson) Rob Blackham (Curse of Lono), C. Ruiz (Parker McCollum)
Cover Image: Mason Allen

MAVERICK

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LATEST NEWS

ACM Honours

The 14th Annual Academy of Country Music Honors™, recognised the special award honourees, and Industry and Studio Recording Award winners from the 55th and 56th Academy of Country Music Awards™. The event featured a star-studded lineup of live performances and award presentations celebrating Special Awards recipients Joe Galante and Rascal Flatts (ACM Cliffie Stone Icon Award), Lady A and Ross Copperman (ACM Gary Haber Lifting Lives Award), Luke Combs and Michael Strickland (ACM Gene Weed Milestone Award), Dan + Shay (ACM Jim Reeves International Award), RAC Clark (ACM Mae Boren Axton Service Award), Toby Keith (ACM Merle Haggard Spirit Award), Loretta Lynn, Gretchen Peters and Curly Putman (ACM Poet's Award) and Ken Burns's Country Music (ACM Tex Ritter Film Award).

FEATURED NEWS

Countdown to Grand Ole Opry 5000th show

Last year the Grand Ole Opry celebrated it's 95th birthday and marked the event with a special concert and documentary. This year the countdown has begun, as it prepares to host it's 5000th show. Artists to perform at the special event, which will take place on October 30th, include Bill Anderson, Terri Clark, Vince Gill, Chris Janson, Jeannie Seely, Connie Smith, The Gatlin Brothers and Chris Young, with more artists to be announced. The ticketed show will be available to stream live on Circle, including its Circle All Access Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube channels.

EDITOR'S PICK



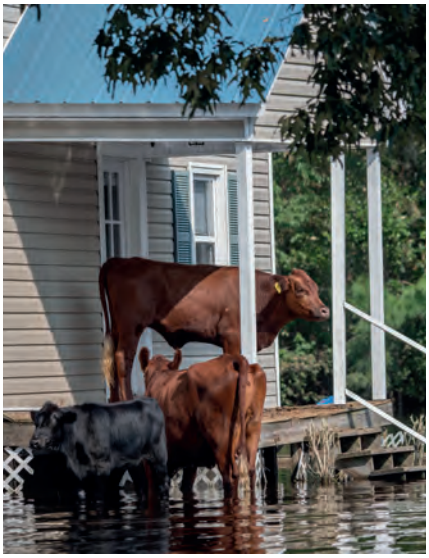
CMA Summer Jam

The CMA Summer Jam which took place in Nashville back in July is being shown on ABC in early September and there are hopes that highlights may be shown later down the line here in the UK. The three-hour concert special, featured Jimmie Allen, Gabby Barrett, Dierks Bentley, BRELAND, Brothers Osborne, Luke Bryan, Eric Church, Luke Combs, Florida Georgia Line, Mickey Guyton, HARDY, Miranda Lambert, Carly Pearce, Thomas Rhett, Darius Rucker, Blake Shelton, Gwen Stefani, Cole Swindell, Carrie Underwood, Lainey Wilson and Dwight Yoakam. Further highlights can be found on our website!



CMA International nominees

The nominees have been announced for the international categories of the CMA's. There is British interest in several categories; Nigel Hassler from CAA is nominated for the Rob Potts International Live Music Advancement Award whilst Chris York is nominated for his marketing work with Country 2 Country. Ricky Marshall from BBC Radio 2 earns a nomination in the media category whilst Baylen Leonard receives a nod in the broadcasting category. Artists, The Shires and Yola also receive recognition for their achievements.



Loretta Lynn's ranch flooded

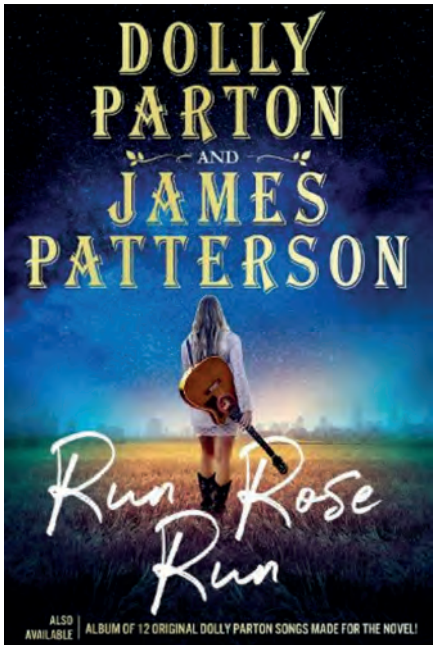
Some sad news came out of Tennessee in mid-August as storm Henri ripped through the State causing severe flooding. Legendary country singer Loretta Lynn had to evacuate and her ranch flooded. The real loss though was her dear friend and ranch foreman, Wayne Spears and the 21 other residents in Waverly who tragically lost their lives. At the time of printing, 10 others are still missing. Loretta Lynn's granddaughter and fellow country singer Tayla Lynn launched a fundraising campaign to help the families of all those affected in the area and many artists within the genre have followed suit and helped with the fundraising efforts.

Granger Smith baby

Granger Smith and his wife Amber have welcomed a baby boy into the world; Maverick Beckham, the couple's fourth child, was born on August 20th. The country singer behind such hits as *Backroad Song* and *If The Boot Fits*, announced the news on instagram saying both baby and mum were doing well. It comes two years after their son River tragically drowned. The pair have fundraised profusely since then and paid tribute to him during this pregnancy. Congratulations to Granger and Amber, welcome to the world Maverick!

Country Music Hall of Fame Inductees

Being inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame is the highest honour that can be bestowed upon an artist or industry member. The class of 2021 was recently revealed, announced by the Country Music Association and sees two of Nashville's most decorated musicians, a mother-daughter duo and a legend of soul who was raised listening to the Grand Ole Opry. Eddie Bayers and Pete Drake were inducted in the triennial Recording/ Touring musician category whilst Ray Charles joins as the annual Veteran Era artist and The Judds receive the Modern Era Artist medallion.



James Patterson and **Dolly Parton book**

Dolly Parton is set to publish her first novel in 2022. She has teamed up with novelist James Patterson to write 'Run, Rose, Run', a story about a young woman who moves to Nashville to pursue her music-making dreams. Parton will release an album of the same name alongside the book, consisting of 12 original tracks. She says the new songs "were written based on the characters and situations in the book" and their lyrics will also feature in the novel. "It's been an honour – and a hell of a lot of fun – to work with the inimitable Dolly Parton," said Patterson, who has sold more than 300 million books. Both UK and US editions will be published on 7 March 2022.

TRENDING



CMT Giants

CMT Charley Pride tribute

CMT aired the concert special, 'CMT Giants: Charley Pride, a musical tribute to the late Country Music Hall of Fame member. Pride passed away in 2020 due to complications from Covid 19. George Strait, Darius Rucker and Gladys Knight all took to the stage. Strait gave a stand out performance of Pride's 1970 number one hit, **Is Anybody Goin To San Antone**. Also on the bill was Jimmie Allen, Mickey Guyton and Luke Combs. Pride's son Dion sang **Mountain of Love** whilst Lee Ann Womack took on one of his signature hits, **Crystal Chandelier**.

CMT GIANTS: CHARLEY PRIDE, A MUSICAL TRIBUTE TO THE LATE COUNTRY MUSIC HALL OF FAME MEMBER

Obituaries

DON EVERLY



Don Everly, one half of the duo The Everly Brothers, passed away on August 21st aged 84. It brings the curtain down on the vocal duo who helped to shape the sound of the 50's and 60's, after younger brother Phil died in 2014. The duo who hailed from Nashville had a string of hits in the late 50's including *Walk Right Back*, *All I Have To Do Is Dream* and *Cathy's Clown* all of which charted highly both in the States and here, in the UK. The latter topped the UK charts for an unprecedented nine weeks. The pair were famed for their harmonies and managed to successfully dip their toes into both Rock & Roll and Country music and were inducted into both genres Hall of Fame. The pair had a very public split in 1973 and had trouble with drug use, but the brothers reunited in a touching performance at the Royal Albert Hall ten years later. Don was married four times and is survived by his latest wife Adela, four of his five children and his 102 year old mum.

NANCI GRIFFITH



Texas singer-songwriter Nanci Griffith passed away on August 13th aged 68. The GRAMMY award winning folk and country artist, best known for songs such as *Love at the Five & Dime* and her album Other Voices, Other Rooms, built her career on a storytelling style of songwriting, which had a literary flare to it. She focused on the intricate details of her characters day to day lives, crafting beautiful and relatable songs that resonated with her fans across the world. Griffith had a knack for picking songs as well as writing them, she was the first to record Julie Gold's *From A Distance* and it was a top ten hit for her in Ireland, though it was Bette Midler who made it famous. She released 18 albums during her 36 year career. Her songs were recorded by a number of notable artists from Emmylou Harris to Kathy Mattea and Willie Nelson. She experienced a number of health issues in the 90's, she overcame breast cancer in 96 followed by thyroid cancer in 98. Many of her peers, including fellow songwriters Beth Nielsen Chapman and Gretchen Peters, left touching tributes online after the sad news of her passing.

TOM T HALL



Tom T Hall died in Franklin, Tennessee on August 20th, he was 85 years old. Nicknamed 'The Storyteller' he wrote 12 number one hits including the international, pop cross-over hit *Harper Valley PTA*. Born in Kentucky, Hall enlisted in the US Army aged 21 and performed over the Armed Forces Radio Network and wrote comedic songs about army life. Harper Valley PTA was one of his earliest successes. Recorded in 68 by Jeannie C Riley topped the hot 100 and Country singles charts, won a GRAMMY award and a CMA award before inspiring a TV programme. Hall also went on to have several books published about songwriting between 1976 and 1996, such as 'The Songwriters Handbook' and 'The Storytellers Nashville'. He was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 2008, the Bluegrass Hall of Fame in 2018 and the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 2019; out of all the awards he's won, he often said the latter was the highest honour.



Summer NAMM Show in Nashville

A worldwide Pandemic has been hard on everyone in many ways. Music, fortunately, has been an outlet for all of us and many people that had not played instruments before, started since they were under lock down and couldn't leave their homes except for necessities.

The National Association of Music Merchants was founded back in 1901 as a way for music instrument/gear manufacturers to release to products to potential music stores, online outlets, media outlets and the public. NAMM has a long history of bringing musicians and companies together in one venue. Due to the Pandemic the Winter NAMM in Anaheim, California (U.S.A.) was canceled and was conducted virtually with sessions and performances from around the world instead of in the Anaheim Convention Center. For the Summer NAMM show in Nashville, TN they decided to move forward with an in-person convention at the Music City Convention Center in downtown near the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum on July 14th through Friday July 16th. This is a great venue location with easy parking directly across from the facility.



There were many manufacturers and instrument producers on hand and one my favourite parts of Summer NAMM is that it wasn't as big or crowded so you can actually discuss the new products more fully and understand what makes them different. Many of the new products featured in this issue of Maverick Country Magazine I discovered at Summer NAMM show. There were so many new and innovative products you will be seeing and reading about more of them in upcoming issues. Baldman Percussion released a new percussion effect called The Stank Foot which can be used on the floor, on top of a drum or on a table.

Gallagher Guitars is under new management and showcased many of their new handcrafted acoustic instruments. Teton Guitars displayed their new line of acoustics aimed at more budget conscious players on a budget that still want great sound and playability. IK Multimedia had a great floor plan showcasing the new AmpliTube X-GEAR pedals they will be releasing this fall (expect a review on all three of those). Brian Wampler and the Wampler pedals team were on hand to answer questions and show their new pedals and effects. Advanced Plating, based in Nashville, featured some of their new guitar bridges, pickup covers and machine heads for guitars and basses. Also at the event was Jack White's companies Third Man Hardware and Records.

Taylor Guitars secured their usual room on the 2nd floor so I spent a good portion of time playing all of their acoustic guitars whilst Reverend Guitars was on hand with a new electric guitar release and their full line for vendors, artists and media to play and ask Ken Haas the owner questions about. Option Knob Inc. displayed a new pedal knob allowing easier control of effects volume and effect with the tap of your foot.

Meanwhile, the Muziclight company had new instrument hangers featuring a light that shines behind your instrument. MagSlide displayed their full line of magnesium slides plus their three new releases. The family owned business of Killer-Q had new guitar and bass straps to show and other merchandise whilst Kepma Acoustic guitars had a front wall floor space display.

JET Pedals had three new effects releases at the NAMM show that will be covered in upcoming issues. Furch Guitars had new acoustic guitar models featuring custom woods and Ferro Guitars explained their new bridges for stop tail and Tele style bridges that were engraved. Deering Banjos were on hand as was D 'Addario & Company Inc. with booths and products.

To Recap, this Summer NAMM show might not have been one of the largest that I have attended but having an in-person NAMM reflected the reliance of music gear manufactures, music stores and musicians. I had a great time at Summer NAMM and as always learned a lot about many incredible new products! And caught up with some old friends that I only get to see at these shows! I look forward to attending the next NAMM show!

www.namm.org

Country Music Hall of Fame class of 2021

Being inducted into the Country Music Hall of fame is often considered as one of the greatest honours of the genre. Reba McEntire made the announcement of the 2021 honorees during a livestream presentation, it sees The Judds, Ray Charles, Eddie Bayers and Pete Drake all being honoured by the hall. The mother and daughter duo the Judds will be inducted as Modern Era artists, legendary soul vocalist, Ray Charles, who was raised listening to the Grand Ole Opry, will be enshrined in the Veteran category and pedal-steel player, Drake and drummer, Bayers will be honoured in the Recording and/or Touring Musician category.



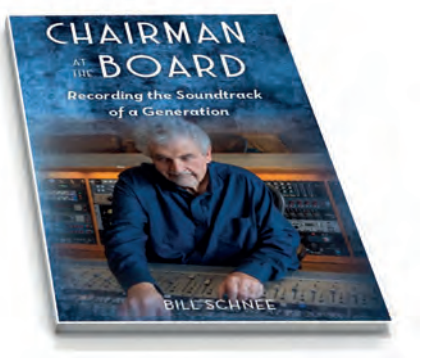
"As an artist, it's wonderful to be included in the family of country. As a believer, I thank God for my gift. As an American, it's just wonderful to celebrate anything, to show up and say thank you"

The duo of Naomi Judd and Wynonna Judd, signed their record deal in 1983 and went on to chart 14 Number One hits over a seven-year period. "As a daughter, 20 years, it's about damn time," Wynonna said. "As an artist, it's wonderful to be included in the family of country. As a believer, I thank God for my gift. As an American, it's just wonderful to celebrate anything, to show up and say thank you."

Charles dueted with country icons like Willie Nelson, Merle Haggard, and Johnny Cash throughout his career. Pedal-steel guitarist Pete Drake played on timeless recordings like Bob Dylan's "Lay Lady Lay," Tammy Wynette's "Stand by Your Man," and George Jones' "He Stopped Loving Her Today." He is the first pedal-steel player to be inducted into the hall. Meanwhile, Bayers is the first drummer inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame. He has performed on recordings by Dolly Parton, Alan Jackson, and the Judds, among many others. The new members will be inducted in a ceremony at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum at a future date.

Chairman at the Board Recording the Soundtrack of a Generation – New book

Unfortunately, many of the people that are behind the scenes creating the music for all of us to hear don't receive the attention or accolades that they deserve. One of these people is Bill Schnee. He started out as an aspiring musician but was then drawn into mixing, engineering and producing other artists music. In "Chairman at the Board" Schnee tells the story of his career and life as it was intertwined with the biggest music names in history. This included Ringo Starr (Bill is on the cover of one of his albums), Carly Simon, Barbara Streisand, the Pointer Sisters, Art Garfunkel, Marvin Gaye, Huey Lewis and even Whitney Houston. Bill achieved two Grammy awards, from Steely Dan's Aja and Gaucho albums, and 125 gold and platinum records, Dove awards and Emmy awards while doing what he loved bringing out the best in songwriters and performers. Some of the stories in "Chairman at the Board" are humors and others are sad and reflect the underbelly of the music business. But through it all Bill kept Producing and Engineering music with his heart as he still does to this day in Nashville, TN. Besides the autobiographical main parts of the book at the end Schnee included two extra chapters, one on Technology and Music and another on his Personal Philosophies. Both of these chapters are helpful to anyone that is creating, recording or mixing music and who better to learn from. Bill had so much to cover that the book couldn't contain it all so extra chapters are available. Visit his website at **www.billschnee.com/got-a-key** if you can complete the phrase from his book it will provide the extra chapters. There are rumors of a documentary in the works for Bill Schnee and always more music. Pickup a copy of "Chair at the Board" and enjoy it with some popcorn, Bill's favorite treat.





Slane Whiskey a History of Live Music

This past August Maverick Country Magazine was invited to a virtual press conference with Alex Conyngham whose family has been a part of the fabric of Slane Castle in Meath, Ireland since 1703.

Although Slane is known for their quality Irish Whiskey that was launched in 2009 and began distilling on the property in 2012, most of the conversation revolved around the Slane Concert Series and all of the amazing musical groups that have played at their shows. The original concept to have Live Outdoor concerts on the property surrounding Slane Castle started back in 1981 with Alex's father Lord Henry Mount Charles. Artists from Bob Dylan to U2, David Bowie and Bruce Springsteen have performed there. The legendary Rock Band Thin Lizzy was the first to perform at Slane and the last show featured Metallica! The band U2 moved into the Slane Castle briefly and recorded an album there.

Conyngham reflected on childhood memories as Bono and U2 were recording the "Unforgettable Fire" in their dining room at the castle. Future plans for music ties will include spotlighting more original Irish artists and the creation of Spotify lists from bands and artists that have played in the Slane Concert Series. The addition and creation of an Irish Whiskey on the castle property was viewed as a way to further diversify the family's holdings and make it a tourist destination for adult beverages and music. A total of 1,500 acres of land were planted in Barley to help facilitate this brewing process. As Alex stated during the Press Conference "Music and Whiskey ties them all together."

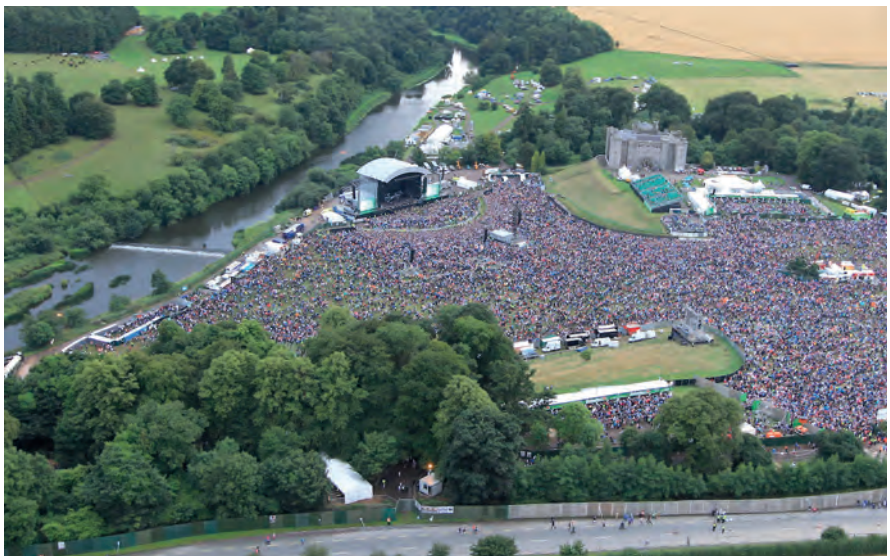
The Distillery itself is situated in the 250-year-old stables at the castle. In 2018, thanks to backing by Brown Forman (makers of Jack Daniels whiskey) the distillery officially opened offering three different kinds of Irish Whiskey. Slane is aged in virgin oak barrels from Tennessee (U.S.A.).

Alex is already making plans for 2022 concerts and shows with probably more than one happening if all goes well. Conyngham's hope is that some of the shows will be a bit smaller than the 80,000 capacity Slane Concerts they have put on in the past. Even when they aren't putting on major music shows you can still take a tour of the Slane Castle and Distillery and hear some of the great history of the castle, land, people and concerts.

Slane is young for a distillery but they have already achieved awards in 2019 and 2020 with a Gold Medal, Tried and True and achieving 92 points in the Ultimate Spirits Challenge. On the music side it sounds as though Slane might start featuring virtual concerts from the property in the coming year as well to help share the music and venue to world wide audience.

Alex's hope is also to showcase Irish artists that might not be gaining the proper attention they and their original music deserve. Slane Castle is a destination and an epicenter for musical entertainment, history, the Irish people and now award winning Slane Irish Whiskey. Visit the Slane website to see what events and showcases they have coming up this year. Lord Henry and Alex are ahead of their time with the concerts and distillery and they represent the Conyngham family tradition very well!

www.slaneirishwhiskey.com



Country Music Hall of Fame New Martina McBride Exhibit

This past month at the Country Music Hall of Fame in downtown Nashville TN Country Music Legend Martina McBride was honoured with her own exhibit entitled Martina McBride: The Power of Her Voice! In her career so far, McBride has achieved 20 Top 10 singles, six number one hit songs and sold more than 23 million albums. Her albums have achieved 9 Platinum, 3 Double Platinum, 2 Triple Platinum and 14 Gold. Martina has also won 15 music awards in total, including three from the ACMs and four from the Country Music Association.

It is hard to fathom that McBride has been in the business of Country Music for thirty years now. The Hall chose McBride for this honour, not only for her great musical achievements with hit songs and awards, but also for her natural talent and cultural impact. Items that you will find in the new exhibit include Martina's wardrobe from multiple awards shows and performances including her induction into the Grand Ole Opry by Country Music Royalty Loretta Lynn. There are also several items from her childhood on display.

At the opening ceremony Martina said, "I am beyond thrilled to have my own exhibit at the Country Music Hall of Fame. It is a dream come true." On August 1st McBride also gave a special performance at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum's CMA Theatre in which she performed several of her biggest hits including "Wild Angles," "Independence Day" and This One's for the Girls." You can also watch this recorded performance on the Hall's YouTube channel as part of their digital series "Live at the Hall."



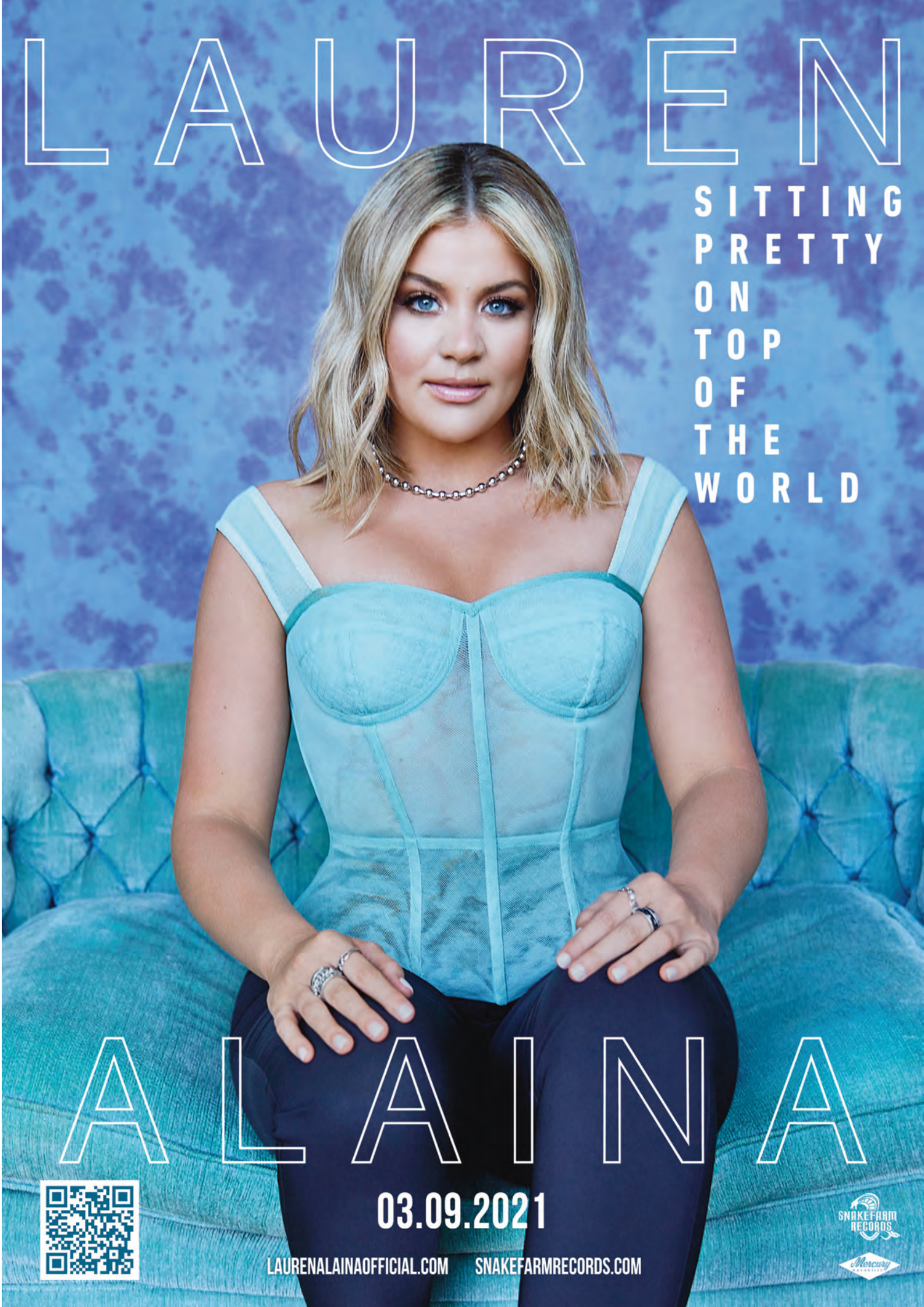


Martina was honoured by the RIAA with a plaque for achieving 20 million RIAA certified career units sold and 23 million in worldwide sales with her RCA albums. To celebrate her thirty years in Country Music, McBride has released a double vinyl album entitled "Martina McBride Greatest Hits: The RCA Years." As if this weren't enough, she also has published two cook books which are available now; "Martina's Kitchen Mix: My Recipe Playlist for Real Life" and "Around the Table: Recipes and Inspiration for Gatherings Throughout the Year." She also has a podcast "Vocal Point with Martina McBride" that has completed its first season and included such stars as Blake Shelton, Loretta Lynn, Lukas Nelson, Garth Brooks and Emmylou Harris and a major tour is planned that will span 2021 and 2022. A new holiday album "White Christmas" is set for release in October and pre-sale for the vinyl record have already begun. Martina McBride: The Power of Her Voice exhibit is set to run until August 7th of 2022.

"I am beyond thrilled to have my own exhibit at the Country Music Hall of Fame. It is a dream come true."

If you can't make it to the Country Music Hall of Fame in person this year be certain to visit their website and YouTube channel to stay connected with Country Stars from the Past, Present and Future. You can also follow Martina McBride on social media and her website for music releases, tours, podcasts and possibly another cookbook? It is great to see a Country Music artist that has had such an incredible impact on the industry achieve this status with the Hall and it is well deserved. Grand Ole Opry Member, Martina McBride, isn't resting on her laurels as continues to push the envelope with her recordings and performances!

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Band of brothers

As, arguably, the biggest band in country music prepares to release their fourth studio album, Time, Tequila & Therapy, Matthew Ramsey sits down to tell us more about the close relationship between the group of friends

Old Dominion are one of the biggest bands in country music, their previous two albums topped the country albums chart whilst seven of their singles topped the country airplay charts. The band, made up of Brad Tursi, Trevor Rosen, Geoff Sprung, Whit Sellers and Matthew Ramsey are gearing up to release their fourth studio album, 'Time, Tequila & Therapy' and are embarking on an energetic tour across the States. Matthew Ramsey took time out of his day to share the secrets behind the bands illustrious career so far and tell us some of the stories behind the songs on this new record.

Early beginnings

Matthew Ramsey, the groups frontman, has always known that music was the path he wanted to take, from listening to his father's records to watching his Uncle perform, it was all inspiration that Ramsey soaked up! "My dad was a huge fan of all music. He just loved country, rock, R&B - he loved everything. He had a record collection, and he would pull a record out and play one song off it, maybe like Waylon Jennings, and then he would put it back. Then he pulled another one out, it might be Smokey Robinson - it was just kind of all over the map. Then there was a radio in the kitchen, there still is a radio, that was always playing country music." Ramsey reminisced, "When I was a young kid, I was probably nine or 10. I saw my brother's friend play the drums and I was just very affected by that. Then my uncle played guitar and I was extremely drawn to him and what he was doing, that was really inspiring to me. I saw my first concert, which was Huey Lewis and the News - I knew that I had to do something in music."

The group met up in Nashville, four of the five boys had connections to Virginia, so the name part was easy since the group share their name with the State's nickname. Their purpose was to jam together and write songs for other artists but along the way their success spiralled and the band found themselves playing shows, covering the hit songs they'd actually written. "For a while there, that was the whole reason that we moved to Nashville, we wanted to be songwriters." Ramsey says, "So we worked for a really long time, just to be successful songwriters, we didn't have stars in our eyes



Image credit: Mason Allen

to be successful artists." Ramsey recalls the first time they wrote together, "We knew each other for such a long time, and we were friends for such a long time. So the first time that we began playing together, it was already familiar, we weren't strangers, we were already friends and we knew each other's sensibilities. I think the first thing we ever really created together, all five of us was a song called *Break Up With Him*. That was sort of a different moment for us because we had played music together for quite a while, but to be able to create together from the ground up like that gave us all an extra little buzz."

Save It For A Rainy Day

Ramsey reflects upon the songs he's written that other artists have chosen to put out into the world, "We're still very proud and honoured

"We knew each other for such a long time, and we were friends for such a long time. So the first time that we began playing together, it was already familiar, we weren't strangers, we were already friends and we knew each other's sensibilities."

"We're still very proud and honoured when another artist picks our song. I would say, Save It For A Rainy Day, a song that Brad and I wrote for Kenny Chesney, is the one I'm most proud of."



TOP FIVE
SONGS WRITTEN BY THE MEMBERS OF OLD DOMINION

5. SAY YOU DO *DIERKS BENTLEY*
ROSEN AND RAMSEY TEAM UP WITH MCANALLY AGAIN FOR THIS AIRPLAY CHART TOPPER.

4. A GUY WALKS INTO A BAR
TYLER FARR
THIS WAS FARR'S FIRST NUMBER ONE ON THE AIRPLAY CHART. TURSI CO-WROTE THIS WITH MELISSA PIERCE AND JONATHAN SINGLETON.

3. MAKE YOU MISS ME *SAM HUNT*
A CHART TOPPER ON THE AIRPLAY CHARTS. RAMSEY WROTE THIS WITH HUNT AND JOSH OSBORNE.

2. BETTER DIG TWO
THE BAND PERRY
THIS SONG TOPPED THE AIRPLAY AND HOT COUNTRY SONGS CHARTS. ROSEN CO-WROTE THIS WITH BRANDY CLARK AND SHANE MCANALLY.

1. SAVE IT FOR A RAINY DAY
KENNY CHESNEY
THIS SONG SPENT THREE WEEKS ON THE COUNTRY AIRPLAY CHART IN 2015. RAMSEY AND TURSI WROTE THIS WITH ANDREW DORFF.

when another artist picks our song. I would say, *Save It For A Rainy Day*, a song that Brad and I wrote for Kenny Chesney, is the one I'm most proud of. That song has taken us on a pretty epic journey and is always going to be special." The friends are not formulaic in their approach to songwriting. After knowing each other so long, they are like brothers and feed off, and thrive on each others ideas. "A lot of times, it does start that way, from a title idea but it's different every time. As a songwriter, we've always got our radar open for it, so you're always listening to conversations, or whatever is happening in your life at the moment and writing down every idea. When you get together, you start just brainstorming and spitballing those ideas. Sometimes your title will remind someone of a piece of music that they've been working on or they'll be playing the guitar and whatever they're playing makes you remember a title that you had. So it can happen in all manner of different ways." Ramsey enthuses as he reflects upon their past hits.

The band first made the breakthrough with their second single *Break Up With Him*. All five members of the band wrote the song together and it was produced by their good friend Shane McAnally - a formidable songwriter and producer within the country genre. It topped the country airplay charts in 2015 and they backed this up with the release of the quirky *Snapback* a song that really defined the band's direction. It's snappy, clever lyrics and production which framed them became instantly recognisable as Old Dominion's sound. "Snapback has to be the strangest song we've ever written, it was a hit but it was centred around a hat!" Ramsey laughs.

The Nashville way

The band has gone from strength to strength with the likes of Shane McAnally, Josh Osborne and Matt Jenkins to call upon for writing sessions and production assistance. Elaborating on those collaborations Ramsey said, "All three of those writers have been a part of our careers since the beginning. We were all friends together, Shane, Josh, and Matt, before any of us had any success, we were all just broke songwriters trying to make it in Nashville. We found each other and we realised we all wrote really well together. That's Nashville for you, right? Just one person has some success and the rest step up with that person, and we all sort of rose through the ranks together. So we were very fortunate that those guys will set aside time for us at this point. Because they can be doing any number of things but I think, because we consider them family, they're a part of this journey just as much as anyone else."

The three of them were heavily involved with this latest record. Matt Jenkins co-wrote the penultimate song on the album with the band, the vivid and impactful, *Don't Forget Me*. "That was one that we started writing that morning. I can't remember who had the the idea of the title, but once a title like that gets thrown out, it's kind of jarring and everyone stops and goes, 'what could that mean? How do we write a song that gives that title?' Then we just start painting a picture really, it's a very magical thing that happens in a room full of writers that are in tune with each other and that song, it just becomes such a fast moving train that all of the ideas start flowing and flowing and you suddenly realise you're painting a picture. I think with that song in particular, it creates so much imagery that it does feel like we were painting that day."

The long game

Their first single off the album is *I Was On A Boat That Day*, which is still climbing up the Billboard charts. Ramsey recalls the journey that song has been on, "The title for that song *I Was On A Boat That Day* has been around since we were writing *Break Up With Him*. We've kind of joked about writing that song, we started



Image credit: Mason Allen

writing it and it was a different vibe, and a different direction entirely. But we did have that idea and just never finished it. It just got kicked around in writing sessions here and there throughout the years but we never did latch onto it. Once we were in Asheville, Brad brought it up again and it just seemed to be the right moment, for whatever reason. You never know when it's gonna stick, and it's worth hanging onto a good idea. So we held on to that one for quite a number of years and it finally stuck. It came out relatively fast after we decided to write it that day."

The record features a very exciting cross-genre collaboration; the band are joined by Gladys Knight for the song *Lonely Side of Town*. "It was meant to be I think, because we were making this album in Asheville, North Carolina. As we were listening to that song, after we had recorded it, it just was kind of begging for some sort of collaboration with a singer that was, maybe not in the country genre. We were talking about who would be great for it and Gladys Knight was mentioned. Then we realised that she actually lived in Asheville, North Carolina, somebody said, 'she lives right down the road from us, where we're recording right now.' So we asked the studio people if they knew her, and the studio manager was like, 'Yeah, we're really good friends, I'll call her.' She immediately said yes, we were shocked that she said yes so fast. It just kind of happened so easily, like, all we had to do was ask!" Ramsey exclaimed.

Ramsey ponders on his own favourites and hidden gems on the record, "It's so hard to pick

"It's so hard to pick a favourite, but I do really love No Hard Feelings. I just love the sentiment there. We took the title of the album from that song but everyone in the band has a different favourite, so that's the beauty of it."

Your live shows are really energetic, are you completely focused when you're on stage or do you let your mind wander?

There's a certain level of letting go that you have to do. If you're too focused or thinking about it too much, that's when I'll mess up. I'll start to think about the next song when I'm singing this song, and that's when both songs are going to suffer. So, if I just sort of let it go and enjoy the moment and look at the crowd and watch them enjoying it and kind of rely on my muscle memory, then I can really get into a true exchange with the crowd. So there's a certain level of letting go that needs to happen for it to be a great show.

QUICK *FIRE*

YOU'VE GOT A BIG RESPONSIBILITY... DESCRIBE EACH MEMBER OF THE BAND'S PERSONALITY AS A FLAVOUR OF POTATO CHIP?

OH MY GOSH, WOW! OKAY WHIT WOULD BE SALT AND VINEGAR - HE'S THAT GUY, A LITTLE SALTY. JEFF IS GOING TO HAVE TO BE LIKE, A SPICY FLAVOUR LIKE, JALAPENO. I THINK, BRAD, I'LL GO WITH THE CLASSIC, JUST POTATO CHIP BECAUSE HE'S JUST A CLASSIC GUY. LET'S SEE, TREVOR...TREVOR'S A TOUGH ONE, HE ALWAYS LIKES THE THINGS THAT NOBODY ELSE LIKES. SO IF THERE'S A CHIP OUT THERE THAT NO ONE REALLY LIKES...I WANT TO SAY DILL PICKLE FOR SOME REASON, BUT HE HATES PICKLES, SO I DON'T REALLY KNOW. MAYBE HE'S LIKE, COOL RANCH DORITO OR SOMETHING. I'M JUST A CORN CHIP, BECAUSE I'M KIND OF CORNY.

IF THEY WERE TO MAKE A MOVIE ABOUT YOUR LIVES, WHAT WOULD THE OPENING THEME SONG BE?

I WOULD LIKE IT TO BE SOMETHING LIKE, *HERE COMES THE SUN* OR SOMETHING, I DON'T KNOW IF IT HAS ANYTHING TO DO WITH MY LIFE, BUT IT CHANGES YOUR SURROUNDINGS AROUND YOU AND MAKES YOU PAY ATTENTION. I THINK THAT SONG IS SO BEAUTIFUL AND PERFECT THAT I WOULD LIKE IT TO BE SOMEWHERE, IF NOT THE OPENING SCENE, THE CLOSING SCENE.

"Can you believe this is our life right now?' It sort of forces everyone to sit down and think, we're very fortunate."

a favourite, but I do really love *No Hard Feelings*. I just love the sentiment there. We took the title of the album from that song but everyone in the band has a different favourite, so that's the beauty of it." Ramsey says, a smile audible in his voice.

Taking stock

As the band near the release of their fourth album, the three time CMA Vocal Group of the Year, are out on the road, lighting up the stage night after night for their fans. They've achieved so much as both songwriters and artists, they're true entertainers and there is so much more to come from the boys. The group of friends very rarely have time to look back and evaluate their success but from time to time the enormity of their career becomes impossible for the boys to ignore. "We don't talk about it a whole lot. I think if we do, it's because while we're out here on the road, someone will have a moment, where you just kind of look around and go, 'Can you believe this is our life right now?' It sort of forces everyone to sit down and think, we're very fortunate. Then we have lots of these barricades made up that we use to fence off the area around our bus, and they're covered with pictures that we've taken throughout the years. So everyday we walk down memory lane of what we've been doing for the past 10 years. So that's a pretty cool way to take a glance at what we've achieved. There's no one moment for us, it's just, every show, we're grateful for every bit of recognition."

The band are not resting on their laurels as, before fans have even had a chance to listen to 'Time, Tequila & Therapy,' they're already thinking about the next one! "We're actually working on the next one already. So we are on tour right now, as long as things keep heading in the right direction, we don't have to get shut down again. We're going to keep on touring and we're already talking about going into the studio to work on the next one. The way people consume music these days they want more, fast, so we're gonna try and give it to them." M





OLD DOMINION

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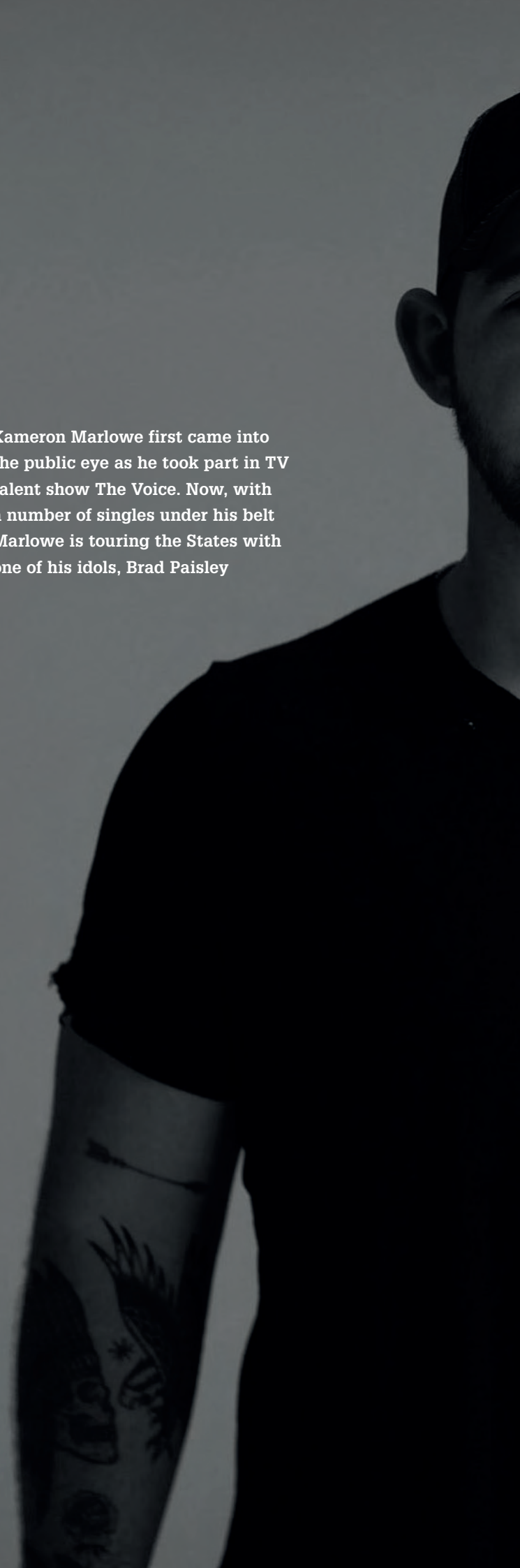
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ONE TO WATCH: KAMERON MARLOWE

Kameron Marlowe first came into the public eye as he took part in TV talent show The Voice. Now, with a number of singles under his belt Marlowe is touring the States with one of his idols, Brad Paisley



When did you first know that you wanted to be a musician?

I would say probably around 12 or 13 years old. I started singing in the church and knew that I loved to sing. Then I went into high school and around 15 or 16, I started a band and really just started loving music and just fell in love with the art of actually playing live shows. So I think that was when it all kind of fell into place for me.

On long car journeys what did your parents play to you? And what are you choosing to listen to now?

A lot of 90s country, a lot of 70s and 80s country as well, Aerosmith and early 80s to 90s rock and Pearl Jam. My music taste is all over the place; I listened to a lot of blues on my own, my family weren't big blues fans, but I really locked in on it and love that. Now, I listen to a little bit of everything. I try and immerse myself in as much music as I possibly can and just take it for what it is - I try to see other people's artistry.

You started your career on The Voice, what was that experience like for you and how has it shaped you as a musician?

I had a blast on the voice - I didn't really make it far - but I just enjoyed being around so many artists and so many songwriters. I fell in love with songwriting while I was out there and realised that that's what I wanted to do, and I realised that I had to be in Nashville to do that. So I met some friends that were on the show that are from Nashville, and I started coming in and out of town and hanging out with them and writing songs with them and learning the process. I guess that's kind of how I got into Nashville. I love the voice so much and I love that I got a chance to be a part of it.

You spoke there about the songwriting process, and I wondered how it works for you? Do you always write with other people? Does it always start with a lyric or melody or is it just different every time?

It's different every time. I like to write by myself, that's when I can be the most vulnerable in a room. There are certain writers that I can be very vulnerable with too, but other writers I choose to back off a little bit and keep some lyrics for myself in a way but I do enjoy co-writing; I think co-writing is a really special thing, especially in Nashville.

Who are your favourite co-writers to work with?

I have a long list! I love writing with Dan Isbell, Jessi Alexander, Shane McAnally, Jonathan Singleton, Casey Beathard… there's so many!



Image credit: Jeff Johnson

Can you tell me about the story behind Tequila Talkin'?

I wrote that with Dan Isbell who was on my list of favourite writers! We came into the session and I had this idea for Tequila Talkin'. I knew it was an old Lonestar song, but I wanted to just rewrite the title; it had been so long, since that title had been written. So, we sat down, and we wrote towards it. We got the first verse and chorus done and we just needed a second verse and a bridge. Me and Dan called it quits on the first day and we returned to it with Ray Fulcher, who is another one of my absolute favourite writers in town. He came in and helped us write the bridge and the second verse, and it turned out to be the song that we have now. I love it so much, and I hope other people are liking it.

You've just released your debut EP, what was that experience like for you, getting into the studio and recording these songs?

Some of these songs are recorded before I even had a plan to release an EP, and some of them were recorded after. I think the coolest part of making that EP was seeing how I had grown from going into the studio when I didn't really know what I was doing, to now, still not knowing fully what I'm doing but having a little bit more of an idea. Figuring out the process and working with the producers and just basically learning, trying to take away as much as I can from their knowledge.

On stage are you completely focused or do you let your mind wander? What are your mid-gig thoughts?

I didn't think anybody knew about that haha, I definitely get some big thoughts when I'm on stage, completely unrelated to the music!

If you were to describe yourself as a flavour of potato chip, what flavour would you be?

I think I'd be old trusty original! I'm nothing special, I just love the originals.

If they were to make a movie of your life, what songs would you include on the soundtrack?

I would say *Giving You Up* has to be on there, because that was a real life thing, I wrote that from a real experience. Another song I'd like to include is *Steady Heart* which has not been released yet, but I'll be bringing that out soon. Then a song that isn't my own… let's go with *Pride and Joy* by Stevie Ray Vaughan, I love that song, I think that that would be a cool song in the movie.

What would you say has been your proudest moment in your career so far? And what would you like to go on to achieve?

I think the proudest moment so far was getting picked to play this tour with Brad Paisley. Being able to go out with one of my absolute heroes and legends of country music is a really cool thing to do. I get to go home and play my hometown amphitheatre, which I've literally dreamed of playing my whole life - that's going to be a really cool moment for me. I'd like to one day, sell out some stadiums - that's the goal, that's what I'm aiming for, so we'll just see if we can get there but that's the dream that we're chasing. M



TWO WORLDS COLLIDE

Cassadee Pope's new album sees her rock and country world's collide as she enlists the help of friends from both genres on 'Thrive'

Cassadee Pope had an eclectic taste in music growing up. She soaked up those influences and channelled them into her own music, beginning her career in the world of rock as lead singer of the band Hey Monday. As she transitioned to country music, Pope became the first female artist to win America's version of The Voice. As she releases her fourth studio album, Pope sees her two worlds collide as she calls upon friends from both the rock and country world to bring these songs to life. 'Thrive' is a truly unique collection of songs.

"My parents weren't the most diverse music lovers, but they loved country music and 80s rock music." Pope begins as she thinks back to those early beginnings, "Those were the two main genres of music that were being played in our household and on road trips. I remember, when I was a kid, listening to Bon Jovi, Slippery When Wet and just being obsessed with that album and realising my love for a hook, like a catchy hook and an explosive chorus. So I tend to write that way because of what I grew up listening to." 'Thrive' is full of those kind of songs, littered with hooks and big productions that help these stories soar to a new level. Knowing the amalgamation of genres that she wanted to achieve with her sound, Pope surrounded herself with a team that she knew she could trust. "I've always loved All American Rejects. Nick Wheeler (lead guitarist) and I toured back in 2008, I think in Australia and New Zealand with Fall Out Boy. So we have kind of a crazy history." Pope begins as she reflects on the people who helped pull this album together. "I was writing a lot with Nick, he would send me these demos back and I was just like 'This sounds like a finished product!' It sounded like the sound I wanted for my next project so I just asked him if he would produce it and thankfully, he said yes." Pope had a clear direction with where she wanted to go with this album, what she wanted to say and how, sonically, she wanted to say it. "2020 was so reflective for all of us, you really just sat around thinking and reminiscing. A lot of things were happening in this country when I, and everybody else, were feeling so raw.

If you were to describe your personality as a flavour of potato chip, what flavour would you be?

That's so good. Let's see here... I love tomato chips. And I guess I would choose that because they're a little sweet, but tart and sour and kind of unexpected. A lot of people who meet me or just hang out with me think that I'm just a very bubbly, giddy girl and then I get on stage and I'm head banging and rocking out, angsty and angry. So maybe the unexpected flavour of a tomato chip would be my chip.

We had nothing but time to just absorb it and think on it. So I definitely talk about my stance on a couple of things, a couple of issues. It was my time to really like, lean into what songwriting is all about. That's just telling your story and letting people get to know you better."

With her previous releases, Pope felt pressured into conforming to the country sound, and hid her rock roots but her first writing session over zoom helped her to change that. "*What The Stars See*, was my first zoom writing session in March/April 2020. I remember finishing the session and feeling like 'oh my god that felt so good,' and then getting the demo back and feeling even more excited because it just tapped into this thing that I've always loved. Hearing myself in that way again was exciting. I have always had that edge to my style of country music but I really tried to fit into the country mould so I didn't feel like I could lean into the pop punk influences. So I kept writing with people that I knew would help facilitate that sound."

As well as working closely with Wheeler, Pope worked with Little Big Town's Karen Fairchild; "A huge part of my songwriting, my voice and my tendencies, are country and I didn't want to lose that - I knew I couldn't lose that. I wanted someone else involved to keep that foot in the door and make sure that I'm not neglecting that part of my influences. Karen Fairchild has just been such a huge mentor for me, she's a mentor for all of us girls, anytime I mentioned her to Lindsey Ell or Jillian Jacqueline, everybody's like, 'Oh, yeah, I went to lunch with her last week.' She's just always trying to help us out. She's everybody's Fairy Godmother." Fairchild co-produced the record with Wheeler helping Pope to blend the two sounds, her two worlds together. "It just feels like I'm blending my worlds, both figuratively and literally, so it feels just really special and collaborative."

The other writers Pope worked with also came from a combination of her rock contacts and country contacts and the writing process stirred up emotions she'd wanted to channel for a long time. The title track 'Thrive' was one such song that had been brewing for a while and it became one of Pope's favourite on the record. "It's a song that I've been thinking about writing for a long time, but I haven't had the bravery to say some of the cutting lyrics in that song because some of them are pretty brutal." Pope reflects, "It took that line of, 'you really hurt me and you suck, but I'm not gonna let you defeat me.' I had a session with two guys that I've known for a really long time, Kevin Bard and Andy Albert, who I've been around in the pop punk scene. I came in with the idea of, I didn't just survive without, I thrive. I really wanted it to be something that people could relate to, not just relationships, but their work, or a family member or a friend, someone that really hurt them. I wanted it to feel just like this thing that everybody could sing and feel empowered by."

IF THEY WERE TO CREATE A FILM ABOUT YOUR LIFE, WHO WOULD YOU CAST TO PLAY YOURSELF? AND WHAT WOULD BE THE OPENING THEME TUNE?

I think Emma Watson would be cool, because she's very angelic looking but she's a badass. So I think if you gave her some dark red hair and rock her up a little bit, I think she'd be perfect. Then the opening song... I just watched American Pie last night and that soundtrack is just amazing. So I'd probably go with Sum 41 because it's fun and upbeat. It has edgy lyrics but is super catchy for an opening song!

Say It First was another song that had been bubbling away for a while - six years in fact! Written with Ross Copperman and Heather Morgan this song was one of those that almost haunted Pope. It had never quite made the cut on her other records, for one reason or another. "I wanted to go back through some old songs that I still love and *Say It First* just fit so nicely in with all the other songs that I had written at that time" Pope begins. "Heather had the title. I remember going into that session just, it was one of those sessions where I had no clue what I wanted to do. I was in a weird place in my career, where everybody was telling me No, or whatever I was writing wasn't working for them. So I've got into this amazing session with these two incredible writers and thankfully, she had an idea, Ross had the kind of vibe he wanted to go with, which is very nostalgic kind of Avril Lavigne, which is totally up my alley. It's just a song that I've always loved and I can sing it now with a different perspective, because I've been through some big breakups and had to be the one to call it quits first. So, when I wrote it, I had broken up with boyfriends in high school, but not the real gut wrenching breakups that are life changing. So I can sing that song with a little bit more passion now."

However, the majority of the record was written over zoom in 2020. Pope learnt to adapt quickly to writing and collaborating during the lockdown. "Writing on zoom has been pleasantly amazing for me. I get to strip away all the distractions of driving to the session, making sure my dogs have someone to let them out during the day, making sure I have snacks. I might get hungry during the session, and I don't want to stop the flow to get lunch so I just end up starving. Here, I get to be in comfy clothes, I can pop down and grab a bag of chips if I'm hungry or an apple if I'm being healthy. I feel inspired here because it's a space that my boyfriend Sam Palladio and I have really come to make homey so creating here has just been really game changing."

Recording the album proved to be a little trickier but again, they adapted well. "We had to get everybody tested and everybody wore masks the whole time. It was funny, at the end, when we all were having a drink outside, everybody took their masks off and we were seeing each others faces for the first time. I'm so glad we took all the precautions because nobody got sick, everybody was fine and safe. It's been a little bit difficult and weird at times but we've we've figured it out somehow and I've ended up with my favourite project to date."

Cassadee Pope wears her heart on her sleeve for this truly eclectic collection of songs which sees her two worlds collide. Upon the release of 'Thrive', Pope hopes to get back out on the road, something she's missed during the last 18 months. She also teases the idea of a UK trip too - "I can't wait to get back over there" she says with a grin. M

"A huge part of my songwriting, my voice and my tendencies, are country and I didn't want to lose that - I knew I couldn't lose that"



Image credits: John Shearer



Jimmie Allen: Breaking the boundaries

The real achievement of 'Bettie James Gold Edition' is it's ability to represent every voice and every person, from all kinds of backgrounds

Jimmie Allen is used to 'firsts' in his career. Just this year he became the first black solo artist to win the ACM Award for New Male Artist of the Year. Now, as he continues to break down boundaries within country music, Allen teams up with an array of artists, across various genres as he delivers a collaborative project in the shape of Bettie James Gold Edition and gets to work on a children's book and clothing line!

Jimmie Allen's latest star-studded project hit the shelves at the end of June and is the true definition of 'cross-over'. It's a continuation of his successful Bettie James project, which amassed 155 million streams and was designed to honour his late father and grandmother. The eclectic nature of the collaborations on this latest project allows him to dip in and out of the music that inspired him growing up and that which continues to inspire him today. "All my dad listened to was 90s country music, the only thing he listened to in his truck was country. My mum only listened to Christian music" Allen begins. " I got into like rock, R&B and hip hop when I was in high school. Nowadays, I'm listening to everything." That certainly shows on the new album as he teams up with the likes of Pitbull on tracks like *Flavor* to Darius Rucker and Charley Pride on *Why Things Happen*.

Crafting nine of the 16 songs, Allen captured one of his most personal projects to date as well as drawing influence from other people's stories as he addressed issues of loss and of love. "Sometimes it's my life. Sometimes it's people that I know, or stories I read about on social media, stories that people direct message me about or email me about." Allen reflects, but one song in particular proved to be a tough one for Allen to write, but the end product was something Allen was very proud of. "I wrote *Why Things Happen* with my bass player Tate Howell, Cary Barlowe, and Brandon Day" Allen remembers. "We wrote it the day after Kobe Bryant died. Kobe was probably one of the most motivated people I've ever met in my life - every conversation, every time we talked, I left more motivated, and more inspired than I was before. Then you wonder, why something like that happens? He's worked hard his whole career,

QUICK *FIRE*

IN A MOVIE ABOUT YOUR LIFE, WHO WOULD YOU CAST TO PLAY YOURSELF?
I'M CASTING MYSELF!

FAVOURITE FOOD:
FRENCH TOAST

FAVOURITE PLACE:
MY FAVOURITE PLACE OF ALL TIME IS DISNEY WORLD IN FLORIDA

FAVOURITE FILM:
MARY POPPINS... WELL IT'S A TIE BETWEEN MARY POPPINS AND LOVE & BASKETBALL

MOTTO:
STOP COMPLAINING, SUCK IT UP AND GET IT DONE - THAT'S WHAT I TELL MYSELF ALL THE TIME

then he's leaving church with his daughter, friends and family, on their way to go to the school for a basketball game and something like that happens… and you're like, why?" Allen's emotions are still raw as he talks about that loss. "I feel like a lot of times in life, we get questions that are never answered. Sometimes those questions do get answered. I believe that writing that song gave me clarity on a lot of different things. With my father, and with Kobe I'd question; 'Why would they be taken away', and then it hit me one day, I was like, man, maybe they reached their moment, it was their time - all the good in the world that they could have done, they've done it. I feel like we all have answers. So for me, that song was really just me trying to find ways to cope through my father's death, grandmothers or friends like Kobe. That can translate and help people through other loss whether it's relationship loss, job loss or just things in life you don't understand."

To help deliver the song Allen enlisted the help of Darius Rucker and Charley Pride, meaning three generations of Black country singers came together to perform this emotional number. "I wanted it to be special. I've always wanted to do something with Charley Pride, so I called him on the phone, talked to him and he said yes. Darius and I were in Germany together, top of 2020. And I just asked him, I played it for him and he said, 'Dude, I'm in.' So Charley recorded his part in Texas, Darius recorded his part in Nashville, and I'm so pleased because it's a special song to me - you got three generations of Black Country artists on there." Allen is keen to show that country music is for everybody, that it's accepting and diverse but for it to be ready for diversity, it needs diverse people in the genre. "It's becoming more equal but even if they're ready for diversity, it's going to take diverse people involved in the industry to make it diverse" Allen begins. "If there's no Black country artists, no Mexican country artists, no Asian country artists, then we can't stream diversity if people don't have the balls to go over there, put themselves in uncomfortable situations sometimes and create. They have to see you doing it to know you want to be a part of it. If my goofy self from Milton, Delaware can get two number one's and work with all these artists, anybody can. The only thing you've got to do is work hard."

Allen continues his words of encouragement, both to fellow black artists and anybody else who wants to be successful within country music; "There's a difference between a dream you want and the work ethic you put behind it. I feel like diversity is created by the people that look different from the current state of that genre. Diversity is happening because we finally have more black artists coming over to country, and diversity is created, because we have people in positions of power, that believe in equality for everyone. So it's a merging of the two."

Allen, now in a position of power himself within the genre after earning the respect of his peers in the genre, is focusing on bringing people together through music in a time when we have all been apart. "This record shows people of all different genres of music and different cultures and skin colours coming together and that's super important to me" Allen enthuses, "To me, that's a representation of what the world can be like and we're heading in that direction. I feel like the world is 85% good but the media focuses on that 15%. So I'm trying to focus on that good and that's partly what this record is about."

Allen is starting to teach youngsters about togetherness and the power that your voice has as he has just released his children's book 'My Voice Is A Trumpet'. Talking about the book which came out back in July, Allen said "It's just a book about teaching kids to use their voice to encourage themselves and encourage other people." The uplifting story is a lyrical celebration of the many types of voices that can effect change. "From voices tall as a tree, to voices small as a bee, all it takes is confidence and a belief in the goodness of others to change the world. Coming at a time when issues of social justice are at the forefront of our society, this book aims to teach children in and out of the classroom that they're not too young to express what they believe in and that all voices are valuable."

Whether it's through music or through words on the page of a book, Allen is changing the world for the better, promoting positivity and togetherness through everything he does. M



Image credits: John Shearer

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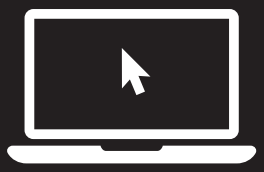
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DAVID FERGUSON



Revered Nashville producer, David Ferguson, cut his teeth in the industry working with his idols such as Johnny Cash and John Prine, producing and engineering their hit records. After 40 years working in country music, Ferguson is stepping out from behind the mixing desk and into the spotlight as he releases his first album.

Ferguson, known affectionately as Fergie to his friends, knew from an early age that he wanted to live and work in the industry that he'd grown up surrounded by. "My grandfather was a musician. He came to Nashville in the 50s, brought his daughter up here to be a country music star. It didn't quite work out that way, he wound up raising his grandchildren, but he was a big influence" Ferguson reflects. "When I was about six or seven years old, my mother was able to take us to the television show tapings of Porter Wagoner and Bill Anderson and some of the CMT shows that were going on at the time. I guess one of the biggest influences was Johnny Cash, watching the Johnny Cash television show. I really, really loved that back in the late sixties and early seventies." Most can only ever dream of meeting their idols, let alone working with them but Ferguson made his breakthrough in the industry working with Johnny Cash; "It's great to meet one of your heroes, and he turned out to be a great guy, there's nothing more disappointing than to meet your childhood hero and they're not a nice person. But Johnny was a really great guy and funny. I was very lucky to be where I was at that time and I have Jack Clement to thank for that. I was lucky enough to get a job working for him when I was 18 or 19." Ferguson would go on to work with Cash again on his American Recordings from 1990 up until his death in 2003.

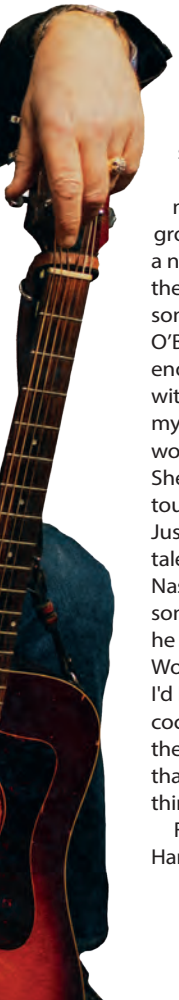
Stepping out from behind the mixing desk and becoming an artist at this point in his career wasn't exactly planned. That being said, Ferguson had been collecting these songs for a number of years as they spilled out through studio walls and stayed with him. "It didn't all happen at once" Ferguson begins, as he begins to take us through the songs that feature on the record, telling us the story of when he first connected with each. "There's a song on there called Looking For Rainbows and another called Fellow Travellers, I've always loved those songs. I heard them through the walls whilst working for Clements, I made demos of those songs back when they were written. One of the writers of those songs was called Charles Cochran and he died in a car accident back in the mid-2000s but he'd made piano tracks of those songs for his wife to sing over at a wedding. I was so glad I had those piano

A round of applause!

One of the first bands I was ever in, I built an applause pedal - I was pretty insecure! It was just a volume pedal hooked up to a CD player that was playing applause on loop so whenever I wanted applause I'd just get my foot on that pedal. We played a lot of Johnny Cash songs, and he sat in with us one time and asked me what all the pedals were for. I had the applause pedal and a steel pedal because my steel player never stopped playing, when he started he couldn't stop so I hooked him up to a pedal so if I wanted a bit of steel on a song I'd hit that pedal and if I wanted applause I'd hit the other one! Johnny found that funny.







tracks as I just built everything around those, I put my vocals on and a string arrangement. Nobody was working during the pandemic so I started going through some of my stuff and the record started to form."

After working for so long in the country music world, Ferguson's contact list has grown considerably and so he called upon a number of friends to assist him in bringing these songs to life. "I would listen to these songs and think, 'I'd sure like to here Tim O'Brien do that part' for example, I'm lucky enough to be able to make that happen just with a phone call. Sierra Hall started using my recording studio, The Butcher Shoppe to work on her records and I think she is special. She's really great singer and really got a touch on that mandolin. And her husband, Justin Moses is really fantastic." The array of talent Ferguson called upon wasn't just from Nashville either. "Roger Cook has the most songs on the record, he's from England and he wrote a lot of classic songs like Long Cool Woman in a Black Dress by The Hollies and I'd Like to Teach the World to Sing, the big coca-cola commercial. My favourite song on there that he wrote is Chardonnay because that's a love song to a glass of wine which I think is pretty creative."

Ferguson called upon Margo Price and Harry Stinson of Marty Stuart's fabulous superlatives to contribute harmonies to the song. "I worked with Margo not too long ago, Sturgill Simpson and I worked together on 'That's How Rumors Get Started'. There was a lot of records I worked on with Dan Auerbach as well that all came out just before or during the pandemic so they couldn't tour them and they didn't get as much support, it was heartbreaking. But Margo is a good friend of mine, she doesn't live too far from me and I don't think the pandemic kept her down for five minutes - she's a lot of fun and she loved that song. Harry Stinson's voice just blends so well with Margo's on those vocals too."

As Ferguson readies himself to release his debut album he reflects upon his past achievements and what he hopes to achieve as an artist. "I just made this for my Mum" he laughs, "I'd like for people to be entertained by it, that would be great - that's enough. I don't aspire to get Grammys or anything like that but I'd like for the record label to make their money back, because I really like those guys" he says with a grin.

'Nashville No More' is a record you listen to time and time again and after every listen you hear something new. The intricate details Ferguson has channelled into the production and arrangement perfectly frame this collection of outstanding songs, something only an experienced engineer could master! M

TOP FIVE

RECORDS PRODUCED AND/OR ENGINEERED BY DAVID FERGUSON

5. COUNTRY SQUIRE

THE CRITICALLY ACCLAIMED ALBUM RELEASED BY TYLER CHILDERS WAS RELEASED IN 2019 AND WAS PRODUCED BY FERGUSON AT THE STUDIO HE OWNED AND OPERATED WITH JOHN PRINE CALLED THE BUTCHER SHOPPE.

4. THAT'S HOW RUMOURS GET STARTED

RELEASED MID-PANDEMIC IN THE SUMMER OF 2020 BY MARGO PRICE, FERGUSON PRODUCED THE RECORD WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF STURGILL SIMPSON AND PRICE HERSELF.

3. A SAILOR'S GUIDE TO EARTH

THIS 2016 ALBUM BY STURGILL SIMPSON MARKED FERGUSON'S SECOND GRAMMY AS AN ENGINEER.

2. THE STREETS OF BALTIMORE

FERGUSON ENGINEERED THIS GRAMMY AWARD WINNING ALBUM THAT WAS RE-LEASED IN 2013 BY THE DEL MCCOURY BAND.

1. JOHNNY CASH IS COMING TO TOWN

ORIGINALLY RELEASED BY CASH IN 1987 THE RECORD MADE A RESURGENCE IN 2003 WHEN IT WAS RE-RELEASED AND PAIRED WITH 'BOOM CHICKA BOOM'.

CHRIS YOUNG
AND HIS FAMOUS FRIENDS

Chris Young is one of the hottest names in the genre right now and has been for a number of years since winning Nashville Star in 2006. Fresh off the back of releasing his eighth studio album, Young reflects upon his proudest achievements, takes us through some of his most personal songs on this latest album and introduces us to his 'Famous Friends'.

Young co-wrote the majority of this latest album and co-produced it as well alongside some of his friends and collaborators that he's spent the last fifteen years making music with. "One of the reasons why we've named the album 'Famous Friends' is not just because of the single with Kane Brown and the success that that's had but, all of the Songwriters that are on this and the other artists I've collaborated with. I've got people on this record that it was the first song I wrote with them, in the case of Mark Coleman with *Rescue Me*. Then I've got guys that I've been writing with for 14 or 15 years. So really, so many people made this record what it is, it was a cool way to do a little nod to that by calling the album 'Famous Friends'" Young begins. He teamed up with prolific Nashville writers and producers such as Hillary Lindsey, Chris DeStefano and Corey Crowder as he crafted the record.

"I never tried to nail it down to a formula like 'I always have to start with the lyric' because I've had success writing a lot of different ways. Sometimes I start from scratch, with no idea what the hook is, or I start with an idea of the hook or just a melody that I sing into my phone. I never really have like a hard and fast way of writing a song." One thing that remains a constant for Young is his ability to wear his heart on his sleeve in his songwriting, however difficult that may sometimes be. "It's personal to me, songwriting. It's real, it's honest and it comes from a place where I know how to speak to it." Young reflects upon one of the most powerful songs on the album *Drowning* "The process of writing this one wasn't hard, but getting to this idea was. Everybody in the room had a different person in mind while we were writing this, that we lost; I think that's why so many people could relate to it. It's something that a lot of people had to deal with - somebody being gone from their lives too soon. I've seen it be just as cathartic for other people as it was for me, obviously, it's very personal to me. I'd started maybe two or three songs over the years where I've tried getting this emotion out. This title got brought in by Cory Crowder. We had talked about writing to tempo that day but he says, "I heard somebody say, missing you comes in waves" and instantly I thought a lot of people will be able to relate to this. It's something that I'm really glad that I wrote and that it did have an impact on other people."

Over the past fifteen years within country music, Young has scored several number one hits and won a series of awards but his proudest moment came in 2017 when he was invited to become a member of the Grand Ole Opry. "I never imagined that I would get asked" Young begins as he continuously pinches himself to check he's not dreaming! "Getting asked by Vince Gill as well, who I'm a huge fan of - it was just such a proud moment for me." However, this latest record is a proud moment for Young also as he brings his friends together in what has been an extraordinary year. The title track with Kane Brown recently topped the Airplay charts. "Corey Crowder, Cary Barlowe and myself wrote that song. I realised that actually this could be a duet. The first person I thought of was Kane, I reached out to him and he was like, 'dude, I love it.' So it came together very organically, seeing what it's done, the success that it's had since we put it out, it's pretty awesome." It's not the only track on the record that features some of country's most relevant artists though as Young calls upon Lauren Alaina in *Town Ain't Big Enough* and Mitchell Tenpenny for *At the End of a Bar*, the latter of which is one of Young's personal favourites on the record. "I just think it's a cool way to say that and it's something different from the other things that are on the record."

From the boy who grew up listening to country music, learning all the words to Randy Travis songs, Young has grown into one of the genres finest artists, perfectly balancing up-beat, fun loving songs such as *Famous Friends* with conscientious tracks such as Drowning. Young has delivered one of the best country albums of the year. M



Image credits: Jeff Johnson

Think Of You - Chris Young featuring Cassadee Pope

We had done a couple of festivals together and I just loved her voice. I wrote this song with Corey Crowder and Josh Hoge, the same guys I wrote ***Drowning*** with from this record and ***I'm Coming Over*** with - they've been stuck with me for a while as writing partners. We wrote this song and thought, this is a duet so they said "Who do you think would sing it?" and I'm like "I love Cassadee Pope's voice, I don't know if she'll do it but I'd love to ask her first." She loved the song, it was the fastest run up the chart that I've ever had, the quickest number one I've had in the States and it was just wild. We got to perform it at the ACM Awards that year and we put on a big show, we had a waterfall of sparks behind us. There were so many cool moments where we got to perform that song together, it just wouldn't be the same without her so I was really honoured that she wanted to be on the song with me.

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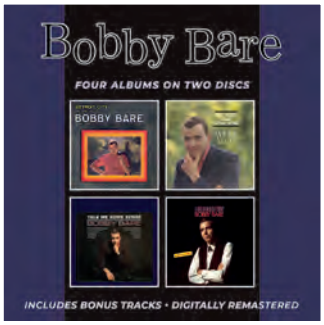
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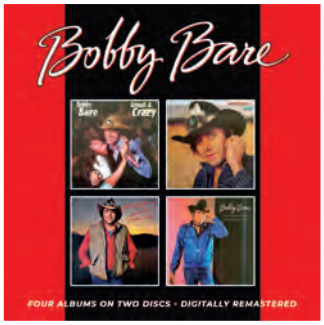
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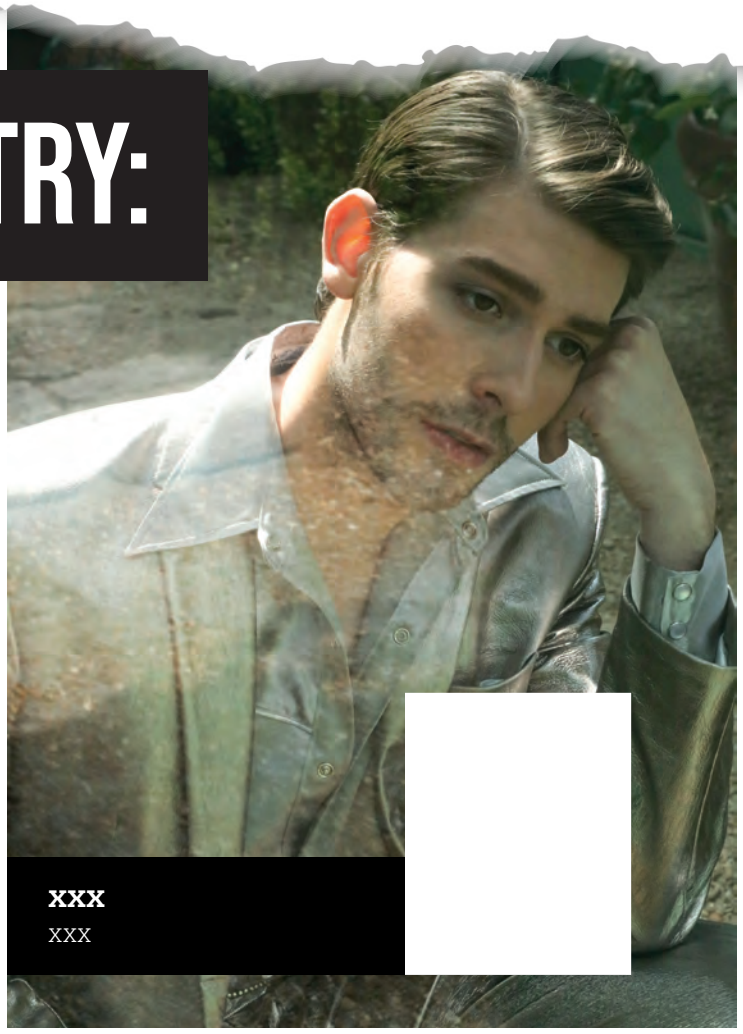
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BLAST from the past

KIDS OF COUNTRY: Sam Williams

The Williams family is one of country music's greatest dynasties, starting from the great Hank Williams, to his son Hank Jr and now to his grandchildren - the musical gene is ever-present and in Sam, a new sound and legacy is born



XXX
XXX

Hank Williams was just 29 when he passed away but his impact on the genre was so profound that his music lived on in the hearts and lives of every fan and artist of the genre that has come after him. Known as 'The King of Country Music' Williams legacy lives on in his children and grandchildren. Hank Williams Junior was just three when his father died but he grew up with the same knack for songwriting as his Dad and he learnt quickly how to carve his own path. The talent of the Williams family wouldn't stop there as his children Hank Williams III and Holly Williams embarked on careers within the music industry too. Now, the latest family member to continue the family business is Sam Williams, though he is very much chasing the dream in his own unique way!

"I was definitely always aware of my dad's fame and music. I think I came to know more of my granddad's legacy and fame as I got older, as I could look up his catalogue on YouTube, and see how many people covered his songs and referenced him and his music." Sam says as he begins to talk about his family ties. "I definitely rebelled in some ways. There wasn't a tonne of music in my household, my dad had been playing shows since he was about eight years old. So he doesn't typically listen to the radio or play records, or anything. He watches TV with the sound off half the time, and whistles in the car."

As Sam went off to school, he threw himself into his studies, rebelling against the family tradition. "When you're a kid, you just want to stand out in some way. If everybody in your family does one thing, if everybody's a teacher, you're like, I'm not teaching, I'm not going to college." Sam laughs as he recalls the rebellious side of his younger self. "I think that it was something that I tried so hard to rebel against that it was always embedded in the back of my brain that really, I did want to do it, I just wanted to do it differently. I wanted to do it my own way, and not be kind of pigeon holed to do what other people think that I should. I definitely was into sports, I was into politics and I was just very studious for a long time so I think my parents thought I was going to go off to college and go into something in education, anything other than music, but I kind of blindsided them."

As Sam began to get into music, it wasn't the traditional country music his family was familiar with that inspired him, "I was influenced by top 40, radio and hip hop music, R&B music, all kinds of things, and soundtracks. So I took a lot of inspiration from everywhere. And it probably was like a little point for me to not be like the biggest country fan." When he did turn to his family for inspiration, it was the music of his sister Holly that he found awe-inspiring. "Holly Williams, my sister, has been a huge inspiration to me. That album, 'The Highway', came out when I was in high school. That was definitely a time that I was probably primarily listening to like hip hop music but I love it so much. Those songs really impacted me a lot and posed the question to me like, what will I write songs about? What's important to me that will free me in a way and connect to other people? She was signed to a major label early in her career and played lots and lots of shows in Europe and busked and did all kinds of really honourable stuff, and she has just really found her niche. So that was inspiring for me to see that it is doable without shooting into superstardom,



Image credits: Alexa King

Honouring his family in his Opry debut

"It was in October of 2019, right after I came back from Europe touring with Cam and in country music, that's one of the stepping stones - to get to go to the Opry. They do a wonderful job of keeping the tradition of country music alive and honouring the greats, honouring my grandfather honouring Dolly as well as bringing in new voices and letting everyone show a piece of their story in their voice. So it was really an honour. I wore this custom jacket with all these dream catchers on it, something I was really, really into. I just love to honour the style of like, the original nudie suits, and Jimmy Dickens, and rhinestones and fringe and crazy stuff like that. I got to wear my grandfather's hat on stage and it actually fit perfectly. So it was a real full circle moment."

that you can really be authentic and carry on the family name in a beautiful way."

So that's what Sam set about doing, finding his own niche, carving his own path with his songwriting. His new album 'Glasshouse Children' is an accumulation of years of trying to find the balance between honouring his Grandfather's legacy whilst being seen and heard as an individual, for the person he is. He found a group of core writers that could help him to do that. "I didn't write a song for this album with Lori McKenna but she is a songwriter and artist that I really adore and we wrote some songs together a few years ago. I wrote the title track with Dan Auerbach of The Black Keys. I work with a guy named Ben Roberts, he's in an americana duo called Carolina Story. We wrote a couple songs together, *Bullet Blues* and *The World Alone*." The latter of which became Sam's favourite song on the record, "The World Alone is just really special to me." He continues, "It just feels a lot of times as an artist, you're trying to figure out your message, your look, your sound. *The World Alone* just feels very unique to me and authentic. There's just something about it, I want everyone to hear that song when they hear the album."

The centrepiece of 'Glasshouse Children' is a song called Happy All The Time and it saw Sam team up with another living legend within the genre, the one and only Dolly Parton. "I worked with Mary Gauthier to write that song. She is amazing, she's also hilarious." He begins, "I have always been a humongous Dolly fan. My manager called me one day when I was making my son breakfast, and said, 'We have to get Dolly on I'm Happy'. I focused my energy on that, we tried every business and professional avenue but nothing came of it. One of my close friends, a songwriter, is really close friends with one of her friends. She agreed to relay a message to her. So I wrote Dolly a letter. I just wrote 'Hi, Miss Dolly' on some thick parchment paper. I let her know how much of a fan I was, but it was more about my life and me, kind of introducing myself. I spoke about the song and what it meant to me, and just how validating it would be for her to sing on the record with me. She ended up loving the song, loving my voice, lyrics and message. She really only does things that she wants to do, that are in tune with her message. Even though we have very different backgrounds, and we're a different age, there's a common ground there. I've been holding on to the song for a long time and it kind of became like the cornerstone of 'Glass House Children'." With a smile upon his face Sam adds, "That's my proudest moment so far. It happened in such an organic way and she by no means had to do that. It really let me know that she loves my voice and songwriting and coming from her, that is just so validating."

As things were starting to fall into place for Sam, tragedy struck, decimating the Williams family. Sam's sister, Katherine Williams, passed away in a terrible car accident leaving behind two young children. "I think that when you go through a traumatic tragedy, you latch on to something, and you can't always control what that is." An emotional Sam begins, "You can latch on to stuff that's negative, you can latch on to pills, or alcohol or isolation. I was already so much into the process of working on an album and putting out an album when my sister passed away that it really threw me for a loop, it wrecked everything in my life for a very long time. But I couldn't just give up on everything. I knew that's not what she would want for me. She would want me to keep going regardless and to know that she's proud of me and it's worth it. So after a while, I came back and started working hard on the music again, and getting everything into place."

Sam's debut album came out at the end of August. It was his voice, his words as he tries to craft his own journey in life whilst honouring his family, both those who are present and those who have passed on. It's a record Sam is proud of and rightly so but he has hopes and aspirations, not just for this record but the songs he continues to write with his friends and colleagues out in Nashville. "I would love to get a gold single in the next few years in my career, and to just do an amazing job of mixing genres, while still having really authentic songwriting." But after the turbulent nature of the past year, Sam searches for something more profound, "Above all, I hope to achieve peace and happiness." M

HANK WILLIAMS GRAND OLE OPRY DEBUT

Hank Williams Opry debut is one of the most famous in country music history. On the 11th June 1949 Williams, age 25 at the time, stepped into that sacred circle to perform a couple of songs. He sang the self-penned ***Mind Your Own Business*** and his first number one, ***Lovesick Blues***. He was called back six times to reprise the latter by the Opry audience! It is one of the most memorable moments in the prestigious establishment's history.

BLAST from the past

Emmylou Harris



Emmylou Harris reflects upon her illustrious career and how it all began as she releases 'Ramble in Music City: The Lost Concert (1990)'

GRAMMY lifetime achievement award winner, Emmylou Harris has had a truly remarkable career. The 74 year old has inspired millions across the years and has become a staple of the country, folk and bluegrass genres. Over the years she has worked both as a solo artist and as a collaborator with a range of different people and is very well respected by those working in the industry. Her latest record allows Harris to take a trip down memory lane as the recordings of her Nashville concert, with the Nash Ramblers, in 1990 is unearthed.

Where it all began

A lot of stalwarts of the genre got their start in the industry by being surrounded by music, perhaps their parents played in a band or their grandparents had them singing in church before they could even talk. For Emmylou Harris, her childhood was very different; she grew up on a military base as her father was in the marine corps and so Harris wasn't exposed to a lot of music growing up. "Music wasn't really a big part of our lives, my parents weren't against it or anything. We went to an Episcopal Church, which is not known for its great melodies or hymns and the record store was just the one on the base." Nevertheless, Harris managed to find records that jumped out at her and inspired her at the time. "There was a particular record I loved called 'The Voice of Ireland' by Ruby Murray. I listened back to it years ago and thought 'God, this is so overly orchestrated' - nothing that I would like now as far as production, but you can't take away the beauty of those songs. Songs like Galway Bay, they have beautiful melodies. I think we had one Elvis record as well that unfortunately had *Old Shep* on it, which is the saddest song in the world if you're a dog lover!"

It was clear from an early age that Harris had a knack for performance as she won a drama scholarship to the School of Music, Theatre and Dance at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and it was here that she began to study music. Around this time, she began to really hone her craft as a songwriter. "I would say for the most part, I write from personal experience, although I have written some songs, I suppose about social issues - a few of them. For example, I wrote a song about Emmett Till and I wrote some other songs that I was actually asked to sing at a Unitarian Church, that deal with the struggle for enlightenment - songs like *The Pearl* and *Cup of Kindness* but for the most part it comes from personal experience." She began to collaborate with other writers and artists but her process remained the same for the most part. "I bring a few lines and an idea to the process. I usually write the same way each time, although on the last record I wrote for, which was 'Hard Bargain', there were a few songs where I actually got a melody first, which is very unusual for me. I usually start almost exclusively with lyrics."

Voices combined

Despite having so much success as an individual, as a solo singer, Harris took part in some historic and very beautiful collaborations over the years. One of her first collaborations was with Gram Parsons of The Flying Burrito Brothers, their vocal harmonies captured audiences hearts every night as the pair shone on stage together. They became great friends and collaborated up until he suddenly passed away. During this time Harris turned to another good friend and fellow performer who offered comfort to the grieving Harris, Linda Ronstadt. Ronstadt and Harris would later team up with Dolly Parton as they created 'Trio'. "There's just nothing like singing with other people, you know, because everyone's voice is unique. So when those voices combine, you create another voice that can't exist without that other person. It's just a joy, I'm so grateful to have worked with so many of these people who have now become dear friends - almost like my extended family."

Whether it was Harris taking centre stage as a soloist, singing back-up for Parsons or harmonising with Ronstadt and Parton, one thing prevailed for Harris - it was all about serving the song. "I don't think your mindset changes from one performance to the next. If you're singing a duet on somebody else's work, that is their work, and you're conscious of that. Like doing harmonies to go along with that lead, you're making sure you're not overshadowing, you're just trying to partner with them so you have to be mindful of that. But ultimately, in any situation it's about serving the song. So you just become other instruments, just



Image credit: Jack Spencer

The writing of 'Boulder to Birmingham'

This song came out of losing Gram Parsons, so tragically, early on. It's about grieving and about loss. I got the words started when I was out in Los Angeles, I was visiting Linda Ronstadt who became a great friend to me and a great champion, especially during that time and she knew I was going through something very difficult. I finished the lyrics and I had the melody for the chorus, but I was a bit stymied about the melodies for the verses and I went to see a couple of other great friends and people who had been a great help to me early on - Bill and Kathy Danoff, they were a man and wife duo who wrote all their own material. I took the song to them and it seemed like in five minutes Bill came up with that melody.

like the lead guitar player, or pedal steel player. That's just a wonderful experience."

Flawless yet real

For her latest album 'Ramble in Music City: The Lost Concert (1990)' Harris is able to take a trip down memory lane to reflect upon the shows of the past - something we have all missed this past year. The recording no one knew existed is of a home town show in Nashville in 1990 where Harris was performing with the Nash Ramblers. "Oh, it was extraordinary to hear it again because I had forgotten that we even recorded that night. None of my band remembered it and even our producer Alan Reynolds. I think shortly after that we all did a regular sort of Country Album and then we did 'At The Ryman', which was all songs that we just sort of sketched out and then recorded on the fly at the Ryman. I guess it just got lost in the shuffle so it was an incredible surprise."

The band was so professional, so tight that it barely needed altering. The memories of that magical time came flooding back to Harris. "To hear that band, fresh off the road, because we had been touring pretty heavily. When I heard it, I was astonished, there was not one single note that had to be changed, there was not one single fix… We could have probably put it out exactly as it was. It's completely, purely a live performance captured like a photograph in that moment, that concert captured in time. So, it was a real gift to hear it. I'm very proud of it. I'm very grateful that I had that band and I had that experience with those guys."

Harris and her Ramblers found hidden treasures within the lost recordings and discovered new favourites within their past repertoire, including her favourite song on the record. "Oddly enough, my favourite song is the song I think that we had all forgotten about. It somehow disappeared from the Ramblers repertoire. It's a song called *The Price I Pay* which Sam starts to lead. It's a very fast, furious, wonderful showcase for their brilliant playing and a great vehicle for this duet which Sam and I do, written by Chris Hillman." She remembers the moment they heard it once again, "I didn't even recognise the song when the introduction started and Sam, who played that intro had the same reaction. I'm excited that people will get a chance to hear it again."

A glance to the future

For Harris, the awards and accolades that she has won over her fifty year career fall away, it is the music she has made alongside her good friends that brings her pride. "I'm very grateful for all the awards but, you know, it's all about the music. It's the work and being able to do my own music and to work on other people's music. I wish I could pinpoint one moment, but I'm sort of grateful for all of them." But whilst she takes a moment to pause and look back on past performances with the release of this new album, the world begins to open up again and she snaps back to the present, glancing tentatively to the future. "I'm finally getting back on the road. A lot of the dates that were postponed last year are coming back, so I'm getting back to touring. I am trying to work on a memoir in my spare time as well, and I had a lot of spare time here recently" she laughs before concluding with a little nugget of life advice; "I kind of look on each day as an adventure, I'm thankful, I'm grateful for each day that I have with my family, my friends and my animals. M

STRANGEST THING YOU'VE WRITTEN A SONG ABOUT

I don't know if it's strange but I did write a song about one of my dogs. It was a song that was kind of an ode to shelter dogs everywhere because I got very deeply involved in animal rescue, dog rescue specifically. So it was inspired by one of my rescue dogs, but I wanted it to be kind of a song about the joy of shelter dogs, and what they do to your life, so maybe that was a little strange. We are quite devoted to animal rescue, to dog rescue and trying to find homes for beautiful creatures in need of so much, but we need them too."

MID-GIG THOUGHTS

I think that pretty much when I'm on stage, I'm pretty much in the zone. That's the one place you don't think, you don't have the monkey mind where a million thoughts are coming to you. It's such a great thing to be almost in a meditative state, I guess. Maybe between songs, I don't know, but once you hit that chord and go into a song, then you are there in the zone.

IN A MOVIE ABOUT YOUR LIFE WHO WOULD YOU CAST TO PLAY YOURSELF?

Oh, that's a very good question. You should have given me some time to think about that! I can't imagine that, I don't know too many young people, you'd have to have somebody who had just started out. Maybe I'll have to get back to you!

"There's just nothing like singing with other people, you know, because everyone's voice is unique."

FROM MEMOIR'S TO MELODIES

After mining the arc of her life, Brandi Carlile threw herself into writing songs again, the result is the sublime collection, 'In These Silent Days'

After the success of her memoir 'Broken Horses', Brandi Carlile, having learnt more about herself than ever before and with a fresh perspective on the craft, went back to writing songs. The end product, is the most profound and timeless collection she has delivered to date. The six-time GRAMMY award winner opens up about her journey up to this point and reflects upon her proudest moments as she gears up to getting back out on the road to accompany the release of 'In These Silent Days'.

A new perspective

"There is something so transformative and life changing about chronologically mining your experiences." Carlile begins as she reflects upon the writing process of her New York Times Bestseller, 'Broken Horses'. "It's crazy the things you remember when you do this in order, when you start at your first memories, and you take a journey to your latest memories. It's self indulgent, but I think it's just an imperative deep dive for someone to do." She continues as she thinks of how enlightening the process was for her. "I learned everything about myself, I realised I didn't know much before that book, it was all just fragments of abstract memories and little bursts of light moments. It didn't add up to anything before. I felt myself always searching for the moral of the story. What does that memory mean? Why do I have it? When I had to put it down - that smell was connected to this day, and this day was connected to this toy, and this toy is connected to this person and this person makes me feel this thing."

For the high school drop-out the book was so much more than a memoir, it was a high school diploma, it was the rollercoaster of life captured on every page, and above all, validation. A realisation that things hadn't always been easy, she wasn't just lucky, she'd worked hard for every single achievement in her life so far. "It was an amazing achievement for me. I felt healed by it in a lot of different ways." Carlile says with a smile. "It took away some elements of imposter syndrome, it made me think maybe I really did work hard, maybe I really do deserve to be here, maybe I did weather some hardship. It also made me feel like I had somehow brought my education to fruition because I dropped out of school really early instead of finishing high school. I have always felt inadequate because of that. I've always wished that I hadn't and even when I'm indignant, and say, 'Well I got an early start on my life,' deep down I'm always like, 'but you didn't finish something that other people finished.' When I wrote the book, I realised that, I have to work a little harder than everybody else to get my letters to turn the right way and to spell words and feel confident about what I'm saying, but I can still do it. The fact that book went to number one New York Times bestseller… I felt like I was given my high school diploma." Carlile continues, "No matter how uninteresting a person thinks they are, no matter whether a person believes they're a writer or not, you can only really benefit from that kind of self observation and humour - by the way, don't try to do it if you don't have a sense of humour." She laughs.

Writing in real time

After Carlile finished writing the book, she looked up to see that the world was a very different place than it was before she began. "I'm in the middle of a pandemic, I had just written a book about my life and I experienced writing songs in real time for the first time ever." Carlile says as she begins to discuss the writing process behind 'In These Silent Days'. "I suddenly realised that I just had a wealth of information in perspective, to draw from and create music, but my prose was sort of stuck in this world, I didn't know how to get back into being a musical writer yet." It was one of her Heroes Bernie Taupin who helped Carlile to get back in the zone, "He sent me a few poems and flipped the switch for me, it got me thinking again, about waxing poetic instead of philosophical or being factual."

"Usually, I will write a song about something intense, and the lyrics are coming out, but I'm not seeing the picture yet. I get the song written, I start singing it, and then I go, 'Oh, it's about this'. When I finished the book, I knew what the songs were about, and the first line before I started. It just gave me so many more tools. I felt more open emotionally and had the best time I've ever had writing a group of songs. So much perspective, I felt like I was an adult!" She laughs.

Carlile has always drawn from personal experience so having her life mapped out in her memoir was bound to be the catalyst for further creativity. "I don't have the skill set to not draw from personal experience." She says, "I really admire people who do, like Bernie, who can write fantastical stories and conjure up images that most people just couldn't and then write these beautiful touching songs about Benny and the Jets or about Marilyn Monroe. So I think that's brilliant when a writer can do that, but I can't, I get stuck in kind of an observational/confessional space which, as I've gotten older, has gotten less self centred."

The three (songwriting) musketeers

With the world around her changing every day, out of tragedy was born a beautiful song with a beautiful message; *"This Time Tomorrow* is one of my absolute favourite songs that we've ever done as a band. It was, like most things, a sentiment realised during the pandemic - that absolutely nothing is promised to us. We don't know about tomorrow at all, but there's something in me that knows that some part of us remains, we don't disappear, we're not algae. I think of my kids, when I sing that song - if I'm not here tomorrow, some part of me lives on in them. I feel that way about even people that I'm not related to. I keep thinking a lot about John Prine who we lost to COVID in the beginning of the pandemic. He's gone and my thoughts are with his family every day. When I look at my brothers and sisters, my songwriters, my friends and my community, his sense of humour, his profound skills of observation, political and religious brilliance and just astute soulfulness is alive in all of us. So when I sing *This Time Tomorrow*, I just know that there's a part of us that just isn't physical and is connected to every single living thing on the planet. We live within one another." Carlile enthuses.

"I learned everything about myself, I realised I didn't know much before that book"



Image credit: Neil Krug

QUICK *FIRE*

STRANGEST THING YOU'VE WRITTEN A SONG ABOUT

"OH, GOD, I HAVEN'T WRITTEN A SONG ABOUT TOO MANY STRANGE THINGS NOW THAT YOU MENTIONED IT. I THINK I'M TOO EMOTIONALLY SELF INDULGENT TO WRITE SONGS ABOUT STRANGE THINGS. PROBABLY SEX. SEX IS STRANGE NO MATTER HOW MUCH EVERYBODY WANTS TO THINK THEY'RE COOL."

IN A MOVIE ABOUT YOUR LIFE WHO WOULD YOU CAST TO PLAY YOURSELF?

I DON'T KNOW ANYONE AS AWKWARD AS ME, EVERY TIME I SEE ACTORS, THEY'RE SO CONFIDENT AND THEY'RE KIND OF AWARE OF THEMSELVES. SO, I HAVE NO IDEA PROBABLY MYSELF. MAYBE YOU, WE SEEM LIKE WE HAVE A LOT IN COMMON, WE DO A LOT OF GIGGLING!

IF YOU WERE TO DESCRIBE YOUR PERSONALITY AS A FLAVOUR OF POTATO CHIP, WHAT FLAVOUR WOULD YOU BE?

FRITOS CORN CHIPS. WE'LL QUOTE THE LINE FROM THE JONI MITCHELL SONG *TURN ME ON I'M A RADIO* THAT SAYS 'I'M A COUNTRY STATION, I'M A LITTLE BIT CORNY.'

"I just know that there's a part of us that just isn't physical and is connected to every single living thing on the planet."

Carlile wrote the song with twins Tim and Phil Hanseroth, her long term collaborators. "I've been in my band, which is this trio with these twin brothers, Tim and Phil Hanseroth for over 20 years now." She begins, their unique set-up is the secret to their success. "We live together out here in the country in rural Washington State, and we raise our kids together. We've really become inseparable people at the soul level so we write everything together. Sometimes it's hard to know or to even differentiate anymore between who writes what, because we're all writing about the same life experience. If they write some heartbreaking song about one of their parents, I understand what it is, if I write a heartbreaking song about somebody in my family, they understand what it is. I think I feel more emotional singing from their derived experience than I feel singing from mine just because I basically fill my gas tank every morning with empathy and then try and get out of bed! It's an intense songwriting trio."

For Carlile, writing is cathartic, a way of dealing with and processing those personal experiences but it's sometimes difficult to go back and channel those emotions. "It's easier once the songs are done and performed, it's like I've got to seal that envelope, I have to perform the song for other people. I will write a song and call my brother and sing it over the phone. I'm really an exhibitionist, musically, that way, I want to just throw myself into the fire and reveal immediately." Carlile's favourite aspect of the industry is performing, it's what she fell in love with at just eight years old. "My mother sang country music when I was a little girl. She had a band and they would rehearse in the house, she was always really good about including me and letting me sing." Carlile reflects fondly upon those memories with her mum. "I thought I had a pretty good voice even at like seven or eight, which I didn't when I look back and hear it now. But I got to audition for and come out on stage during a thing called the Northwest Grand Ole Opry at about eight years old. When I heard from the dark - I couldn't see it - but when I heard that applause from the audience for the first time, 200 people, I was done. That was it. I was never gonna do anything else for the rest of my life. I was totally obsessed with performing more than the music."

Love of live performance

Carlile has worked hard to understand what goes into a live performance, what's going on with the body and mind. "I've done a couple of sessions with hypnosis, and for most performers, the psycho sympathetic nervous system doesn't see what we're doing as natural. So our systems get really stressed out, I think we switch into fight or flight. The ones that can do it, the ones that are made to do it, have an almost out of body experience while it's happening. And I do. I make eye contact with people in the audience, and I'm totally invested in their experience. Meanwhile, the words are coming out of my mouth, and the chords are getting played but I'm very duplicitous in my presence."

"I do music so that I can stand in front of people and exchange energy, and emotional permissiveness, and, for lack of a better word, love, that's what I do. I want to give and receive it and feel it in a circular way." Carlile's eyes light up as she gushes about live music, something she's missed terribly in the last



Image credit: Neil Krug

YOU'RE A ROLE MODEL TO SO MANY YOUNG ARTISTS BUT ALSO TO SO MANY YOUNG PEOPLE WITHIN THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY, WHAT ADVICE CAN YOU GIVE TO THOSE PEOPLE WHO LOOK UP TO YOU WHO ARE PERHAPS STRUGGLING AT THE MOMENT?

I really understand that I am, because I had them and I needed them so badly. I needed to have these characters, these people that I could look to in pop culture and beyond, and see future family in those people. The thought that I might be family to an LGBTQ+ kid living in a small town in rural America or in rural England for that matter, It really warms my heart and I feel the weight of that responsibility, I think it's really important. One of the things I tell young people all the time, that, thankfully didn't need to be told to me because of my unique situation, is be brave, and don't isolate yourself. Don't believe that you're alone, don't lock yourself in your room even to play guitar or write songs, find friends, find collaborators, find allies, find a team, even people that you don't agree with. It's just about the fact that human beings are not meant to be alone. When we become disenfranchised and isolated, we can't change the world, we need these unanimous pushes of communities. So I hate the thought of young queer people isolating themselves.

year. “It's what I’ve been thriving off since I was eight years old. It's my favourite thing. The thing that's happened in my life and career that I think I've enjoyed most about the industry is getting to collaborate with and be friends with and support my heroes. That's been the best part as a total fangirl.”

Proudest moments

Carlile grew up idolising the likes of Joni Mitchell, Elton John and Tanya Tucker to name just a few. Her hard work and dedication to the industry has been validated in recent years by getting to collaborate with her musical heroes. “My proudest moment is probably going to be the Joni Mitchell ‘Blue’ show, performing the album in front of Joni Mitchell and Elton John and Bonnie Raitt, my absolute heroes and overcoming that intense and seemingly insurmountable terror that I felt before doing that, it wasn't nerves, it was another thing entirely.” Carlile reflects fondly, before adding, “Watching Joni recover from her medical emergency, watching her stand up and walk out of that wheelchair, open her mouth and sing songs again. I'm so personally proud of being able to be a part of and to have witnessed that. Singing *I Will Always Love You* with Dolly Parton, creating that huge moment in Newport - the first all women's headlining set there and bringing out Dolly Parton in the end, that was a proud moment.” An artist as talented as Carlile, with a heart as pure as gold has many memories like this, as musicians call upon her to help bring their projects to life.

In 2019 Carlile helped bring Tanya Tucker’s ‘While I’m Livin’ album to life. It was Tucker’s first album in a decade and Carlile co-wrote a number of songs on the record and co-produced it with Shooter Jennings who has also co-produced ‘In These Silent Days’. “Shooter Jennings is a real soul brother, that’s why we got together to record in the first place, because I'm a better artist, writer, singer, person when he's around. Dave Cobb made ‘By The Way, I Forgive You’, with Shooter and there was something about the way that record went down, where when we close the door on the studio, I knew we were half done with our journey together. I looked forward to the day that we could cross that finish line, I feel like we're there. I think we got our mission accomplished with ‘In These Silent Days’.” When it comes to Carlile and Jennings work together with Tanya Tucker, Carlile says it’s something they’re all very proud of. “Helping her back into music after 17 years of not really having enough of a light shone on her path for her to know that she could step onto it, to watch her win Best Country Album and Best Country song at the Grammys, to watch the good humour and respect and platform that she's been given over the course of the last few years has made me really, really proud.”

The Highwomen

It’s not the only GRAMMY award-winning collaboration that Carlile has been involved in in recent years. At this year’s GRAMMY’s, country supergroup The Highwomen, which is composed of Carlile, Natalie Hemby, Amanda Shires and Maren Morris, took home the award for Best Country Song for their song *Crowded Table*. Carlile reflects upon the whole experience. “The first time we all got together in the same room, was when Natalie Hemby brought us Crowded Table. I remember all sitting around the couches and reading our lyrics, we sang it in unison, because nobody wanted to step on anyone's toes. That unison sound of us all singing the melody together, that's when we knew what The Highwomen sounded like. We'd recorded some songs before that but we hadn't hit our stride of what The Highwomen sounded like until we sang crowded table. Then we actually went back to the songs we recorded prior and tried to meet that bar. Natalie Hemby and Lori McKenna…

> "That unison sound of us all singing the melody together, that's when we knew what The Highwomen sounded like."



it’s hard to say because there's so many good ones, and most of them are women but they are the genre defining songwriters in Nashville - I've got so much respect for those gals.”

“Those girls were too generous to include me as an equal songwriter on that song because, I call myself the one liner, I wrote one line! They were like, ‘Yep, even split’ it was just really generous. All I wrote was the line that says ‘Let us take on the world while we're young and able and bring us back together when the day is done’ and I have got a GRAMMY for it! I can't tell you how grateful it makes me feel but it's a beautiful song and it's one of the songs in the arc of my life, in my career that I'm most proud of.” She concludes, “I loved that record so much, that will always be musically one of my favourite things I've ever been a part of, because I feel like that record ticks the boxes of everything I love about country music.”

Live loud

As Carlile prepares to release ‘In These Silent Days’ she says she is ready to “Live loud again”. “I am getting back on the road, cautiously. It's a lot of fancy footwork to keep everybody safe and still experiencing the healing power of live music, but we can do it and we can strike a really important balance.” Carlile also takes some time for the most important part of her life too - motherhood. “My big girl’s going back to school, and I'm starting to look at preschool for my little girl.” She says, flashing the biggest smile of the whole conversation. “It’s cautiously good times.” M



GETTING TO KNOW: TRAVIS DENNING

Tell me when you first knew that you wanted to be a musician?

I started playing guitar when I was 11 years old and it was just the first thing that I really grabbed a hold of. I played sports as a kid, but I never really found what I really enjoyed doing. The guitar was the first thing that I got my hands on that I could wrap my head around a little bit for some reason. I was getting better at it at a pretty normal pace. I just kind of fell head over heels in love with it. When I was 14 years old, that was the first time I ever stepped foot on stage and I just was like, okay, this rocks. I don't want to do anything else.

When it comes to your own songwriting, where do you like to start?

It all starts with an idea, whether it's a hook or a title, I got to have something I can mentally grab on to. And for me, that always starts with a hook or just something that we know we're writing about. So once we get that, then we start thinking, well, musically, what do we want it to sound like? And would it be mid-tempo or a ballad?

I want to ask you about your first number one After A Few, what did it mean to you to get to number one?

I wrote that song with Kelly Archer and Jessica Weaver, Kelly had the title and she was like, I think it's all these things that are after a few you know, drinking songs, minutes of conversation, whatever it is - man, she rocked it that day. I mean the melody was hers and I was just hanging on for dear life. I had the guitar lick and knew how I wanted the song to come out. Once we demoed the song I thought this song feels like a hit. It's probably the biggest accomplishment of my life so far. Not only as an artist to have a number one song, but to be a songwriter and have a number one song meant the world.

You mentioned there about being a songwriter, and not just an artist, is that something that you want to continue doing?

I always want some cuts. The reason I love doing it is because it still challenges me as a writer to think outside of the box. If I co-write those co-writers are expecting us to write a song for me, I love focusing on myself, but there's also something cool about thinking well I wonder if this person would record it and it's such a cool validating thing, when you do get a song recorded, because I think it just shows that you still have a place in the songwriting community.

So this record, that you just released, it features that wonderful song ABBY on it. Could tell me a little bit about the story behind that song?

That's a song that a buddy of mine played for me and I just laughed my ass off. I heard it and I thought it was the funniest song ever. It also felt really big. I was like, this could be such a big moment live. And I fell in love with it. I knew who the Songwriters were, and I called them up and asked if I could record it and they gave it to me.

You spend so long planning a record and what it's going to sound like live and then you're not able to tour it? How has that affected you?

We definitely faced that with the first EP, it came out in May of last year, and the whole world was just up in flames pretty much, it was difficult. You worry if anyone's going to care about it when we do go back on the road. Ultimately, I found myself leaning on new music from artists I love during the pandemic, that gave me a little reassurance that hopefully a lot of other people were doing the same thing.

> "It all starts with an idea, whether it's a hook or a title"

What's the strangest thing that you've ever written a song about?

That's a great question. There's definitely been some drunk, not safe for work, parody songs I've written with some buddies. I'll say the one I can definitely talk about is, I wrote a song to the tune of 'Do your ears hang low? Do they wobble to and fro?' An old nursery rhyme song and it's 'Do you drive a truck?' It's very stupid and funny and I think it'll probably come out at some point. It's got some big, silly Tick Tock energy to it. So maybe I need to try and make up a dance or something to it.

If they were to make a movie about your life, who would you cast to play yourself? And what would be the opening theme?

I think the opening song would probably be *Kickstart My Heart* by Motley Crue. I'd definitely cast somebody handsome like a young Leonardo DiCaprio! M

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TAKING THE STAGE

The versatile songwriter Sonia Leigh has a thirst for adventure, something that's evident in her music. Having been forced off the road by the pandemic, Sonia Leigh is resuming her tour this fall.

Hit songwriter Sonia Leigh has become somewhat of an adopted brit over the last seven years spending months at a time touring the UK and playing festivals. I can't recall if it was Country 2 Country where I first saw her play or Tin Pan South in Nashville but what I do remember, is that on both occasions I was captivated by the versatility of her songwriting and the energy and emotion she injected into her live performance. From what I recall, it was around the time the Zac Brown Band cut 'Sweet Annie' and 'Goodbye In Her Eyes' - both co-written by Sonia. She was over in the UK on tour when Nashville, her home, was hit by a devastating tornado in March 2020. Though worried for her friends, she continued to do the thing she loved best, but just days later the coronavirus pandemic took hold and she was forced to go back to the US. As she makes her way back to the stage and back to England, Leigh opens up about her forced time away from the spotlight and reflects upon her achievements throughout her career.

Adopted Brit

"I've spent so much of my life touring round England trying to get places by any means possible and I finally get to go on a tour bus and COVID comes and shuts it down!" She begins with a laugh as she thinks back to the tour she was on with Joanne Shaw Taylor, the one she is about to resume over 18 months later. "I was mostly quarantining in the mountains with my girlfriend and her little girl. It was really nice but there's that sagittarius in me that loves to travel and loves to be on stage. I love people - I love to see people, meet people, connect with people, and performing is a big part of my life and who I am. So I think I fell into like a little bit of a depression." Sonia says.

It wasn't all bad for Sonia who now found herself having to entertain a small child all day, every day! Whilst the world descended into a chaos, there was still a child-like sense of wonder within the house that kept Sonia and her girlfriend grounded. "I think she kept us both sane. She was aware of what was going on but I don't think she knew the intensity. You're in a house all day with a toddler and so you've come up with these amazing ways to keep her entertained, you're like, 'Oh, I like to colour. I'm just gonna sit here and face paint and colour all day and make popsicle stick animals and heal some of my inner child just by hanging out with her.' She's just so funny. She did add a little hope and laughter and joy because she has that little bit of naivety that the weight of the world wasn't really fully on her shoulders."

A new sound

The forced pause gave Sonia time to work on writing for her various projects too. "I was quarantining in Asheville, I flew straight back there from England so I didn't go back to my home in Nashville for a whole year after the Tornado hit. I just had my guitar with me and I

wanted to work on my engineering. So I went to Guitar Centre, it was like their last day open, and it felt like every musician was just going in and just grabbing what they could because everybody's like, 'I'm not going to be able to create!' I just kind of bought a little bitty studio and set it up." For the past two and a half years, Sonia has been writing for BMG for the film and sync department but still explores folk and country and has a side project, the Indica Girls that's mainly rap and hip-hop; did I mention she was a versatile writer? "The problem is that I have so much music, I could release like three or four different records right now, without writing another song. If I can be 100% honest, I haven't released a lot of music and I think that there's a fear in me, that's just me being transparent and vulnerable, because it is all different there's a fear in me that's like, 'Oh, God, what are they gonna think? Is it good enough?'"

"I want to put a record out called 'As Is' and putting all the songs I've been writing on, that are not perfect and going off key, just to show the vulnerability - I think fans would like that." Sonia continues as she thinks of the back catalogue of songs she's amassed over the years. "There's a song that I love that, me and the band used to do back in the day it's called Devil May Care. We've been talking about recording that song very seriously. I'm talking to some producers right now and it's one of my favourite songs. I started writing when I was 10 years old, I have a song box - I always called it my song box when I was growing up - and I kept all of my notebooks in there, of all my songs, and I would sit in my room and I would sing all those songs over and over and over, just so I'd never forget them. I couldn't go back through there and play most of those songs today. It's hard to keep track of what you've written and where it's at. I'm not sloppy, I like to keep things tidy but it's still hard." Aside from the support she gets on her film and television projects at BMG, Sonia is an independent musician. She has to juggle the creative side of the industry with the business side. "I'm kind of my own team, I've got my friend Jen Ogden, who helps me with my socials and she's my personal assistant. It's just us, so it gets a little rough to navigate on your own."

Writing with the Queen of rockabilly

Despite the struggles of being an independent musician, Sonia reflects fondly on her career that she's worked hard at since she was around 17 years old. "I wouldn't change one thing, every single thing that I've done, it's just been with joy." She grins. "I'm kind of at a place in my life where I want to do what makes me happy. And if it doesn't make me happy, I'm not going to do it." Something that made her very happy recently was getting to write with rockabilly legend Wanda Jackson for her last album 'Encore'. "I never thought in a million years I'd be a part of something like this and it's just an incredible honour to sit with her and write with her. I wrote with her, her granddaughter Jordan and Vanessa Olivarez and we wrote the song and I'm so incredibly thankful I can't believe that happened. All the other talent that's a part of this record is just… this is monumental, its legendary and so I can't even say how blessed I am to have gotten to be a part of it." Sonia gushes.

There are so many pivotal moments in her career that it is hard to pinpoint a stand out memory. From performing alongside Willie Nelson to playing at the famous Red Rocks. For Sonia, it goes back to that human connection, and there lies the key to her most memorable moments. "I remember meeting Joan Jett, right before I was going out to open for her, she grabbed my hand and pulled me in, looked me dead in the eye and said, "Go kick some ass."" The validation from some of her earliest inspirations in music mean the world to Sonia. "My very first concert was Loretta Lynn and that was when I realised I wanted to do what I do. I ended up getting to tour with her and my dad got to come out and see me perform on stage, on her stage and that was another monumental moment for me."

Sonia regularly takes part on the Melissa Etheridge cruise, something which Sonia looks forward to every year. "I grew up loving Melissa Etheridge, studying her work learning to play guitar to her albums. I rewound the tapes and wrote down the lyrics. I taught myself the chords, I couldn't just look them up on Google that wasn't available. I think that being admired as an artist and writer, by her is probably one of the biggest accomplishments to me. To be friends with her and her wife and her family is and to be on her cruises, it's such an honour. She's just such an amazing writer and talented person and good soul."

Proud moments

There have been some memorable moments on this side of the pond for Sonia as well, from recording at Abbey Road Studios in London to working with Roger Taylor. The pinnacle of her time here was Pride festival, "Do you remember Pride festival in Soho that one big year? The streets were flooded. I'd worked so hard to get to England and played whatever gig I could, then here I am standing on a stage with 1000s of people, you couldn't see the end of the people from street to street in Soho. And I was like, they're all looking at me!"

As some kind of normality is realised once again, Sonia prepares to come back to England for a few months of heavy touring, knowing that she will be welcomed back with open arms by her loyal fanbase and fellow musicians. "I'm in awe of the blessings in my life and if I died, right this second, I couldn't have asked for more." She concludes with a reflective smile, content with her private life and the lingering thought of just how much she's achieved within her career. M



"I'm in awe of the blessings in my life and if I died, right this second, I couldn't have asked for more."

Image credits: Lauren Morrell

The first lady of Rock and Roll

Wanda Jackson's final farewell reflects upon her life and career whilst passing the baton to the next generation

The queen of rockabilly, Wanda Jackson seemingly retired from the limelight in 2019 when she announced she would no longer be touring. Little did the world know she was planning an encore in the form of an album, which would see her collaborate with some of her favourite people and fellow songwriters who had been inspired by Jackson's illustrious career.

Keeping it in the family

"This is my victory lap" Jackson laughs - it is one of her most personal albums to date and it was something she got to share with one of the closest people in her life, her granddaughter Jordan Breanne Simpson. "She has proven to be a lifeline. After my husband passed away in 2017, we had always travelled together, I'd always had someone with me, all of a sudden, I had no one. I had dates coming up so she just took on that role, she took time out of her schedule to travel with me, and take care of me on the road. I don't know, she loves her grandma!" She begins with a chuckle, "I didn't ever have representation in Nashville, or hadn't for a long time. It was just nice to have someone there that had their hand on the pulse, that knew what was happening and who was doing what." Jackson reflects upon how the album came about. "She acts as a manager for me right now, she manages my social media and she's a personal assistant to Maren Morris. She knew the writers who were really hot at the time we started this project. They were all anxious to write with me and I hadn't been writing, I've just stopped through the years for some reason. So she wanted to see me get back into songwriting and she thought this was a very good way to spur me on - she was right."

Simpson didn't just arrange Jackson's writing schedule though, she joined in. "She's musical, she writes and sings a little bit. She doesn't have aspirations to be a star but she does do some music. So she's a very good person to have around and bounce things off." She was the perfect person to help Jackson tell her final chapter of the story. What is abundantly clear from both talking to Jackson and listening to the eight song collection, is that family is at the heart of everything she does. 'Encore' features songs dedicated to several members of her family who encouraged and nurtured her talent through the years, including her father. "I was telling the girls (Sonia Leigh, Vanessa Olivarez and Jordan Simpson) about growing up and being in show business and I told them what my dad had said to me early on, he said "You do what you want to do on stage, have the freedom to sing what you want to sing and sing the songs the way you want to but keep in mind that first of all you're always a lady."" Jackson reflects as she begins to share the story behind *Treat Me Like A Lady*. "He taught me some things when he travelled with me, he had some rules that I had to go by. I was brought up in that atmosphere in the 50s where the young girls were ladies. Once we got started on this song, we decided we'd make it like the old songs of mine that change tempo from a waltz tempo into a rockabilly tune. That was fun to do."

Going back to her roots

As 'Encore' and Jackson's biography 'Every Night Is Saturday Night' have given Jackson time to pause and reflect on her life and career within recent years, she recalls her earliest memories and the influence of her parents. "I knew that I wanted to be a singer since I was, they tell me six years old, I said I was going to be a girl singer. My folks loved music" Jackson says, a smile audible in her voice, "My dad was a musician. He had a little band for a while. That was in the days of the depression in America, in the 30s so he didn't have much of a chance. He played the guitar, he played the fiddle and he could sing very well. So he began teaching me when I was six years old, he put a little guitar in my hand and began teaching me some chords. I loved it from the very start. Some of my first memories are of my mum and dad in the evenings, before we had television, we would do things together. After supper dad and I would get the instruments and play and sing whilst my mother would do some work but she enjoyed listening to it. We lived in California by this time and the war was over. They'd go to dances and they took me with them because I loved the music. So that was how I came to have such a love for music."

The first lady of rock & roll, took inspiration from all kinds of places when it came to writing songs but insists it always comes from something within us. "Personal experience seems to be discovered as a catalyst for writing a song, you may not stay true to your story, you could wind up writing something funny about some situation but they come from somewhere deep within us." She says as she evaluates the creative process. Known for her zestful performances which captivated her audience members, not enough light is shone on just what a prolific songwriter she really was. She reflects upon a song she wrote in the early sixties that wound up being a hit for Buck Owens. "Sometimes they come from something we've read, I was reading a magazine one time and someone was quoted, they said, "We've got to stop kicking our hearts around" I thought, that is a song title! I immediately got my guitar out and wrote *Kickin' Our Hearts Around*. About a year later Buck Owens recorded it and had a pretty good little hit with it." Once again a fond smile is detected as she reminisces. "To bring it up to date, my latest album came about through the same way, through stories that I was talking to the other writers about. Being young, they didn't all know my career really well. So they had questions and as I would talk about my family life, and my husband and children, these things just came out of me. We

> "Keep in mind that first of all, you're always a lady"



"This is my victory lap!"

Image credit: Emma Lee

QUICK *FIRE*

STRANGEST THING YOU'VE WRITTEN A SONG ABOUT

WELL, IT'S NOT NECESSARILY STRANGE, BUT I WROTE A SONG ABOUT A PIECE OF JEWELLERY. I HAD A CHARM BRACELET, CAPITOL RECORDS HAD GIVEN ME THE BRACELET AND MY HUSBAND AND I THROUGH THE YEARS TOGETHER, FILLED IN THE CHARMS ON IT. THE SONG IS ABOUT A GIRL DATING A GUY AND HE GAVE HER THE CHARM BRACELET AND SO FORTH. SO THAT'S NOT STRANGE, BUT IT'S KIND OF UNUSUAL.

IN A MOVIE ABOUT YOUR LIFE WHO WOULD YOU CAST TO PLAY YOURSELF AND WHAT WOULD BE THE OPENING THEME TUNE?

HOW ABOUT MILEY CYRUS SINGING LET'S HAVE A PARTY, DO YOU LIKE THAT ONE? I THINK THAT WOULD GET EVERYBODY'S ATTENTION. IT'S STRANGE THAT YOU SHOULD MENTION MOVIE BECAUSE AS WE SPEAK, THERE IS A MOVIE BEING WRITTEN RIGHT NOW ABOUT MY LIFE AND IT WILL BE BASED OFF MY BIOGRAPHY. MILEY CYRUS HAS SHOWN INTEREST IN DOING THE PART FOR ME. SHE DOESN'T LOOK LIKE ME, BUT I THINK SHE COULD GET INTO MY CHARACTER REAL WELL.

WHAT'S THE ONE PIECE OF ADVICE YOU'D GIVE TO THE ACTRESS PLAYING YOU?

I WAS AHEAD OF MY TIME, I WASN'T EVER WILD, I THINK THAT REPUTATION IS FOLLOWING ME AROUND BUT I WAS NEVER THAT KIND OF GIRL. I'D HAVE TO TELL HER TO REMEMBER, I WAS ALWAYS A LADY, ONSTAGE AND OFF.

wrote songs about them. So the album is very personal in that respect."

That's what love is

Much of the record has a feistiness to it, the kind of kick that we have come to know and love over the years in Jackson's music. Her voice, with all the strength and power she had in her youth, is supported by Joan Jett or Angaleena Presley and Elle King - her younger counterparts that have spent their lives learning and looking up to her - further enhancing the notion that the sound Jackson pioneered lives on in the hearts of the next generation. Yet, the conclusion is a much more raw and vulnerable encounter that has become one of Jackson's most precious songs. "*That's What Love Is* is a very intimate, personable song, I mean not in the way of sex or anything but just something very sweet and dear between my husband and I." She begins, "I was telling the writers that no matter where we were in the world, he'd wake me up every morning, the same way. He'd come into the bedroom, open the drapes and the blinds, and then turn the television on. I would be cursing him saying, close the drapes, turn that TV off but he came over and he had a cup of coffee in his hand, and would get me in a good mood. He'd talk to me and act silly or something. I was such a sleepy head but he knew what it took to get me up and going, so that song, that's my favourite on the record."

As the rockabilly queen returns to the spotlight for her 'Encore' she takes stock of the achievements and accolades during her career. The most dear to her are the ones she got to to share with her loved ones. "I've had so many wonderful accolades and things done for me. I think the really big one was the induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. That was something I never expected to happen. It was purely my husband and my fans that got on board with that campaign and they made it happen. I think they put a new category in, just to induct me once they got word of who I was, and what I had done for rock and roll being the first girl to ever record it. So all my family was there. We all went up to Cleveland, the grandchildren and the whole family, so that was a wonderful weekend for us."

A legendary finale for a legendary artist, the first lady of rock and roll's last album is perhaps one of the greatest albums she's ever made! M



Image credit: Bobby Cochran

Carving his own path

Charley Crockett is not one to conform to the business models of the industry, as he releases his tenth album in six years he continues to stick to his guns

Charley Crockett's life and career has been somewhat of a rollercoaster. From a tough upbringing to getting into trouble with the law, Crockett has battled his own demons by turning to music time and time again. Something which began as a teenager when he picked up the guitar for the first time. "My mama got me an old Hohner guitar out of a pawn shop in Irving, Texas when I was 17."

Crockett, who grew up somewhere between Texas and New Orleans spent much of his adult life running from his roots but they had a way of following him around. "I'm from a South Texas area called the Rio Grande Valley. And it's a very isolated place. You know, we weren't doing real good down there. My mama moved with me, up to Dallas. I would go and live with my uncle in the summertime in New Orleans, and he lived and worked in the French Quarter, which is the area of New Orleans that people talk about. When I was really young, I spent a lot of time in New Orleans on the street there and I always kept that with me. so eventually, years later, I became a street performer in that same neighbourhood just by circumstances."

Crockett continues, "South Texas was similar to New Orleans in a way. You can try to run away from where you're from, but even in doing that it just defines you even more. So Texas… I had a hard time with Texas, especially Dallas, Fort Worth area growing up, I had a really difficult time with it, we weren't in a great situation and I didn't have fond memories necessarily, of that area. In a way, that's what makes a town like Dallas, a very blues town. I ended up back there for a while playing in bars playing blues and country. The further I tried to go across America away from those places, I got to a certain age and realised who I am is the culture of Texas and Louisiana."

Crockett's single off his upcoming album

> "You can try to run away from where you're from, but even in doing that it just defines you even more"

I Need Your Love has a soulful vibe to it. "I just kind of wrote that one really easily and quickly." He added "You can write a record of country music and if you put a soul song on there, that's the one that's going to be the single and that's the one they're going to push to radio. Because traditional country music is not seen as commercial. It's not seen as sellable." The music industry, particularly the country music industry is a peculiar business to Crockett who in the past few years has focused on creating as much as possible for his fans. "Country music is such a strange world because even the country music formats, they don't really want to push or promote anything, that's true country music." For a while and for various reasons artists have raged against country radio in particular. "I think there's a big disconnect between what they play at radio, and what makes people want to listen to somebody's album."

He compares the greats that he grew up listening to and their release schedules compared to todays major label models, "It's kind of like a reality TV driven world. You find somebody who's maybe making music in obscurity in their bedroom or something and then they sign them to a label, and then they promote the record for like, two years.

"That's America. That's the music business in a nutshell."

There's very little development. Back in the day, no matter what type of music you're talking about, that's not how it worked. Ray Charles recorded 60 albums, Willie Nelson has recorded 70 albums. I'm not making records to satisfy the music industry, because the music industry, to me, is dead. I'm trying to figure out why American artists used to record three or four records a year, and now they're recording, like one record every two or three years. I just don't see how a young person making music could be excited to do that."

For the Texan native, there are some hidden gems on 'Music City USA' that he can't wait for fans to hear, "My favourite song is probably the song I wrote called, Only Game In Town. It's probably the least commercially viable song on the album. I've watched a million old westerns, there's always a saloon in this one horse town, somewhere in the middle of nowhere, in the Mountains or something. And there's a card game going on, the game is rigged but they always play it anyway even though they know it's fixed. I really enjoyed writing that song. There's a line in the song 'You came in feeling lucky/We all know how that is/The dealers my friend/and the house always wins.' That's America. That's the music business in a nutshell."

As 'Music City USA' is shared with the world, Crockett is sure to be plugging away, already on to the next one as he continues to release music his own way, in his own time. M



Image credit: Bobby Cochran

Beyond Nashville

THE MULTI-CULTURAL MUSINGS OF YONDER BOYS



Image credit: Johannes Gerblinger



"Country music, as people still might classify it in mainstream Germany, isn't always just white guys in Cowboy hats, well... not everyone at least!"

The multi-cultural musings of Yonder Boys

The Americana Berlin-based trio, Yonder Boys, have come together from all over the world, bringing their different influences and cultural sensibilities to the music scene in Germany. None of the core members of the group are from Germany but they have made waves in the music scene there. Banjo player, David Stewart Ingleton is originally from Forster, in Australia, guitarist Jason Serious hales from Baltimore, USA whilst Tomás Peralta who jumps from mandolin to double bass, drums to keys and helps out on the banjo, comes all the way from Santiago, Chile. Speaking of the band's formation Ingleton said "We all came to Germany for different reasons being music, work, love and family. We had different levels of experience and interests in all types of musical genres but we love to write and perform folk and Americana music." Speaking about the music scene out in Germany the Yonder Boys praised the fans saying, "Germany has a definite love affair with music and interest in all styles. German audiences are also very kind, attentive and some of the most generous fans you will meet so to play here, once you find a nice fan base, will always be a joy." Reflecting on the audience's perception of their music he says, "most in Germany and most likely in all of Europe would define all music played with a banjo as "Country," a little explanation of the different sub-genres of American Folk can help people understand the variety of different music that can be played on such, sometimes polarizing instruments as the banjo." The band's latest album, 'Acid Folk' features wild banjo melodies and intricate fingerstyle guitar, Sicilian chants and Beach Boys harmonies whilst the lyrics range from abstract to descriptive and melancholic. "We Yonder Boys are a band that likes to push those boundaries and enjoy pushing people into listening to our music that wouldn't normally enjoy a song with a banjo or mandolin and three part harmonies." says Ingleton. The musicians that they enlisted to play on the album spanned seven nationalities including Japanese, German, French and Chilean. Ingleton says that this shows "Country music, as people still might classify it in mainstream Germany, isn't always just white guys in Cowboy hats, well… not everyone at least!"

Rodeo FM adapt to changing music scene

The Berlin-based Rodeo FM are fresh off the back of releasing their EP 'All The Things You Asked For'. The Alt-Country/Americana group have been making music for the last 15 years, playing all around Europe from the south of France to the Russian border, from vernissages to line dance saloons, from weddings to funerals. Singer-songwriter in the band, Pat Cater, talks about the highs and lows of the scene in Berlin; "Berlin is still a great place to make music because of the the huge number of diverse musicians of all kinds" Cater begins. "The Berlin Americana scene is small. One of Europe's biggest country festivals, the Country Music Meeting, takes place in Berlin annually but it is rather mainstream, which in Germany means it is verging on a genre called "Schlager", quite compatible with beer tents and the Oktoberfest." The alt-country scene is tricky to make a living from too, especially for bands due to running costs, "With clubs dying and fees at an all time low, more often than not, it means playing just for the hat" Cater continues. However, Rodeo FM have managed to carve out a long and successful career and have been able to adapt to the changing scene. "A lot of shows in Berlin have actually gone private with in-house concerts organised in flats or offices. That being the case, until 2020, Berlin was a hot spot for US touring artists like Willy Tea Taylor or the Harmed Brothers who have been here more than once." Rodeo FM have prided themselves on ear catching choruses, and guitar and pedal steel soaked tracks that take you on a journey from start to finish. This EP is no different from the old school sounds of *Shame, Shame, Shame* with its unusual banjo counter melody to the slow building *Worthless Gain*, the first single to have been released off the bands latest project. The songs on this record were all recorded just before the first lockdown in 2020, but they are excited to get back out on the road and get back into the studio together soon!

Beyond Nashville

NORWAY TO TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Norwegian duo Fayen make their debut

Fayen was founded by Anne-Grethe Nyhaug and Gøran Bogstrand, both profiled musicians on the roots and americana-scene in Trondheim. "The music scene in Norway is very diverse" Nyhaug says, "Country, folk and americana has been around for many years, but there's been a lot happening the last few years. I think the movie 'Oh Brother Where Art Thou' sparked a bluegrass trend which since has developed into what is popularly called nordicana - americana with a nordic twist." Nyhaug was born in rural north western Norway. She grew up by the ocean, with sheep, pigs, hens, american cars and music. The first time she stood on a stage singing was at 5 years old, and since then she's stood on many stages, performing a variety of music. However, she has never let go of the country music she grew up with.

Meanwhile, Bogstrand is from Melbu, a small village in Vesterålen, northern Norway. Surrounded by mountains, fish and guitars, his passions in life were set from early on. He has played guitar in a number of different bands, but has immersed himself more and more in the traditional music from northern America.

"I think we've mainly been inspired by american music, but there's definitely a nordic sound in our music as well. We listen a lot to norwegian traditional music and singer-songwriters. Many people come to Trondheim (where we live) to study music, so the local music scene is very exiting. It's always been an inspiration. Some of the artists which have been important to us (to mention some) are Emmylou Harris, Gillian Welch and Dave Rawlings, Feist, Alison Krauss and the Union Station, Sufjan Stevens, Ane Brun, Sudan Dudan."

Their debut album 'From Here On Out' draws a lot from those influences as they carve a path and find their own unique voice. "On this album there's both songs written from personal experience to the 'big questions'. Religion or social injustice may be the theme in some songs, and then you have *Meander Love* which is a straight out love song."

2375 miles: Gary Hector

Trinidad and Tobago is 2,375 miles from Nashville, Tennessee and 4,408 miles from London but Gary Hector has drawn influence from some of the biggest artists from both these parts of the world as well as his native musicians. "Once I touched a guitar at around 19 - a very late beginner by most standards - I just never put it down, with the ambition being to get into a rock n roll band." Hector did just that less than a year later, heavily influenced by The Rolling Stones; "That sound, that look, that style, that attitude, that swagger, that Rolling Stones" he proclaims with enthusiasm. "The Stones led me to lots and lots of history and a whole new world. They even led me to where I am right now." Hector has just released his album National Trash which features single Today I Ride Alone. Trinidad and Tobago have a rich music scene and Hector appears to be proud "We have a history, and also our own music form in The Calypso. Over a hundred year old art form and some amazing exponents of the art. As most music styles, they change and merge and take new shapes in modern times, but my passion for our music is generally with the past greats. I'm deeply inspired by the living legend The Mighty Sparrow, the undisputed King of Calypso from the mid 50's to the 70's, alongside The Lord Kitchner, two geniuses. Also hugely inspired and influenced by another living legend David Rudder, who picked up the mantle in the mid 80's and produced decades of high-class work."

Though influenced by Rock and Calypso, Hector's debut album sees him shift to the country and americana scene instead. We hear a beautiful pedal steel in the production an integral part of our genre yet we hear his laid back vocals, a freedom to his lyrics reminiscent of his native influences. Hector intends to keep on writing and releasing music, exploring his influences in greater depth and translating that into his own music. It's not just music he has to focus on though, Hector is a gifted footballer, batsman, bowler and golfer!



"The Stones led me to lots and lots of history and a whole new world. They even led me to where I am right now"



Beyond Nashville

TENILLE TOWNES



GETTING *TO KNOW* TENILLE TOWNES

FAVOURITE FILM: *THE WIZARD OF OZ*

FAVOURITE SONG: *LEAN ON ME - BILL WITHERS*

FAVOURITE PLACE: *THE UK*

FAVOURITE FOOD: *ICE CREAM*

FAVOURITE QUOTE: *'THERE'S A CRACK IN EVERYTHING, THAT'S HOW THE LIGHT GETS IN' - LEONARD COHEN*

PETS: *A DOG NAMED SAM*

IF YOU WERE TO DESCRIBE YOUR PERSONALITY AS A FLAVOUR OF POTATO CHIP, WHAT FLAVOUR WOULD YOU BE? *AN ALL DRESSED CHIP, IT'S ALL THE FLAVOURINGS IN ONE, YOU'VE GOT A LITTLE BIT OF BARBECUE, A LITTLE BIT OF SALT VINEGAR, A LITTLE BIT OF SOUR CREAM AND ONION. AND IT SOUNDS LIKE KIND OF A CRAZY MIXTURE BUT IT REALLY IS MY VERY FAVOURITE KIND OF CHIP!*

IN A MOVIE ABOUT YOUR LIFE, WHO WOULD YOU CAST TO PLAY YOU AND WHAT WOULD BE THE OPENING THEME TUNE? *EMMA STONE, SHE'S HILARIOUS AND HERE YOU COME AGAIN BY DOLLY PARTON.*

Canada has always produced talented country stars from Shania Twain to Terri Clark but there's a new kid on the block, Tenille Townes, that's been making strides within the scene as her compelling story telling lyrics truly tug on the heart strings of anyone who hears them. Currently residing in Nashville when she's not touring the world, Townes reflects upon her experiences growing up in Canada after recently winning three Canadian Country Music Awards.

"It still seems so surreal to get to celebrate music at home and to feel the community that I grew up with, wrapping their arms around this path." Townes begins, "It means the world to me. I'm so grateful to have got my start there and to be able to call Canada home. I grew up very much surrounded by country music and the stories. That's the beautiful thing about country, I think it just sort of has this universal truth. I grew up singing along to the little yellow radio in my dad's garage, or we'd drive around in the motorhome with my grandparents across the wide open spaces of Alberta's plains into the Rocky Mountains, on our summer field trips, listening to Patsy Cline and Dolly Parton."

Townes' unique voice helped her to clinch the Female Artist of the Year title whilst her evocative songwriting helped her to take home the Songwriter of the Year award. Songs like *Somebody's Daughter* and *Jersey on the Wall* would bring a tear to the eye of even the hardest of hearts. "Getting to hear a story about someone who's lost someone too soon and how painful that is and to just be able to kind of talk about that for a minute, that always means the world to me and I will never ever take that for granted. When I play the songs I think about the stories that people have told me and the names of the people. I try to completely be enveloped in the emotion of that every time I sing it because I want anybody who's out there who just needs to feel that emotion to be able to feel it. It can be hard on my heart to be wrapped up in that moment but it's such an honour to get to stand there, sing that and think about the people who have left us too soon. So I carry that with me every time."

Townes has spent the last few months during the pandemic, working on new music and has approached songwriting differently. "I love to be the storyteller, I always will. However, there's something about this past year that has challenged me and I think the songs are coming out a lot more personal." Townes says. Talking about the collection of songs she's gearing up to release she adds, "There's a group of songs on there that definitely were created with the mindset of me missing live shows and missing playing with my band. There's a lot of really joyful songs. Then there's also some songs that were just written from a very lost and lonely place in my own heart. And I hope that people feel comforted when they hear those."

"Being able to write songs, even across the distance on zoom has been what's kept me sane during this pandemic." Townes continues, "It does not replace the in person, I am so excited be getting back to a little bit more of that. It doesn't replace it but it made me feel like, the song will find a way one way or another, into the world." Speaking of the new single of this new chapter which she co-wrote with David Pramik and Steph Jones, she said "I've been walking around my neighbourhood a lot, this past year; there's something therapeutic about just putting one foot in front of the other and being outside. I've been hearing kids laughing in the backyard and was looking at different sidewalk chalk art, and something about that just made me feel reminiscent of childhood. And I've been spending a lot of time working on myself and thinking about where our confidence comes from, and how the most confident version of ourselves was that fearless kid who just believed that anything was possible. I think I could use more of that confidence in my life right now."

For her last album, Townes spent time decorating her guitar to represent each song on the record. "A few years ago, when we were working on the lemonade stand in the studio, my dad came to visit and we walked through the Country Music Hall of Fame. We were looking at all of the remarkable instruments that they have in that place, and all the stories that these guitars have told, if only they could talk! For this record, we've got the sunrise painted on it, and on each of the rays, you're gonna get different lyrics. So I've got the ones on there for *Girl Who Didn't Care* and I've got my pen ready, just about to commit to the next song."

Townes continues to win the hearts of country fans across the world and continues to make her home country of Canada proud with each song she writes.

BEHIND THE SONG



SONG: THE CLIMB
ARTIST: MILEY CYRUS
SONGWRITTERS: JON MABE AND JESSI ALEXANDER
RELEASED: 2009

The Climb was a chart topping hit for Miley Cyrus upon its release in 2009. The country-pop ballad, that featured in the Hannah Montana movie, was Cyrus' first solo song to be released to country radio and became a signature hit for the Tennessee-native.

The song topped the Adult Contemporary chart in the United States and charted all around the world, from Australia to Denmark, Canada to Switzerland and here, in the UK. The song was nominated for a GRAMMY Award in the category for 'Best Song Written for a Motion Picture' but withdrew due to it not actually being written specifically for the Hannah Montana film. Songwriters Jessi Alexander and Jon Mabe take us back to the moment they first put pen to paper.

"I had been an artist at MCA, and had failed attempts at being an artist." Jessi begins, as she thinks back to that time. "I was considering getting married. My husband now, Jon Randall, was having success, he just had whiskey lullaby - Song of the Year, and everything I was doing was just not working. I'd already been writing songs for nine years in Nashville, and I was just in a low point in my career. I thought 'he's doing really well, we're probably going to get married, I'm approaching my 30s, maybe I should just stay home and be his wife. It was dark, but it was almost a freedom of giving in."

The day was just like any other day as she drove into work, except for two things! "I remember two specific things about that morning. I was driving into work, and I remember thinking, I don't have a song idea for today. I wanted to reach for my phone, which we all do, to put on music, but I remember that morning thinking, don't do that. The second thing I remember is the melody to the chorus, I started singing it in my head. All I remember about that is just thinking it sounded classic, like it had been written before, to the point where, by the time I got to music row, I was thinking is that islands in the stream - what is this melody? I went barreling into the co-write with Jon Mabe and said, pull up your GarageBand!"

Jon remembers that day very well; "She just said, 'Listen, I've got this melody, I don't know what it is but I need to get it down.'" So that uplifting chorus melody was the part that the pair wrote first. When they came back to it in another session, they began to think about the lyrics. Jon continues "There used to be a television show called Biography, people would go on and talk about their lives. Somebody was on one of the shows, and they were talking about how, at a certain point in your life, you are given the opportunity to stop and look backwards over the things that have happened to you, the things that you have made happen, or the things that you've been through, or that you've accomplished, and survey how your life has unfolded. Most people in that process realise that when they were struggling - for me, it was when I was trying really hard to be in the music business, I was on the other side of the desk working as a publisher - you look back and realise that it was the journey of you getting to those dreams, working hard. When you were struggling and eating cheap food and trying to scrimp and save and make it, that was when you were really living, all those struggles made you who you were, and they made the person that you became. So that's where we started."

Songs you're proud to have written with Jon Mabe

"There's a song that I wrote with the Dirt Drifters called ***Name On My Shirt***. My father, who just turned 94, he was a diesel mechanic. It was all grease and blue shirts - uniforms that he wore to work every day, had his name on. When I was a kid, I was sort of ashamed of that and didn't know any better. I thought, well, we're poor, all I ever do is work in the afternoons and a lot of my friends go home and don't have to do anything. That song is about figuring out what matters to you in life; realising that it's about family and the people around you and providing for them. Eventually, the guy in the song ends up with his name on his shirt, and he's proud and wonders if his dad would be proud too. That was very personal to me and meant a lot to me and my father - I still play that every every time I see him. There's another one called ***You're Only 17*** - that one's never been cut. I don't understand why, it's been in the studio with multiple artists. Tim McGraw's producer, Byron Gallimore, called us and was telling us how to spend our money! All our songs are like children until the crowd yells out 'your children suck!'"

Sitting back after the session, neither writer knew just what that song would go on to do and there was still a long road ahead until people began to pay it, or its writers, any attention. "When we left that room, we knew that it was a really good song. We felt like we had written a song that would work great for soundtracks." Jon begins. "I didn't really feel anything specific about it being a hit." Interjects Jessi, "I had written so many songs by this point, but when we demo'd it, I remember feeling like…wow, what a beautiful song, what a big song, the production came alive. I'm very blue collar with the way I write songs though, I don't really think much about them afterwards, I'm just moving on to the next song. There's songs that haunt me but that wasn't necessarily one of them." Jon thinks back on the demo's they created for the song. "We did a male version and a female version, Jessi sang and I sang. There was a period of time where it was just sort of sat on the shelf. There were some folks that kind of gave it a listen here and there and it was passed on by several artists in Nashville."

However Jessi had an ace up her sleeve, even if she didn't necessarily know it at the time. "I was writing songs at Disney at the time, a small branch of the big Disney, - we only had about six or seven songwriters." Jessi begins, "My publisher, Lisa Ramsey, found out that the Hannah Montana movie was being made in Nashville. She was a bit annoyed that there was this movie about Hannah Montana being in Nashville and yet, they weren't going to use any Nashville songs, they were going to have all these Los Angeles writers. So she was smart to find out that the directors were coming to town to do a location scout. She invited him over to the office. His name's Peter Chisholm and he's an amazing director - he did other movies like Serendipity. He had never seen anything like a Nashville publishing house before so we sat him down and did like a Nashville guitar pull. I sat next to him, we hit it off, we talked about Italy, we talked about songs and as we were leaving, he said, "Do you have any songs on CD? I just love your voice." I remember thinking, this is my shot. He thinks I'm sending him a CD home to listen to my voice but I have to be pitching for the movie. I didn't know anything about Hannah Montana. I did not have kids yet, I had zero interest in this situation. I was just trying to do my job. That's when me and Lisa remembered the song - It's The Climb. I promise you when I handed him that CD, I thought nothing about it. So much had gone wrong for me that I didn't think this was going to be any ticket out of anything."

However, the songwriting duo was about to get a pleasant surprise! "When they called maybe a month later and said, how much they liked the song and how if we could tweak some of the lyrics, they would make it the centrepiece of the movie, I just didn't believe it. I thought that kind of stuff just doesn't happen for me or Jon, some bigger writers are going to swoop in and write a bigger song, but the song did not want to die." Jon details how they set about changing the song for the movie. "At the time, it was third person, not in first person. 'You can almost see it that dream, you're dreaming'. They wanted, of course, the house of the mouse (Disney) wanted the spiritual references out of it."

Upon The Climb's release, the writers had different experiences of its success, for Jon it became one of his favourite songs that he'd ever written and remains one of his favourites to this day. "It's what put me on the map." He reflects, "It was the first song I ever had released. We start with that, where do you go after? Well, obviously I probably won't have one that big for the rest of my career. There are songwriters out there that do, but not very many." Meanwhile, Jessi was in the hospital after starting her own family. She jokes, "I'll be honest, I almost feel robbed of The Climb's success because I couldn't feel it. On January 22, which was the inauguration of President Obama - Miley Cyrus performed it at the inauguration ball, and I'm in the hospital with my firstborn. It was bizarre because my dream of being a songwriter was coming true but I was about to launch into an endeavour that would take all of my time and all of my energy." However, Jessi would eventually have her moment to soak up the songs success. "Miley invited me to her concert at the Bridgestone Arena. They put me and my husband kind of front row, front and centre. The band started to tune up for the climb and she said on the microphone to 22,000 people, "The girl that wrote the climb is here and would y'all please sing it to her" and the spotlight landed on me with 22,000 mums and little girls and grandparents singing the climb to me. It was an, 'it was all worth it' moment."

Later that year, as Miley Cyrus' version continued to soar, here in the UK the song found wings of its own. Joe McElderry, that year's X-Factor winner released the song as his first single and he took it right to the top of the UK Official Top 40. "I loved watching it go out and do its thing, it's like my baby." Jessi laughs as she reflects upon the success,

JESSI ALEXANDER:
BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

"The Climb was great for Miley, but I thought it would open doors with like Carrie Underwood and Martina McBride but that just wasn't happening. That's when I made the decision, looking back, it was a radical decision. I wrote to my publishers and said, 'I'm no longer writing female songs. Only put me in the room with men, specifically a man that can sing.' I was walking into the room with people that would typically want me to sing and I'd say, 'Nope, I'm not singing a word.' At first writers said 'You want to write a song for Blake Shelton? But you're a girl.' I had to break down a lot of barriers. It was quick, though - being a songwriter, if you're female or male, it's a craft, it's just a job. Pretty quickly, the men that I was writing with would realise... wow, what a perspective to have a woman in the room - now when we're writing this pickup line song for like, ***Drink On It***, now we have a female actually in the room that can say, would that be a turn on? Would that be a turn off? So it was really cool to launch into that phase in my career."

"It really feels like I'm raising children - you raise them up and then you let them go, you see what they can do in the world. That's what it feels like with the climb. The other day for example, there's a friend of mine that's struggling with a major illness but she was working out on her peloton, the climb came up, and she snapped the shot and sent it to me saying "This is getting me through that last mile." It's just the gift that keeps on giving. During that time, it was so fun just to see all my dreams come true." M



BEHIND THE SONG



ALBUM: WATCHHOUSE
RELEASED: AUGUST 2021

Fresh off the back of releasing their first self titled album after their recent name change Andrew tells us the stories and creative thought processes behind each track.

Wondrous Love

I wrote this song in 2018, late one night as that's when I do all my songwriting. I was just hanging out on the porch, looking at the stars and thinking about how peaceful it was. If everybody could take the time to step away from their day to day and just hang out with the stars, I think it can really inform our internal mess, it can reconfigure it. I think there are very simple ways for humans to reconnect with the earth. I think a lot of people sing about it and I think a lot of people hit on the same points, because they're just true, they're just universal truths.

Better Way

For anybody who has an online social media presence, I'm sure you've had those battles where you really want to respond to negative comments. For me, personally, I just don't engage because this person is not here to have a conversation. This person is here to vent anonymously. I don't feel like I should be commenting on people's social media presence to bring them down. So that song is mainly just me trying to figure out what's going on. Why do some people bring it upon themselves to just spread so much negativity in the world?

Belly Of The Beast

This song has taken on a few different forms. We released it as a single back in 2019 but it was in 4/4 time instead of the 6/8 time it's in now. We played it live a few times and it was a song that we felt was almost there but not quite. I love the lyrics of it, I wrote that song after a friend of a friend ended up committing suicide as a musician. It really shone a light on how taxing being a touring musician is, there's a lot of pressure put on people these days in any profession but especially an artist who is trying to create work that people connect to and that helps you feel connected to the world.

New Star

I get a lot of inspiration from books I read, passages will just strike a chord with me. The Once and Future King by T. H. White has informed a lot of my instrumental pieces as well. There's this one passage where he's talking about Lancelot and Guinevere meeting eyes after not seeing each other for a long time. He talks about how in that moment, Lancelot looks at Guinevere, and he sees this ageing woman that has dressed herself up in the finest of clothes, and is putting on all this makeup. He looks through all of that, to see her eyes. And he said, it's the same person that I fell in love with 20 years ago, if you just look at her eyes.

Upside Down

I finally have a fireplace and so I was really excited to have the first fire in the house. Once we got it going, I didn't want to go to bed, I just wanted to sit around the fire all night and I grabbed the guitar and stared into it, very sentimentally. I started writing this tune, from the perspective of, feeling like you were haunted your whole life. I was musing on the fact that maybe what I was actually haunted by was the spirit of my unborn daughter, and that I just felt like something was missing my whole life.

Lonely Love Affair

I hate to keep referencing my daughter but a lot of these songs were born out of that time. I'd be holding her at 3am and their eyes aren't able to focus very well at first, she'd be looking all around me and was drawn to shadows and sharp edges. It looked like she was seeing things that were making her smile. I saw like a poster at the midwives office about how midwives actually bridge that gap between the spirit world and the real world. It got me wondering if she could still see spirits because her soul was still more connected to that world than the real world. After losing my mum and my grandma, I just imagined them leaning over my shoulder.

Coming Down From Green Mountain

I wrote that song at the end of a really beautiful music festival that we went to in Vermont, called Green Mountain Bluegrass Festival. There were so many of our friends there. So It was just like three days of non stop sitting around playing music. On the last night of the festival, everybody had gone to bed and it was like four o'clock in the morning. I sat down, instead of going to bed, and I wrote that instrumental to help myself put all these very positive, very warm feelings into a tune.

Beautiful Flowers

I hit a butterfly with my car one day and it made me realise how selfish we can be sometimes. As humans, we do everything so fast, we move through the world as if it's ours. Something as beautiful as a little butterfly got killed because I needed to get somewhere at 50 miles an hour. It was the devastating realisation of how little regard humans have for animal life. There are individuals who are doing their bit but there are whole countries not doing anything to change the way we interact with the Earth. This was my way of trying to raise a bit of awareness or at least do my part to grieve about it.

Nightbird

I think that's my favourite track on the record. I like the pacing of it. I wrote that song about writer's block. I was like having a really tough time writing a song, I couldn't find anything to latch on to. Sometimes it just feels impossible. It sums it up for me, I try to find those little points of magic in the mundane things in life. The band really shines on that record as well. M

MAVERICK TOP PICKS



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MAVERICK NUMBER RATING GUIDE

10 – PERFECT
9 – EXCEPTIONAL
8 – VERY GOOD
7 – GOOD
6 – ENJOYABLE
5 – AVERAGE
4 – SUBPAR
3 – QUESTIONABLE
2 – POOR
1 – BAD
0 – OFFENSIVE



GREGORY DWANE

GREGORY DWANE

Peacedale Records
08th October 2021

9/10

There's no doubt about it, Gregory Dwane is a creative individual. Having worked in the music industry writing jingles and producing various artists to painting and opening a fine art gallery in Brooklyn, Dwane has done it all! Now he embarks upon a new venture exploring the world of alt-country. The lyrics throughout are an acknowledgement of life experiences both the ups and downs and tough lessons he's learnt along the way. The honky-tonk feel of ***Do You Really Want Me*** opens the album, giving us our first introduction to Dwane's gritty vocals. The production is tidy, he's got a good group of musicians helping to bring this together. It's a catchy, toe-tappingly good opening number. My favourite track is ***When You Say California***, the relaxed, laid-back vibe at the beginning is fitting whilst the banjo is bright and sits perfectly within the production. The swirling pedal steel throughout adds a different dimension to the track. As it ramps up we hear more conviction in Dwane's voice and we feel the intensity pick up. I am really excited by this album and this new artist on my radar, with his creative background taken into consideration as well, there is so much potential for Dwane to go off exploring his sound further - though it's pretty good just the way it is!



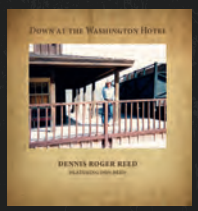
www.gregorydwanemusic.com

DENNIS ROGER REED

DOWN AT THE WASHINGTON HOTEL

Plastic Meltdown Records
10th May 2021

7/10



Dennis Roger Reed's 'Down at the Washington Hotel' boasts an authenticity and sparseness about its production. He drafts in some of the finest players from California to accompany him. The 17-tracks are self-penned and for the most part, there is a relaxed feel to the album. Although he has a lovely tone to his voice, I feel I want to hear slightly more conviction in his delivery especially in the more emotive songs. I love the backing vocals in ***I Need You*** and the guitars bright, crisp tone. ***Wishes Were Horses*** is my favourite track on the album, again there's a lovely acoustic guitar sound - the dominant accompanying instrument throughout the record in fact. There is lots of space for each line to linger. He also showcases the lower end of his vocal register towards the end of each section. The record closes with ***Such A Long Long Time***, again a simple, to the point lyric is at the centre of this love song. It's a tune that is sure to bring a smile to your face.

www.dennisrogerreed.com

FENCES

WIDE EYED ELK ENSEMBLE

ENCI Records
30th April 2021

8/10



Christopher Mansfield AKA Fences is popular within the indie-folk world, releasing several successfulalbums since 2010. However, the Seattle native has just teamed up with GRAMMY award-winning bluegrass musician Billy Strings for his latest single ***Globe*** which boasts a more acoustic feel to it as the pair's vocals blend well together over the sound of the soft folk guitars. Written by Mansfield and Strings and co-produced by the pair, the detailed lyrics transport you to the world they perfectly describe.

This latest single follows the release of his EP 'Wide Eyed Elk Ensemble'. The five track record opens with the soothing sound of ***Boot Height***, one of the singles from the EP. It features an interesting production, the effected banjo and reverb on the backing vocals are a particular highlight on the percussion based track. Meanwhile, the beautiful guitar tones in ***Shape Shifter*** really bring the song to life whilst Mansfield delivers a wonderful vocal performance, that adds strength and depth to the weight of the lyrics. The record is punctuated with the slightly darker ***My Pale King*** and concludes with ***Fake Snow***, a gentle laid back track which features some lush, prominent female backing vocals which echo the lead vocals.

The five track EP, that many would concur is over too quickly, takes you on a journey - Fences songwriting is simple yet personable and relatable whilst his melodies are calming and have a familiarity about them.

www.fencesmusic.com



RICHARD LYNCH

MY GUITAR DRIPS COUNTRY

12th February 2021

8/10



Steeped in tradition, Lynch draws influence from the likes of Merle Haggard and George Strait on his latest album. It opens with Starting Now - a fitting title for an opening track! We hear the story clearly and get a feel for the characters as Lynch begins in spoken word as a pedal steel softly meanders its way through the song underneath the vocals. Lynch's vocals have an authentic twang to them, a clear tone, they smoothly tell the stories he's so eloquently crafted. His songwriting throughout draws upon the sensibilities that the genre was built upon. My Heart and Yours is a standout on the 12-track album. The duet ballad shows off his vocal range in the beginning as he swoops into his lower register. The lyrics are simple but to the point. Meanwhile, You Can't Do This No More, the closing track leans upon the pedal steel once again as the vocal Melodie intertwine with the steel or guitar riffs. Lynch's ability to tell a story, to paint the picture of these characters in your mind is what sets him apart. The production and arrangement frames these tales perfectly too.

www.richardlynchband.com







MIKAYLA LANE

MILES FROM NOWHERE

Mikayla Lane Entertainment
Anticipated September 2021

9/10



At just 16 years old Mikayla Lane's music is grabbing the attention of her industry peers and propelling her to tour around the States as her fanbase grows. 'Miles From Nowhere' is authentic country music, from the instrumentation and production to the compelling stories her lyrics tell, whilst all the while her melodies grab your attention and keep you hanging on every clever word she's crafted. The standout track is the beautiful Wild Like The Wind. Inspired by Lane's involvement in the rodeo, her voice sores through her range as the chorus shows off the powerful nature of her young voice as she paints the scene with her words; "One day here, next he's gone, blows in with the sunset, out before dawn."

Meanwhile, Coming Home, with it's haunting slide guitar addresses Lane's youth and sacrifice for her craft as she "I spend most nights on a stage with a good song, and all these strangers come a hundred miles just to sing along, how could it ever be wrong?" Her observations and evaluations of her own career and emotions show Lane is wise beyond her years. Along with co-writer John Conrad, Lane has crafted some wonderful lines throughout the four song collection

Reminiscent of early Taylor Swift, the sky's the limit for Lane who has a very bright future ahead.

www.mikaylalanemusic.com



JAMESON RODGERS

BET YOU'RE FROM A SMALL TOWN

Sony
17th September 2021



Mississippi native, Jameson Rodgers, has been dreaming of the day he can finally release his debut album after working hard to achieve it for 11 years in music city. Now that day is finally here and Rodgers delivers his own fresh take on country rock with epic, arena-ready productions across the 15 tracks. The opening number, One Day has an incredible outro with big drum hits and electric guitar solos ramping up the energy, giving us a taste of what's to come. The stripped back Merle Haggard and Good Dogs meanwhile, show Rodgers versatility and a softness and vulnerability is audible in his voice. One of the highlights is Rodgers top 10 single Cold Beer Calling My Name which features label mate Luke Combs. In this song, Rodgers displays a likeness to early Jason Aldean, I like the electric guitars and the subtle addition of the banjo in the chorus, following on from that is Some Girls which was a number one hit on the country airplay charts. It's easy to see why with the clever lyrics and rhythmical melodies in the chorus. To conclude, the new kid on the block has delivered with his debut album and just like the recently released singles, I expect this record to do very well in the country albums chart.

www.jamesonrodgers.com/

LAUREN ALAINA

SITTING PRETTY ON TOP OF THE WORLD

Snakefarm Records
03rd September 2021

10/10



This is the third full length album from Lauren Alaina and follows two critically acclaimed EP's released in 2020. Alaina, who says this record is about "a dreamer becoming an achiever," co-wrote 14 of the 15 tracks alongside some of country music's finest writers, Lori McKenna, Liz Rose and Hillary Lindsey to name a few. Alaina's vocals are in fine form as they soar throughout the record whilst the production is well polished. The single, Getting Over Him, which is climbing up the country charts, sees Alaina team up with Jon Pardi. It begins with a notable guitar riff before the songstress works her way to the chorus where the pair sing in unison through the catchy melodies. It opens out into an arena ready anthem. Alaina immediately shows her more vulnerable side on Good Ole Boy, her vocals wavering slightly with the emotion. The lyrics bring a vivid image to mind; "If you took care of me like the cowboy boots that made you over six feet tall." As each line lands, the cleverness takes your breath away. The pedal steel helps to deliver the emotion. To summarise, this may be the best we've heard from Lauren Alaina - she presents us with the full package, the lyrics, the melody, the production is flawless.

www.laurenalainaofficial.com





TOM SPEIGHT

EVERYTHING'S WAITING FOR YOU

8/10

24th September 2021

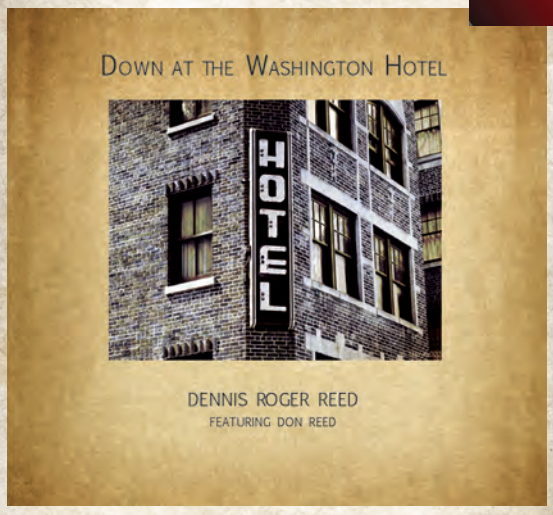


Everything's Waiting For You is a positive, vibrant release from Tom Speight, a record we never knew we needed to hear, particularly in light of this last 18 months or so. It's a reminder to live each day as it comes and make the most of every second. Sonically, the album reminds me of Coldplay or a band of that elk, it wouldn't be out of place sitting on the mainstream charts here in the UK that's for sure. A couple of highlights for me, are the title track and Hymn For Her. The former, which was released as a single, has a big, catchy chorus. The female backing vocalist, providing support to Speight's toppling is subtle yet really effective. Meanwhile, Hymn For Her begins acapella and highlights Speights vocal style and range - the conclusion being he has a lovely, controlled falsetto. The production is stripped back throughout before opening up towards the end with epic drum hits and cymbal crashes along with a distorted electric guitar. As a country music fan I was pleasantly surprised that I enjoyed this album so much but I think Speight has an awful lot of talent and this record could do really well in a mainstream setting.

www.tomspeightmusic.com

"Reed has a penchant for understated plaintiveness...not without some interesting twists..." *Los Angeles Times*

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TAYLOR RAE

MAD TWENTIES

Independent
1st October 2021

8/10



Mad Twenties' is the debut album from Taylor Rae. It looks to address the life lessons learnt in her twenties, set to a polished production. The relaxing undertones of 'Fixer Upper', one of the single's off the 12-song collection, boasts a beautiful melody sung by her gentle, wispy vocals. The soft tones of the B3 organ audible under the arpeggiated acoustic guitar only add to the sweet, folk influenced track. Meanwhile, Rae shows off the power of her vocals on songs like Forgiveness which starts of small and grows bigger as the track progresses, Rae steps up to the plate as her voice comes into it's own towards the end of the track, whilst Home On The Road draws upon the B3 again, very effectively. The use of backing vocals should be praised here too. Taking Space brings the album full circle, the raw, wake-up call is the perfect finale. To summarise, the concept album is tied together well by the stories of Taylor Rae's twenties. Her vocals are what makes this album stand out, her ability to channel that vulnerability in the softer songs and the power she exhibits in the bigger numbers mean she has a promising future.

www.taylorraemusic.com

GRANT MALOY SMITH

APPALACHIA: AMERICAN STORIES

Indie Collaborative
26th June 2021

8/10



The follow up to Grant Maloy Smith's critically acclaimed 'Dust Bowl American Stories' features some of Nashville's finest musicians and it certainly shows. The production is well thought out and rather atmospheric. The instrumentation perfectly matches the traditional themes that lie within Smith's lyrics. From the rise and fall of the coal industry on the opening track, The Coal Comes Up to the In This Twilight, a song about a harrowing night with a drug addict, the tales Smith tells are supposed to be a snapshot of the things the region has been through over time. All the while, Smith's husky and raw vocals, authentic in their delivery add to the weight and emotion of these tunes. Through the sometimes heavy subject matter though are light hearted, up-beat songs such as Gas Station Chicken which help to break up the intensity of the record whilst songs such as I Found Faith address the religious way of life there. That song in particular is effective with the addition of gorgeous backing vocals from Kim Fleming and Kim Mont whilst Smith's vocals find another gear that we haven't heard before. Credit should also be given for the thoughtful presentation of the collection, in this digital age, packaging and artwork has been an after thought for most but there's nothing better than unboxing an album and reading the liner notes. Smith takes it one step further as a forty page booklet takes you through the stories behind each song.

www.grant-maloy-smith.com

EMMYLOU HARRIS AND THE NASH RAMBLERS

RAMBLE IN MUSIC CITY: THE LOST CONCERT (LIVE)

Nonesuch Records
3rd September 2021

10/10



The lost recording from Emmylou Harris and the Nash Ramblers hometown show has been unearthed and thank goodness it has! The first thing that hits you is the incredible musicianship that the Ramblers display as the concert begins with the high tempo Roses In The Snow something which is further showcased in jaw-dropping instrumental displays throughout, such as on The Price I Pay which sees Harris duet with Sam Bush when the vocals kick in. If you close your eyes, the four walls that surround you fall away and you're transported to Nashville, to that concert as Harris' impeccable vocals serenade you. Hit songs like Beneath Still Waters and the closing track, Boulder to Birmingham hold more weight to them in this live setting, the emotion audible in her voice. What you hear is a glimpse of a spine-tingling performance from some of the greatest musicians ever assembled, playing some of the greatest bluegrass and country songs ever written. The timeless performance, delivered as a high quality recording, is a must have in any music fans collection.

www.emmylouharris.com


Image credit: Jack Spencer

Gregory Dwane

"If you are a fan of Sturgill Simpson, Lucinda Willams, or Waylon Jennings, you'll be a fan of Gregory Dwane"

"Memorable, powerful and, restrained in all the right places. The strength is in the songs and the vocals. The vocals have a remarkable ease to them - a delivery that belies both the depth of the lyrics and the life experience that lies at the heart of the album. An auspicious debut"

Joe Wolfe-Mazeres - E2TG - WXAN Nashville

Amy Ray, Indigo Girls, is featured on the songs "It's Fucked Up" & "Gone and Changed"



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PHIL ODGERS
GHOSTS OF ROCK N ROLL

Vinyl Star Records
27th August 2021



8/10

Phil Odgers fifth studio album had a rocky start with his funding campaign thrown into doubt due to the collapse of Pledge Music and the pandemic preventing him from getting in a studio with producer Jim Knight. However, the resilient Odgers managed to push on through the setbacks and has delivered a record with a diverse range of topics set to a tight, alt-country production. The former front man of The Men They Couldn't Hang, has a relaxed approach to the delivery of his smooth caramel-like vocals, whilst there is a sense of wistfulness and nostalgia which runs as a common theme throughout the record. The title track has a theatricality about the arrangement whilst The Serpent, The Maiden and The Bear brings Odgers back to his folk roots. A highlight is Brooklyn Bridge, which draws inspiration from a piece of literature; the poem 'Motorways' by Joe Solo. There is a small element of spoken word in the track alongside the singing but it's the detail in the lyrics that makes the track stand out, it really helps to paint a clear picture in the listeners mind. It would have been easy for Odgers to throw in the towel after his series of setbacks but the struggles of the last few years have surely been worth it.

www.swillodgers.co.uk

BÉLA FLECK
MY BLUEGRASS HEART

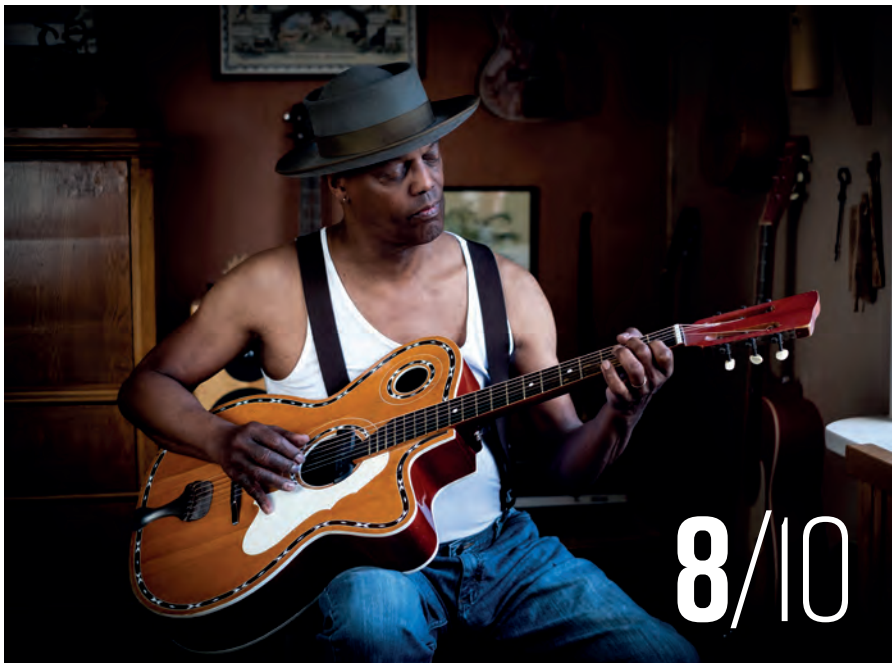
Renew Records
10th September 2021

7/10



15 time GRAMMY award-winning banjo pioneer Béla Fleck returns to the bluegrass genre with 'My Bluegrass Heart'. After venturing off, unlocking the instrument's potential in other genres, this latest 19-track collection marks Fleck's homecoming in style. The album brings together some of the genres finest musicians and bridges the generational gap as he teams up with collaborators who were a part of his classic album 'Drive' as well as new faces such as Billy Strings. There is a high energy throughout the album, from the opening track, the apprehensive Vertigo which has a questionable time signature in parts, to the very last note of Psalm 136. A stand out track for me is Hunter's Moon, with it's eeriness and intensity, it feels delicately crafted with a well thought out arrangement and production. It's an enjoyable listen which will see your foot tapping along throughout to this instrumental master-class.

www.belafleck.com



8/10

ERIC BIBB
DEAR AMERICA

Provogue
10th September 2021



70 year old country-blues troubadour Eric Bibb returns with a love letter to his country. The record is a collaborative effort from Bibb who drafts in an array of talented of musicians from Ron Carter to Chuck Campbell. The album opens with Whole Lotta Lovin' which gives a nod to the American roots music that inspired him - it's a simple yet heartfelt message. Bibb tackles topical conversations about equality in a number of tracks from Born Of A Woman which teaches of respecting women and features Shaneeka Simon who adds an extra dimension to the track. Meanwhile, the poignant Emmett's Ghost retells the harrowing murder of Emmett Till which sparked the civil rights movement, it's a thought-provoking bluesy number. The album has a balance though, with lighthearted songs such as Talkin' Bout A Train counteracting the heavy topics. The production matches the locomotive inspired lyrics, the chug of the electric guitar driving the song forward. Bibb's vocals are soulful across the album as he delivers each word, and the guitar-work is solid throughout too.

www.ericbibb.com





TRÉ BURT

YOU, YEAH, YOU

7/10

Thirty Tigers
28th August 2021



Tré Burt's melancholy vocals ring out on this unique album. The tenacious musician sticks to his guns and addresses numerous thought-provoking observations he's made about his home country. By The Jasmine is very topical and a true story about what he's experienced as a black man living in America. The narrative isn't angry - who could blame him if it was? - just leaves the listener with something to think about. Meanwhile, Carnival Mirror an upbeat, carefree song that makes the statement along the lines of 'freedom don't come free'. The album speaks of loss but not in a desolate way, Sammi's Song talks of the heightening of his senses on the day of her funeral. There is positivity within it, a light in the dark so to speak and Burt has done a wonderful job with the lyrics. Dixie Red is another nod to a friend who went too soon. Through the hard hitting topics, Burt delivers the record with a sweetness to the arrangement and of course his vocals. The follow up to Caught It From The Rye is a thoughtful album which deserves to be heard, far and wide.

www.treburt.com



EMMYLOU HARRIS &
THE NASH RAMBLERS

RAMBLE IN MUSIC CITY:
THE LOST CONCERT

Released for the first time, the 1990 live recording of the legendary, Grammy-winning group's hometown debut at Nashville's Tennessee Performing Arts Center, which sat unreleased in the vaults for three decades



'The Ramblers ready Emmylou for her finest decade yet. Her newly acoustic terrain stretched back decades into America's roots, yet covered songwriters of the day, too, all in a decisively progressive style. Most every track gets to the heart of compassion.'
– UNCUT, 9/10

'The 23 songs include churchy traditionals, Outlaw Country and pop and folk rock covers filtered through spirited, road-honed, note-perfect bluegrass. There's not a bad track here and a slew of highlights, Harris' voice both fragile and powerful.'
– MOJO ★★★★

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STEVEN GRAVES

ALL ALONE

One Essence Music ASCAP
1st June 2021

8/10



All Alone' faces the trials and tribulations of the world, head on as Steven Graves explores the universal themes of loneliness, fear and anger caused by the pandemic whilst also asking tough questions to each and every listener about their impact on topics like climate change. You're The One is an upbeat track with a finely tuned production, the addition of the B3 organ really contributes an extra dimension. The track is uplifting and the chorus hook is catchy but not in a throw-away pop kind of way. There is a simple charm to the song that sets it apart. Graves use of different textures and timbres to accompany his message is unusual within the genre but thats not a complaint as the title track and Always Here play host to a horn section and saxophones that help to bolster the arrangement. The album concludes with Good People, a bright, cheerful song to finish the album which has taken you on a bit of a rollercoaster ride through the facts of life. His vocals are natural and raw in his delivery and despite his ability to tackle difficult subjects head on he does it with a sense of hope and optimism.

www.stevengravesmusic.com

STEVE BONHAM AND THE LONG ROAD

AMERICAN WILDERNESS ODYSSEY

Artisan Creative
29th January 2021

8/10



Upon first listen I am drawn to the level of musicianship on display from Steve Bonham and The Long Road. From the opening track Ballad of Duane and Billy Marie, where they utilise every aspect of the acoustic guitar including the harmonics, to the closing track, Western Requiem with the delicate piano cutting through the bright chords strummed on the guitar - it's well arranged. The harmonies too are a real selling point of this record whilst lyrically it is born out of adventure with songs such as Interstate 25 and American Wilderness written about real stories Bonham heard whilst travelling around the States. The lyrics themselves are very literal and descriptive as they recount the tales of times gone by. My favourite on the record is the love story Wrapped Up in You which became a hit on UK Country Radio. The track has a simple yet catchy pay-off line and lovely acoustic guitar solo. The group play with their sound a little for the theatrical If There's A God Out Here, which delves into a darker subject matter, once again influenced by Bonham's travels. All in all it's an intriguing record, there is clear chemistry within the group and the production is sonically pleasing.

www.thelongroadband.net

LEO SAWIKIN

ROW ME AWAY

15th October 2021

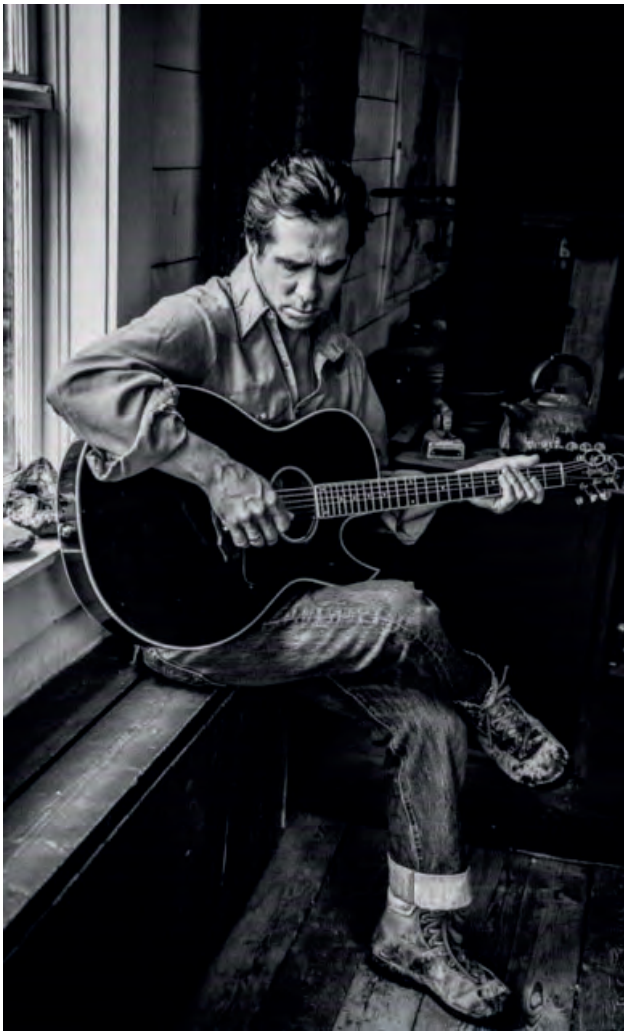
8/10



The first thing that I notice is the production, it feels big and very polished. The former frontman of folk-rock group The Chordaes delivers a dream-scape record. His vocals, with reverb audible, have never sounded better especially when he goes into his falsetto. A Whole World Waiting is perhaps the centrepiece of the album with it's rich, melodic guitars and soft drums. The harmonies in the latter stages of the song really add another layer to the track and take it up a gear. The title track transports you to another world for four minutes and thirty five seconds, Sawikin's vocals soar as the melody begins to rise. Meanwhile, Tell Me There's An Answer is stripped back, the acoustic song resonating more with a simple production. In summary the themes of escapism with a nostalgic undertone are the foundations that the record is built upon. A high end production helps the record to get to the next level. It's a smooth and relaxing listen, although for the most part, he leaves his folk roots behind and opts for a slightly more mainstream approach.

www.leosawikin.com/music





PAUL BENOIT

BEAUTIFUL LIES

8/10

11th May 2021



Paul Benoit has had a varied and successful career as both a singer-songwriter and a composer who has had a number of film soundtracks credited to his name. His latest ten song collection fuses americana, folk and rock and features some lovely slide guitar playing. The highlight of the record for me is the duet Benoit does with Amilia K Spicer on the love song Beautiful Lies. Their soft vocals convey the emotions perfectly, you can feel it tugging at the heart strings. Benoit draws influence from the likes of Nick Drake on atmospheric songs such as Smoke, a rawness evident in Benoit's vocals. Meanwhile, Let's Pretend We're in Love draws inspiration from the pandemic, there's something theatrical and haunting about this tune, the effects on the electric guitar sending shivers down your spine as you listen. Though a cohesive collection of songs resonates on Beautiful Lies, there's also enough variation and dynamic changes to keep it fresh and inviting to the listener. A solid production and effective use of slide guitar help bring it all together.

www.paulbenoitmusic.net

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KALINEC & KJ

Let's Get Away

"This may very well be the best album of 2021!"

Jon Stein--Host, Hootenany Cafe, WTBQ AM 1110 FM 93.5 NY

DAVID OGILVY

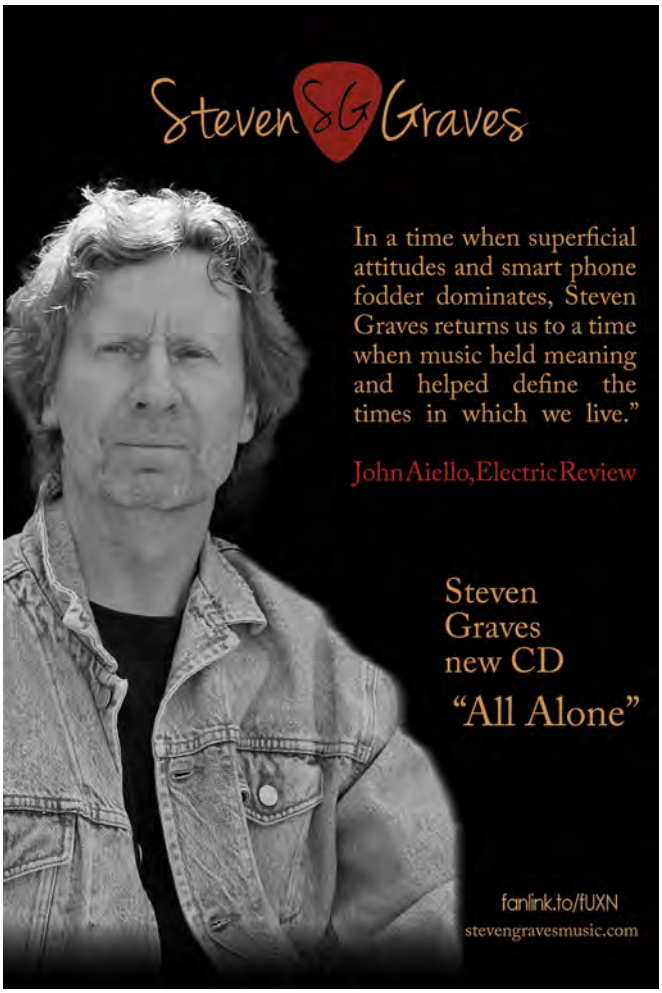
THE SCOTTISH AMERICAN SONGBOOK

"Wonderful stuff, it would be nice to think this is just Vol. 1"

Mike Davies - Alternative Roots - Brum Radio UK



www.medicinemusic.me



KALINEC AND KJ

LET'S GET AWAY

Berkaline Records
2nd July 2021

8/10



Kalinec and KJ's voices blend so well together, they certainly have a chemistry and the pair, who have both been recognised for their songwriting, keep their melodies simple and their lyrics set the scene in each song. New Lovers Waltz is a favourite of mine on the record, it's sometimes hard to get a waltz time song right, but it's not a problem for the pair as I find my foot-tapping along instantly as KJ takes the lead, it's a beautiful, soothing love song. Their cover of When You Say Nothing At All is brave, I felt in parts the pair were rushing or trying to hard to put their own stamp on it, nonetheless upon second listen it grew on me, I warmed to the conversational tone Kalinec took to deliver his lines. The pair give a nod to their celtic connections with the song Home in Scotland, the melodies in the chorus are beautiful as their voices intertwine. To summarise, Kalinec and KJ are meant to sing together, the way their voices fuse together to become one is magical. The pair stay true to their roots and deliver a well produced album with some real gems on it.

www.xxx



Image credit: Matthew Berinato

9/10

NIKO MOON

SMALL TOWN STATE OF MIND

Sony
27th August 2021



Niko Moon's debut album has that relaxed, loving life kind of vibe to it. The writer who began his career writing for the likes of Zac Brown Band and Rascall Flatts, teams up with his wife Anna Moon and Joshua Murty to spin these care-free stories of good times and life lessons learned. Sonically he mixes traditional country sensibilities with hip hop beats. Standout tracks for me include Way Back, a song that reminisces on his wild, younger days whilst Last Call is a cleverly written drinking song, with lyrics written in a list-song style. Moon's fresh take on Travis Tritt's It's A Great Day To Be Alive works a treat alongside his other songs such as Paradise To Me which shares a similar vibe. However, Moon demonstrates his versatility with the slightly more stripped back Without Saying A Word. The meaningful song draws influence from his father's advice as he swoons, "it's what you do, not what you say/learn to bend and you'll never break/keep your word, finish what you start/fall in love with a woman's heart." On the whole this record is a perfect summer soundtrack that brings a fresh approach to the country sound. It's a phenomenal debut from the talented writer and I'm keen to hear how he explores and experiments further.

www.nikomoon.com

DAVID OGILVY

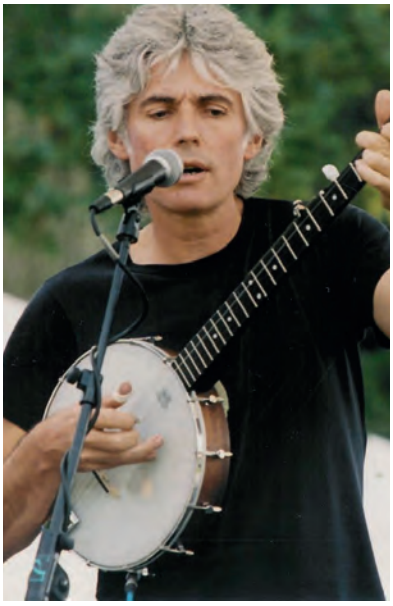
THE SCOTTISH AMERICAN SONGBOOK

9/10



David Ogilvy's smooth, velvety voice is a joy to listen to. So often we see artists throwing the kitchen sink at a song to make it bigger and more effective but for the production of this record, Ogilvy got the memo that less is more - every layer is added with a clear sense of purpose. It's steeped in traditional, celtic folk influences from the lyrical content to the melodies and instrumentation. Lassie is a stand out track, the backing vocals bringing something special to the song whilst Millers Farm with it's dark, haunting melodies feeding off the accordion, showcases the lower register of Ogilvy's voice. There is some beautiful guitar work on this record, the album is built upon the beauty of a good relationship between a voice and an acoustic guitar. Lyrically, there is vivid imagery and metaphors throughout; "It fades away like morning dew" Ogilvy softly sings on Water Is Wide, a sombre love song. Recommended for fans of Simon and Garfunkel, this album is beautiful in both it's content and delivery and has a clear direction and theme running throughout. I look forward to hearing more from Ogilvy in the future.

www.davidogilvy.uk



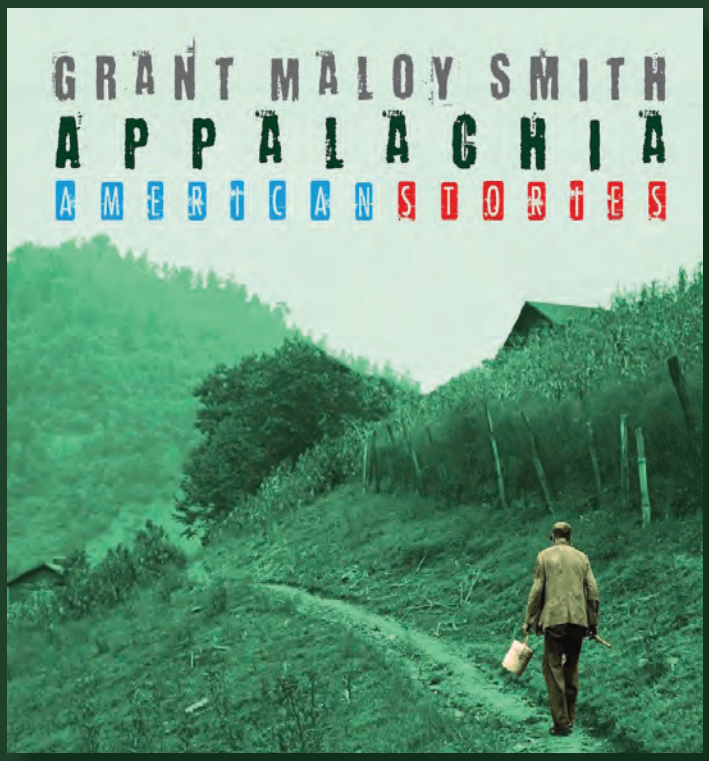
THE CRITICS ARE RAVING:

"One day we'll be talking about how Grant Maloy Smith is a national treasure – like John Prine. I'd be the first to say it's so."
-- John Apice, Americana Highways

"Appalachia: American Stories comes across with such absolute authenticity. ...the arrangements shine with such craft and consistency..."
-- Lee Zimmerman, Bluegrass Today

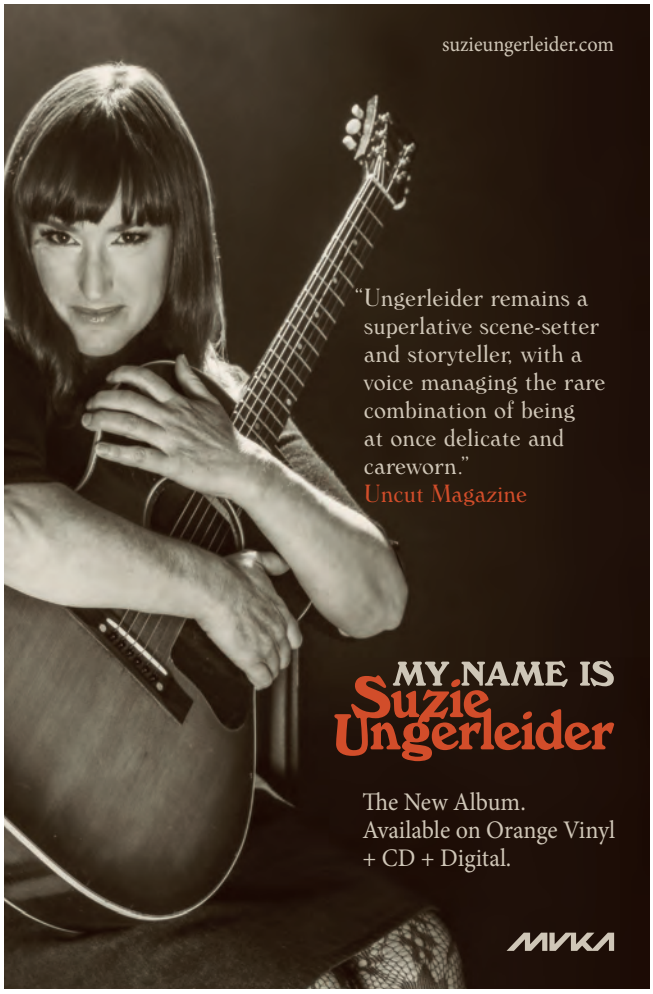
"One of the year's most ambitious productions... Smith has a penetrating, searing tenor voice that brings his lyrics of everyday Americans vividly to life."
-- Robert K Oermann, MusicRow magazine

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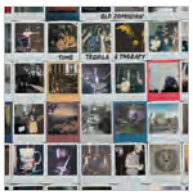




OLD DOMINION

TIME, TEQUILA & THERAPY

Sony
8th October 2021



Old Dominion are back with their fourth studio album. It encapsulates, once again, the band's personality as it's riddled with catchy and clever choruses and a quirky, vibrant production. They have worked once again with the likes of Shane McAnally, Josh Osborne and Matt Jenkins to bring these songs to life. A favourite of mine is the slightly surprising duet they do with Gladys Knight, Lonely Side of Town, in which Knight's vocals are flawless and the band add a new dimension to their repertoire. Don't Forget Me is another standout track, it's lyrics are vivid 'If a spirits running through you, looking for your hallelujah, if you're somewhere feeling empty, I'll be right here where you left me, Don't Forget Me'. It's a rhythmic tune that's driven along all the time by a simple electric guitar riff. The single I Was On A Boat That Day has been in the works for quite some time, we're glad they finished it, it's a summer anthem that has your foot-tapping along as the care-free story emulates out the speakers. To conclude, the boys have knocked it out the park again with this one as they solidify their place within Country-pop and continue to expand their universal appeal.

www.weareolddominion.com

STEVE BONHAM AND THE LONG ROAD

AMERICAN WILDERNESS ODYSSEY

Artisan Creative
29th January 2021

8/10



Upon first listen I am drawn to the level of musicianship on display from Steve Bonham and The Long Road. From the opening track Ballad of Duane and Billy Marie, where they utilise every aspect of the acoustic guitar including the harmonics, to the closing track, Western Requiem with the delicate piano cutting through the bright chords strummed on the guitar - it's well arranged. The harmonies too are a real selling point of this record whilst lyrically it is born out of adventure with songs such as Interstate 25 and American Wilderness written about real stories Bonham heard whilst travelling around the States. The lyrics themselves are very literal and descriptive as they recount the tales of times gone by. My favourite on the record is the love story Wrapped Up in You which became a hit on UK Country Radio. The track has a simple yet catchy pay-off line and lovely acoustic guitar solo. The group play with their sound a little for the theatrical If There's A God Out Here, which delves into a darker subject matter, once again influenced by Bonham's travels. All in all it's an intriguing record, there is clear chemistry within the group and the production is sonically pleasing.

www.thelongroadband.net

MITCHELL TENPENNY

MIDTOWN DIARIES EP

Sony
10th September 2021

9/10



Mitchell Tenpenny's gritty and powerful vocals ring out on this record. He's the next big thing in country-rock, he's the full package, the vocals, the songwriting and production is high end. The record starts with the high energy, arena-ready To Us It Did, the electric guitars ramp up the adrenaline. Tenpenny then shows his more vulnerable side on Good Thing which has a lovely sentiment behind it whilst melodically it has a simple hook that's easy to hold onto; with a slightly different production it's the kind of melody that could be taken on by someone like Westlife and crossover seamlessly into the mainstream. The single, Truth About You, is a centrepiece of the album, it's easy to see why it garnered 2.5 million streams in its first three days of release. It is clearly the most suited to country radio but it boasts clever lyrics and a good hook. Tenpenny's vocals soar towards the end, as he belts out the final chorus and the emotion floods into his voice. The eight song collection announces Tenpenny as the next big thing of the genre, it actually has me itching to see what Tenpenny has to offer in a live setting.

www.mitchell10penny.com


Image credit: Matthew Berinato

THE COUNTY AFFAIR

OFF THE GRID

8/10

3rd September 2021



Tony Regan and Kevin Brennan's friendship spans over forty years and was founded on their shared love of music, that passion and drive has culminated in their debut album 'Off The Grid' and it is a stellar introduction. It draws upon decades worth of experience and discusses themes of everyday life, painting vivid characters with the imagery the use in their lyrics. The single, Every Ghost, is a standout on the record as it humanises the stranger sleeping in the doorway. Lines such as "People don't break their stride past me, they don't care who this ghost might be" is thought-provoking for the listener as they start to think about to their own actions and prejudices surrounding the topic of homelessness. Despite the subject matter it's set to an upbeat groove. Another high point is the rock infused Nashville Storm Warning which features Lonestar legend Richie McDonald. It's a high energy song which features a great guitar solo, you can imagine this being the pinnacle of the night in a live setting. Not a single song feels out of place on this record, it's a cohesive set of songs with fantastic stories and a brilliant production. Fate brought the duo back together and boy, are we glad it did!

www.thecountryaffair.com



THE RISING

NO HOPE WITHOUT LOVE

7/10

Renegade Maverick Records

1st October 2021



The Rising, made up of Chris Logan and Chantelle McAteer, have written and produced a brilliant EP. The DIY, homegrown musicians have stayed true to their country-rock sound and their ability to tell a good love story remains. Upon first listen I notice the tidy production and the high energy injected into the opening track You Had It All. McAteer's vocals are at their very best throughout the record as they soar through those choruses. A stand out track for me is Bruise You Left which reflects upon the impact of a failed relationship, the vocals start off small, playing host to vulnerability as they convey the story. Highway to the Lost and Found reflects upon life as an independent touring musician, addressing the hardships and passion behind the job. It's all set to an upbeat, intense arrangement which leans even more towards the rock side of the genre. I enjoyed the guitar solo in the middle also. To summarise, it's a strong EP from the duo who have worked tirelessly to study the changing industry models of release and keep fans engaged throughout the pandemic. They're certainly a band you're willing to succeed!

www.therisingmusic.com





SPOTLIGHT ON CURSE *OF LONO*

After a turbulent past, Felix is drawing upon those experiences as he crafts a brilliant future as part of Curse of Lono

Felix first got into music after getting into a spot of bother at school, that was the first time he found solace in it but it wouldn't be the last. He discovered a side of music that wasn't played on the mainstream radio and he realised, that was exactly how he wanted to spend his life - making music like that.

"I was 14 years old," Felix begins, "I had just been on the receiving end of a beating at school and a guy a few years above me, came into my room and said, 'come with me.' He took me to his room, gave me a shot of vodka and put on Never Mind the Bollocks by the Sex Pistols. I was completely mesmerised because until that point, I thought that music was 'I love you, baby, I miss you, baby.' Then he put on The Final Cut by Pink Floyd. They're very different kinds of music, but they were sort of saying the same thing. One was a bit more pragmatic and thoughtful and the other one was just, two fingers up at the world. I was completely blown away by the idea that music could be a protest thing."

When it comes to Felix's music, he draws influence from his past experiences; his battle with drug use and the friends he lost during that dark time in his life have been the focal point of a number of Curse of Lono songs. For his latest album 'People In Cars' Felix took a slightly different approach to the way he wrote songs. "When I started the album, life was really, really good. There was no pandemic, we'd just come off this UK headline tour, and it suddenly felt like things had moved up a gear. I was trying to find inspiration. Then obviously, the pandemic started, and my father passed away. I was with him, the night he passed away and I still can't write about that but I did, Stream of Consciousness writing. I'd use that and I realised that it was very obvious what it was about, but I wasn't trying to construct it, it just came out. So it was a more gradual process. I tried to sit down and write about it but it all sounded a bit contrived."

This style of writing also inspired the production too, "I think the sound of the record, musically, is a bit more meandering and dreamlike. We just kept it really intimate. I don't think I've ever sung so quietly before in my life as I have on this album, it didn't feel like the right time for me to make a loud, noisy rock and roll record." The pandemic slowed down the production of the album though as time in the studio kept getting pushed back and when they finally got in, covid protocols prevented them from all being in the room together. "The production of it was a very strange process because we were booked in at the beginning of lockdown, we had to push it back and in the end it was myself and the producer who went in. We built the tracks and then the other band members would come in and put their parts around it."

> "I came back to that idea of driving the pain away"

Felix didn't just use music to battle his demons. Another theme throughout the record is driving, he explains where that inspiration came from, "When I was in America, when I got clean off heroin, I was going through a difficult time, I was in a detox ward but there was dealers at every corner. The following months, whenever I'd face temptation, or there was very heavy things going on, I'd take my Uncle's Jeep Wrangler, and I'd have a pile of Rolling Stones CDs, and I'd just drive until I felt better. This past year, I lost my dad, my uncle, an ex partner of five and a half years and I came back to that idea of driving the pain away."

That's not the only reason Felix chose a driving theme for the record though. It is clear as we talk that he is a family man, his wife and children are everything to him and he tries to include them in his career as much as possible. "The last album is dedicated to my daughter. So my wife said, 'the next one has to be for your son', and his favourite colour's yellow. So that's why there's going to be a yellow vinyl. He's also obsessed with cars."

For Felix, his proudest moment didn't occur in the studio or on a stage but in a hotel room with his family by his side. "On the last full studio album, there's a song called Way to Mars. The opening verse, is all about this very long tour we did. It was 23 gigs in 25 days with Chuck Prophet all around Europe. My daughter was very little at the time, I think she was two years old. I had mixed emotions about leaving home to go rock and rolling around, while

QUICK *FIRE*

WHAT'S THE STRANGEST THING YOU'VE EVER WRITTEN A SONG ABOUT?

I WROTE A SONG CALLED THE POSSUM TREE BECAUSE I FOUND OUT WHEN I WAS IN REHAB IN AMERICA, THAT POSSUMS SLEEP IN THE TREES THAT THEY HANG FROM. I DON'T REMEMBER WHAT THE SONG WAS LIKE, I JUST REMEMBER THE LINE "UNDERNEATH THE POSSUM TREE, SHE'S MAKING LOVE TO ME". IT WAS THIS RIDICULOUS SONG ABOUT MAKING LOVE TO A GIRL WITH ALL THESE POSSUMS HANGING FROM THE TREES. NOTHING EVER HAPPENED WITH THAT SONG, IT WAS TOTALLY RIDICULOUS.

ON STAGE ARE YOU COMPLETELY FOCUSED OR DO YOU LET YOUR MIND WANDER?

IF I START THINKING TOO MUCH ABOUT WHAT I'M DOING ON STAGE, I TEND TO FORGET MY CHORDS AND MY LYRICS. A LOT OF MY SONGS, NOT JUST ON THIS ALBUM, BUT ON THE PREVIOUS ALBUMS, ARE ABOUT VERY DARK, REAL LIFE SITUATIONS SO I DO FIND MYSELF AT TIMES CHOKING UP AND GETTING QUITE EMOTIONAL ONSTAGE. THERE'S A SONG CALLED *NO TROUBLE*, WHICH WAS ABOUT WHEN MY BEST FRIEND PASSED AWAY. IT'S NOW 13 YEARS AGO, BUT HE WAS A SINGER IN A BAND, AND WE USED TO PERFORM TOGETHER, THAT WAS DURING OUR MORE CRAZY WILD DAYS, BUT I OFTEN PICTURE HIM NEXT TO ME ON STAGE WHEN WE'RE SINGING THAT SONG.

she's at home. So the first verse was about her. We got the video back, and I'll never forget, I was sitting in a hotel room, and my wife and my daughter were there. I got the first draft of the video and I played it, and she started singing along, she knew all the words. That's probably my proudest moment!"

Felix and the band are coming up with inventive ways to get the kids more involved in their latest album as well. "This is going to sound ridiculous. We're working on a colouring book. I wanted to get the kids involved in the albums, but if I play them a record, they just go, 'that's a bit boring daddy.' But if I can come in with a colouring book and a yellow vinyl, it's actually quite cool. So we're starting to work on that next week. We thought no one's done that before."

Felix is bursting with creativity and 'People In Cars' is not the only project he's getting ready to release right now. "We've just done a spoken word piece that we'll probably put out after this album comes out, which was stuff that I'd written during my time on heroin. They're 22 years old now. It's a collection of poems that I found and we just did this ambient jam in the studio where Joe Harvey White and Ollie, our producer set up the piano and the pedal steel and all sorts of ambient effects and synthesisers. I just read this thing, four or five times, and they just played along to it. They were feeding off the words, I was feeding off them. That's a 22 minute long, mad ambient spoken word thing. I think the lockdown and the losses that happened last year for me personally, just made me reevaluate everything. I'm trying to stretch my wings and try some other stuff now."

This all follows on from his as yet unpublished memoir, "I spent some time writing a memoir. I wrote 14 or 15 drafts and I got shortlisted for an award, it's basically for best unsigned memoir. I got a little bit of interest there, I talked to some book agents but the truth at the end of the day, is that it wasn't there yet. I think you only write your memoir once, if at all. I'm a big Bukowski fan, you're not expecting to ever write as well as those people, but if I know I'm falling way short of the mark, then it probably wasn't ready. So I decided myself not to put it out. Maybe I'll come back to it one day, maybe the story wasn't finished." Felix teases.

As Felix continues to meander the highs and lows of life with his family by his side and music to lean on, he reflects upon Curse of Lono's achievements. "Receiving the Bob Harris emerging artist award was an incredible achievement. I don't make music to win awards, I never have done, but that was a huge moment. Bob has been a big influence on my musical tastes over the years, so to get that award with my dad and my mum in the audience was an incredible moment for me." As he readies himself to release this latest collection of songs, it is clear Felix has a bright and illustrious career ahead of him as his music goes from strength to strength with each passing year. M





SPOTLIGHT ON LEO *SAWIKIN*

We sat down with Leo Sawikin, to get to know what inspires him as he prepares to release his debut solo album 'Row Me Away'

I wondered when you first knew that you wanted to be a musician?

The thing that made me decide I wanted to be a musician was seeing School of Rock back in 2003, it had such a huge impact on me. It made it look like so much fun. Then I started writing when I was 12, shortly after that, and it was such a great outlet for me. It's helped me whenever I've had anxiety about things, it's helped me get over it and move forward.

What did your parents play to you on long car journeys and what are you choosing to listen to now?

They played a lot of post grunge stuff. I listened to a lot of Lilith Fair, Lisa Loeb, Sheryl Crow, the Cure and David Grey. That definitely has had a huge influence on me in my songwriting, it was like more of a subconscious influence. Since then I have really gotten more into the classic stuff - I really love the Beach Boys, specifically Brian Wilson's songwriting, Burt Bacharach, Jimmy Webb, people like that. I'm a huge Radiohead fan, I think Thom Yorke has probably influenced me as a vocalist more than anyone else.

You talked about the therapeutic qualities of songwriting and how it helps you with anxiety, so do you write a lot from personal experience?

I don't write about personal things as much as I did when I started out. Half the songs on the album are written from personal experience, half are imagined scenarios. I usually start writing by playing through a chord progression, the melody comes to me as I'm playing and the lyrics come a lot later on, it takes a lot for me to feel good about a lyric.

Can you tell me the story behind your single Row Me Away?

I had this little grunge thing I had been playing. It was just two chords I was playing and I didn't really know what to do with it. Every time I would try to build a song and go to a different chord, I would sort of lose that hypnotic vibe. It was very hard to preserve that while adding complexity. So that one definitely took me a little while to write. Recording that song we tried to go for more of that post grunge world - the stuff that I used to listen to with my parents in the car. That's definitely what inspired it musically. Lyrically, it's it's about wanting to just escape this reality and find a new one.

This album is due out really soon, but what's next for you?

When this one is done, everybody has so much backlog material now, I have two albums worth of songs that I've been working on although a lot of them don't have lyrics but I have a lot of music and melodies. Half of which are more in that post grunge world, then half are like in the more like the 60s and 70s Wrecking Crew vibe, classic songwriter world. So I think I'm going to do two albums and have two very different vibes on them. I have all these open tunings I've been experimenting with, I've been listening to a lot of Joni Mitchell lately and figuring out all the tunings, so I'd like to make an album using some of those tunings. M

"I really love the Beach Boys, specifically Brian Wilson's songwriting, Burt Bacharach, Jimmy Webb, people like that. I'm a huge Radiohead fan, I think Thom Yorke has probably influenced me as a vocalist more than anyone else."

GETTING *TO KNOW* LEO SAWIKIN

FAVOURITE FILM: *THE GODFATHER*
FAVOURITE SONG: *SURF'S UP BY THE BEACH BOYS*
FAVOURITE PLACE: *BARCELONA*
FAVOURITE FOOD: *: I LOVE FOOD SO MUCH, IT REALLY DEPENDS ON THE DAY. RIGHT NOW I'D SAY A CHEESEBURGER.*
FAVOURITE MOTTO: *BE TRUE TO YOURSELF*
PETS: *MY PARENTS DOG IS ESSENTIALLY MY PET, THEY HAVE A COCKAPOO AND MY HOUSEMATE JUST GOT A BELGIAN MALINOIS LAB MIX.*



SPOTLIGHT ON PARKER *MCCOLLUM*

Fresh off the back of releasing his third studio album, Parker McCollum sits down with us to discuss the ins and outs of it's inspiration and creation

You've said in previous interviews that your brother influenced you a lot growing up, how big of an impact did he have on your musical career?

He had a tremendous influence. We had the opposite of a musical household, playing guitar was his escape. He was six years older than me and I just wanted to do what my older brother was doing. If he'd been ice skating, I'd be a professional ice skater right now. But he was playing guitar, writing songs and singing and I wanted to do it too as his little brother, my cousins picked it up too after he did.

Where do you draw influence from in your lyric writing?

I would say it's 85% personal experience 15% making stuff up. Sometimes I like to sit down and let my mind go, just make something up, almost like a free writing technique. I think those days when maybe you're just feeling a little off or something didn't go your way, those are the days I feel like the best songs come out, because you're a little more in touch with that side of yourself. Songwriting is the most compelling thing I've ever done in my life.

You've collaborated with a lot of talented people on this record, 'Gold Chain Cowboy'. Could you tell me a little bit more about some of those people you worked with?

I say it all the time, I'm the luckiest son of a gun in the world. Ending up in a room with Tony Lane, what an absolute treat to get to write with him, I ended up in a room with Jon Randall and Miranda Lambert, Randy Rogers. Sometimes I'm sitting in those rooms and I'm going, 'why they let me in here?' I always just try to take advantage of those times when you're writing with someone like Miranda who I'm such a fan of. We know each other a little bit now, she's just such a superstar, but when you're talking to her one on one, she's just like talking to anybody else. I can't say enough about her.

Tell me about the story behind your number one hit 'Pretty Heart'.

I had my first big co-write in Nashville, everything else had been written with my brother or solo. I got to write with a guy named Randy Montana who I didn't know but I knew he was a big writer so I didn't want to go in empty handed. I was digging through some old stuff the night before and found this video of me singing this hook over and over. So I took it in to him the next day and his eyes lit up, he said "Let's chase that!" We wrote it rather quickly, I want to say it took maybe an hour. I remember leaving and thinking 'Man that was such a good idea but we just ruined it.' Which I do often. I put it on the back burner for a couple of months and when I went in to do some demos, that was the first song we demo'd and that's what you hear on the record, we never cut it again. I was in the studio singing vocals and I thought to myself, 'this is a lot better than I give it credit for, I was wrong.' I remember when they told me it went gold, that was something that hadn't even crossed my mind. That seemed like something that Michael Jackson did.

If people only listened to one song on the album, which one would you want them to hear? What's your favourite?

It's a song called *Rest Of My Life*. I wrote it during the early lockdown days, where no one could leave the house and going to the grocery store was a big deal. It really messed with me and I was treating myself poorly. I needed to find a way of writing that was less damaging. I woke up one day with this melody in my head, I recorded myself humming it on my phone and put it on the bluetooth speaker whilst I went and showered, I turned the water off halfway through and wrote it - boom, it was done right there.

You're from Texas, I know Texas has a cool country scene what's it like to be a part of that scene?

Texas is home and it gave me my start. I cut my teeth there in a van with four or five guys playing empty bars. I don't think I ever would have gotten the opportunity that I'm getting now had I not had what I have in Texas and and I'll never take them for granted. It's my favourite place to play in the world.

What's the strangest thing you've written a song about?

I had a dream that Elvis was my granddad. And and then I didn't know he was my granddad until the funeral. I wrote *Memphis Rain* off my second album about that dream. M

"Texas is home and it gave me my start."

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TOOLS OF THE TRADE

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

In this issue, Eric was inspired by the products showcased at the summer NAMM event, he talks us through the latest hot guitars and 'must-have' music accessories

TAYLOR MOBILE GUITAR MONITORING

Taylor guitars first developed their TaylorSense system a few years ago, but now they have made it compatible with Android smartphones and tablets also. We got one in house at Maverick Country and installed it in a Taylor guitar to see for ourselves.

The TaylorSense Smart Battery Box replaces the existing battery box that came with your guitar from the factory. Installation only took me 20 minutes and it was an exact fit for the previous battery box. Once installed the unit connects to your smartphone via Bluetooth. It then monitors your guitars humidity levels, battery level, temperature and if it has any jarring physical impacts that could damage it (hypothetically like on an airplane).





I was surprised out easy the TaylorSense was to install but it is also fun to check the temperature and humidity level of your acoustic guitar while you are at work and it is at home. If you own multiple Taylor guitars you can store all of them in the Free downloadable Taylor App on your phone, name them and check the stats on each instrument. The TaylorSense is not expensive and provides a lot of information on your prized guitars at the touch of your phone. The only addition I would like to see is the addition of tracking of guitar encase it is stolen or misplaced. Maybe that will be added to the next version.

TaylorSense is a high-tech way to maintain the health and integrity of your Taylor guitars no matter where you are and now Android smartphone users can join the club too. If you aren't comfortable with installing the device yourself a qualified Guitar Repair Tech could do the job probably faster than I did it. Taylor scored with the TaylorSense!

www.taylorguitars.com

WALKABOUT A NEW WAY TO KEEP THE BEAT



I was first introduced to WalkaBout drums a few years ago at a Summer NAMM music gear show. They impressed me so much I went out and bought one. This year, they have released their new Wander model. It is shaped like an acoustic guitar but with no neck on it. Also, they have setup tonal areas on the WalkaBout Drum so you achieve different percussive sounds depending on where you strike it.

What separates the new Wander from the past Odyssey and Venture model is that it is totally acoustic with electronic output, much like a standard square Cajon except you can wear the WalkaBout and walk around with it. Another incredible feature of the WalkaBout drums is that you can add to your percussion choices with their add on effects. These are held to the drum via built in magnets inside the body and include Soundot RIQQ (my favourite), Soundot TAMB and the Soundot FAN for scrapping sounds.

The new Wander model includes a hiking worthy drawstring bag, whilst the higher end models come with the form fit gig bag to protect your instrument. The great thing about these innovative drums is that you can stand with them, they are portable, and they provide a wider variety of tonal choices when you're playing percussion. For smaller stage and limited space performances or songwriter sessions the WalkaBout is ideal way to go. Plus, they're just fun to wear, walk around with and play drums in your house.

We had a great time in the Maverick Country office trying out all of the effects and creating our own beats. There are also several UK musicians already playing concerts with the WalkaBout. Visit their website to learn more and watch for more add-on effects!

www.walkaboutdrum.com

M TOOLS OF THE TRADE

GATOR CREATES AN ICON



Gator is an innovator and their new Icon Series has some never combined features in a gig bag until now. The goal of the Icon is to provide a lighter weight, portable gig bag with the protection of a hard case which is always much heavier. No easy feat. This is achieved with multi-layered semi-rigid panels on the top/back wrapped in weather resistant 1000D black nylon fabric. It's strong enough that Gator Cases tested the Icon Series by driving vehicles over them with no damage to the instruments (not recommended to try at home). Inside of the Icon we found an adjustable neck block with a strap to keep the neck secure. The QR Code on the front of the Icon case if for registration and so you can track your guitar. It has a big top pocket for straps, cables and capos and a small hidden one for important documents. The Icon gig bags come with their own rain cover also if you are walking or traveling in inclement weather. A built-in retractable luggage tag is a great feature that won't get lost as most do when on the road. The Icon gig bags have padded shoulder straps and a big side handle for ease of carrying. They are currently available for electric guitars, dreadnaught acoustics, basses and 335 style guitars. During the demonstration on these I realized these are some of the best constructed gig bags I have reviewed in a long time. The Gator Icon gig bags are ones that you could check at the airport and not be as worried about, compared to a standard soft case. If you travel with your instruments the Gator Icon series gig bags are a wise investment and the QR code addition was genius!

www.gatorcases.com

BOSS TAKES IT TO THE STREETS

First introduced back in 2007 the then Roland CUBE Street was a big hit with musicians seeking quality sound, portability and the option to use batteries instead of plugged in power. For 2021 Boss has not only added their logo to the front of the CUBE Street II amplifier but also many upgrades that players will embrace.

The first thing I noticed about our demo amp is that it's lighter than its predecessor thanks to an ABS injection-molded cabinet. Boss has increased the output wattage from 5 to 10 watts (which I thought was needed) and kept it stereo making the chorus very lush. If you choose the Eco mode on the amp it will even make your batteries last longer. The Boss CUBE Street II is designed to accommodate one guitar (or instrument of your choice) and one microphone or two instruments thanks to the combo jack and the ¼" plug-ins. Both channels offer reverb and three band EQ whilst the guitar/mic channel also has chorus and delay. An internal harmonizer provides vocal harmonies based upon the guitar chords you are playing. The BOSS Cube Street II can also be linked to your computer via the i-CUBE link or USB maintaining your sound and harmonies for recording or for social media performances.

For an additional fee you can also purchase a Bluetooth Audio MIDI Adaptor to link your smartphone or tablet with the amplifier for backing tracks or to jam to. There is also a free CUBE Street II Editor app for download where you can adjust your amp levels and check battery life from your external device. The Boss CUBE Street II is a lot of amplifier for the money even if you only use it to play and practice at home!



www.boss.info

FENDER TONE MASTER AMP SERIES

Fender amps are a gold standard in amplification. The only challenge is that with great tube tone also comes increased weight from added circuitry, transformer, tubes and wiring. The new Tone Master line of amps strives to provide classic styling, multiple output wattage choices, direct lineout and lighter weight!

For review, Maverick Country received the Tone Master Super Reverb. When it first shipped to the office, I thought they sent the wrong amp, since I own a late 70's Super Reverb that is incredibly heavy! This new Tone Master version still features four 10" Jensen P-10R alnico speakers. Normal and Vibrato channels, two-button footswitch and classic plywood cabinet wrapped in black vinyl. Where it differentiates is a USB port to support firmware upgrades, XLR line output with impulse response (IR) cabinet simulations, wattage attenuator offering 1w, 5w, 12w, 22w, 40w and 85w, ground lift and a powered jewel that changes colors depending on the mode. The wattage attenuator essentially provides the capability to play any room from your bedroom to practice to a full show and have the power of a Champ, Princeton and a Super in one package. I had played through these at a guitar show and was already surprised at



how close Fender has come to matching their own tube amplifiers with this new technology. Musicians will still want their tube amps for studio and home play, but I would definitely prefer an amplifier that is lighter with more tonal options and a built-in direct box for playing live shows. The Tone Master line also includes a Twin Reverb, Deluxe Reverb, Twin Reverb Blonde and a Deluxe Reverb Blonde besides the Super Reverb we tested. Plug one in for yourself I believe you will be blown away by Fender's new Tone Master amps.

www.fender.com

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TOOLS OF THE TRADE

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Music accessories are designed to make the performance and preparation of playing and recording music a bit easier and more fun. Our featured Tools of the Trade in this issue have something for everyone!

ANATOMY OF SOUND GETS A HEART



Known for their 3D guitar picks that are shaped like a woman's bottom, Anatomy of Sound is now releasing their new "Heart Attack" picks. The concept that AoS applied was that if you increase the top portion of the guitar pick where you grip it that it will reduce hand fatigue by taking less strength and not cause Repetitive Stress Injuries (RSI). These hand maladies can include carpal tunnel syndrome, arthritis and tendonitis. The "Heart Attack" picks are 6mm thick at the top, 2mm in the middle and only 1.2mm at the tip where you strike the guitar strings. Anatomy of Sound states that these new plectrums require 80% less grip pressure than a standard flat pick. The one we reviewed was very comfortable to play with and responsive. A nice evolution to an already eye and ear catching product by AoS check them out.

www.anatomyofsound.com

FENDER PARTNERS WITH KYSER CAPOS



Two major music industry companies have teamed up to create custom color capos! The new Fender/Kyser Quick-Change Capo series are available now in stunning Fender guitar colors including Olympic White, Surf Green, Daphne Blue and Butterscotch Blonde. They are made of lightweight aluminum and thanks to their spring-loaded handle they are easier to attach to your guitar's headstock when not in use. The thick rubber pad that lays on top of your guitar strings keeps them from buzzing and the rubber pad on the bottom won't mare or scratch the back of your guitar neck. The capos are designed to fit 9.5-inch radius electric guitar fretboards.



Now you can match your capo to the color of your favorite guitar and the bright colors will make them easier to find on the stage or in your gig bag. Visit their website for the Fender/ Kyser Quick-Change Capos!

www.fender.com

NEW FENDER SIGNATURE UKULELE

The Fender Musical Instrument Corp. has been launching many new instruments and signature models lately. But none has been more eye catching than the new Fender Dhani Harrison ukulele that just released. Dhani Harrison is the progeny of George Harrison, of the Beatles, but he has cut his own path as a songwriter and musician. The review uke that Maverick Country received for this coverage was stunning right out of the gig bag. It was finished in Sapphire Transparent Blue (available in Turquoise as well) with phases of the moon fretboard inlays. The back of the tenor shaped uke body has a carved face on it much like Dhani's engraved signature on the back of the headstock. The top, back and sides of the Dhani Ukulele are made of Ovangkol wood whilst the fingerboard is constructed of Walnut. Fender Deluxe electronics come standard and feature a built-in tuner, volume, tone, battery light and top load battery compartment. Quality enclosed gear metal tuners give this uke superior tuning. The neck profile on this ukulele is thinner than many I have played and much easier to navigate than most. The Fender quality shines through with a real bone nut and saddle features usually not seen on a uke in this price range. This is a professional grade instrument that will take anyone's ukulele playing up to the next level.



www.fender.com

GROOVETECH MINI MULTI GUITAR BASS TOOL



The new Mini-Multi tool by GrooveTech has packed many useful options into a package that is less than 7.62cm long! It provides two Phillips head options, to slotted screwdrivers, a ruler, bottle opener and metric and standard hex wrenches in eight different sizes. What I like about the GrooveTech swiss army configuration is that it takes up less space but offers more tools. Every gig, live show or practice session someone always needs to change a battery or tighten something on their instrument amp or PA. The GrooveTech Mini-Multi tool can easily fit in your gig bag or case when you need a tool on the road but don't have your full toolbox with you. The ruler is handy for checking string height and with the bottle opener you might need a cool beverage before or after the gig? Affordable, sturdy and priced right!

www.groovetechtools.com

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

VOCOPRO NEW COMMANDER SERIES



VocoPro is a leader in creating affordable audio equipment and they just launched the new Commander series of wireless devices. For review, Maverick demoed the Wireless condenser mic transmitter, wireless USB receiver, headset mic and the wireless guitar/bass transmitter. The VocoPro Commander units all have built in batteries and are rechargeable via a USB plug-in. Not only do they functional for performances but also for live or recorded videos via social media. VocoPro also offers an HT hand held microphone that will interface with the transmitter and receiver. My favourite features about the Commander series are that you can utilize a wide variety of audio input devices and you have options for the output from the receiver. Whether you output to USB straight into your computer, mini plug or 1/4". For practice, home and smaller gigs the VocoPro Commanders devices are ideal for sound reproduction.



www.vocopro.com

NEW ONYX MIXER BOARDS FROM MACKIE

To my ears, analog effects, amps and mixers still sound warmer than digital, but digital does have some huge benefits. Thankfully Mackie feels the same, as they have just come out with a full line of premium analog sound mixers with their Onyx series. The current configurations are Onyx8 (4 mic inputs), Onyx12 (8 mic inputs), Onyx16 (12 mic inputs) and Onyx24 (18 mic inputs). They also feature extra line inputs and stereo. The Onyx series essentially maintains an analog configuration and hands on feel but provides the extra features and benefits that only a digital mixer can.

The full color display is awesome and easy to read you have multi-track recording capability with USB send and can record in stereo and store on an SD card. All of the built-in pro effects are customizable and Mackie has built in the Perkins "British Style" EQ to achieve our favourite 60's and 70's mix sounds. The Onyx series is also capable of streaming direct into a channel via Bluetooth. Mackie's standard low noise award winning Mic preamps are already built in to the mixers.

The studio command configuration makes you feel like a big shot in a full-blown studio! And the topper on the Onyx mixers is that they come with a software bundle that includes: Pro Tools/First DAW, Musician Collection (Mackie's own effects bundle), Waveform OEM DAW (with unlimited tracks), DAW Essentials Collection (more effects). In these times as more of us are creating music from home than ever before it is essential to have a low noise, top quality mixer to create and record our music. Mackie has done an incredible job of packing the Onyx series of mixers with more effects, options and choices than most of us will ever need!

www.mackie.com

MISSION ENGINEERING GETS RECHARGED

Mission Engineering has been on a mission to come up with creative electronic music gear for musicians and to power all of your guitar pedals! We reviewed their earlier incarnation of the 529 power distribution hub and were definitely impressed. The new 529i is the next evolution of Mission's original concept by merging a rechargeable battery with a power distribution unit in one small device that can fit underneath or on top of your pedalboard. The eight isolated separate 9volt power amps are provided with 2 x 500mA and 6 x 300mA. The isolation portion means that you won't get electrical noise added to your effects by the power source.

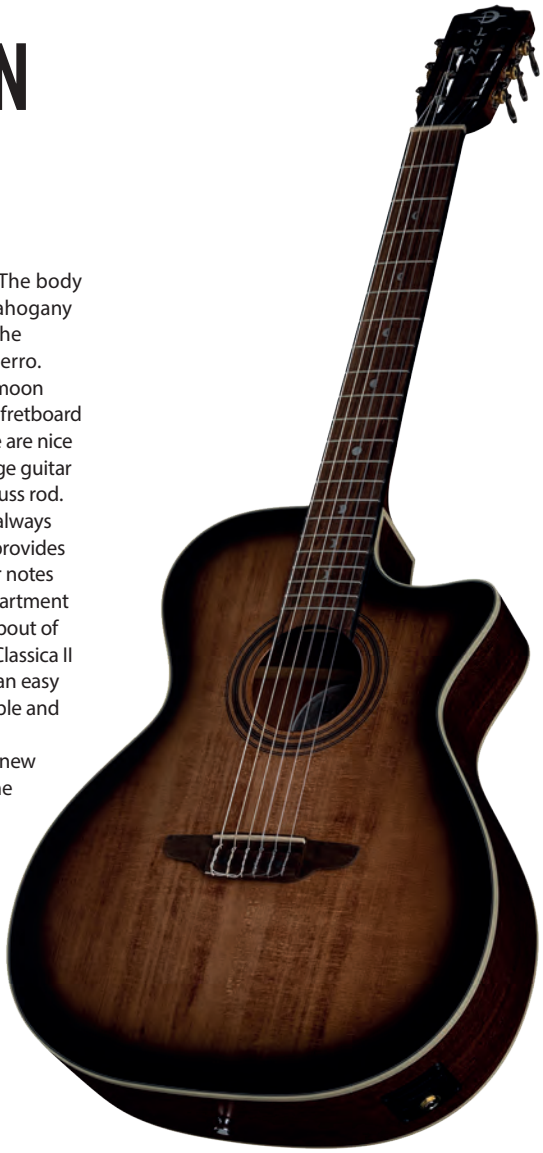
The 529i also has a 5V USB output to recharge or power your smartphone or tablet on stage! The device comes with a charger that has plugs from various countries wall plugs. Mission has also included a two-output cable to power your 18V pedals. The rechargeable Lithium-Ion battery has a runtime of four hours once fully charged. The case is constructed of aluminum and only weighs 453gm. The simple on off button on top is easy to engage and shut down. The lights next to the power switch pulse when the 529i is charging up. If you are making an investment in a top-quality pedalboard and the best sounding effects pedals it only makes sense to power them with a more sophisticated device that will provide them quality consistent power with now sound artifacts or bleed. The investment in an isolated power source will be returned in the longevity and sound of your pedals. Visit Mission Engineering to see their full line of products but I've been hoping they were working on power supply configured like the 529i and here it is.



www.missionengineering.com

LUNA NEW NYLON STRING GUITAR





Luna Guitar Company has been known for creating ukuleles, acoustic guitars and percussion instruments that are very playable for all age groups. The new Art Vintage Nylon Acoustic-Electric guitar is a fine of example of this in a Grand Auditorium body design.

Right out of the box I notice how slim the neck was compared to many other classical style nylon the guitars the body is also a bit thinner, so it is easier sit and play it as well. The distressed brown burst paint job kind of gives the Luna a vintage feel as do the brushed nickel open face guitar tuners. The body and neck are constructed of mahogany with a solid spruce top, whilst the fretboard is composed of Pau Ferro.

I like the look of the pearloid moon phase fret markers on top of the fretboard as well. The bone nut and saddle are nice touch for tone and the Art Vintage guitar is equipped with a dual action truss rod. The cutaway body, which is not always offered on nylon string guitars, provides full access up the neck for higher notes and chording. The battery compartment and output jack are the bottom bout of the guitar. The built-in Fishman Classica II electronics include a tuner with an easy to read screen, volume, bass, treble and phase options.

Plugged into an amplifier the new Luna sounded full bodied and the phase control comes in handy. Most of us don't use a Nylon string guitar for the majority of our playing or song writing, but I believe it is always a good idea to have one in your instrument arsenal for those subtle nuances. The new Luna Art Vintage Nylon Acoustic/Electric guitar is a great value in an instrument of this style!

www.lunaguitars.com

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BREEDLOVE CUSTOM DAVID STARR ACOUSTIC GUITAR



David Starr is a well-known singer/songwriter and also a band member for John Oates (half of the famous Rock duo Hall & Oates) solo music projects. Starr began playing guitar at the age of 10 and has shared the stage with Clint Black, The Marshall Tucker Band, Survivor, The Guess Who and Restless Heart. David is a known guitar player, collector and music store owner with his own shop "Starr's Guitars in Cedaredge, Colorado (U.S.A.).

He has been endorsed by Breedlove Guitar company based in Ben, Oregon but this is a first. His new custom Breedlove model is named "Rise Up Again" after the popular song off his most last album "Beauty and Ruin." The proclamation is even inlayed in the fretboard of the guitar giving it a very distinctive visual. The concept for the song, and eventually the guitar, came from a dream that Starr had during an emergency surgery procedure. His deceased Father and Grandfather spoke to him during this episode and told him it wasn't his time to depart this world yet.

The Concerto shape of the guitar was chosen by David because it remined of some of his vintage acoustics, but he sought the addition of Breedlove's modern craftsmanship sensibilities. The guitar features solid flame maple back and sides with a solid Sitka Spruce top. The neck is built from Maple with an ebony fretboard. The cream binding on the front, back and neck add a look of elegance. The flamed sides and soft burst finish reflect the level of craftsmanship in this guitar. Starr was given entrance by Breedlove guitars to go through their library of wood sets to select the ones he felt best suited this model.

Another unique feature, as you see on many Breedlove instruments, this guitar has no standard bridge pins as the strings travel through the back of the Delta bridge and come out across the saddle for added sustain. The electronic output of the instrument is achieved through an LR Baggs Anthem pickup setup for quality sound reproduction. I'm a fan of the discreet in sound hole mounted controls that give you full access but don't distract from the beauty of the guitar. The statement to Rise Up Again has been a call to action for many people around the world during this Pandemic.

Tom Bedell, owner of Breedlove Guitars, said, "We're so excited that David has chosen to build this personal, beautiful guitar with Breedlove and remind us all to 'Rise Up Again.' The initial run of the custom Rise Up Again David Starr model was originally set at only seven guitars, but due to demand three more instruments will be available in 2022. After spending time playing, I wouldn't be surprised if Breedlove made a more standardized version of this eventually.

The flat neck shape is reminiscent of other high-end custom boutique guitars I have played, and it allows for effortless chording. The wood choices and body made shape make this a singer/songwriter dream as it delivered pronounced mid-range, soft bass tones and doesn't compete with vocals. Besides his last album "Beauty and Ruin" Starr also republished his grandfather's book "Of What Was, Nothing is Left" which was the inspiration for the album that he created with John Oates.

Currently David is releasing one song a month instead of another album, although he does continue to tour where possible and play songwriter festivals. His new current single is "Statesboro Blues." Visit Starr's website below if you are interested in ordering his new Rise Up Again Breedlove custom acoustic guitar.

www.StarrsGuitars.com



ENCORE: NIKO MOON

Fresh off the back of his debut, full length album, Niko Moon sat down with us to discuss the songs that inspired him to become a writer and artist.


Image credit: Matthew Barinato

The first song that you learned all the words to?
Wow, that's a good question. It's probably a song I've forgotten the words to now. Yeah, probably. It was probably something like *Row row row your boat* or something like that. Some childhood nursery rhyme.

A song that makes you think of touring?
On The Road Again by Willie Nelson.

A live show that changed your life?
There's this artist, his name is Will Hoge. He's almost like our generations Bruce Springsteen. He's one of my favourite artists in the world. When I was probably 20 years old, I went and watched him play in Atlanta, at a venue that was maybe about 1000 people. At the end of the show, he said, 'I want to sing this last song acapella.' Without even the microphone or anything he sang to about 1000 people and you could have heard a pin drop in that room. It was so powerful. The beauty of a song really shone through because, it was just a guy and his voice and a song. About halfway through the song, he jumped off the stage and started walking through the crowd, they just parted like the Red Sea. He gets all the way to the back of the venue and everyone's gone from looking at the stage to looking at the exit doors and he ends the song and just walks out the exit door. I was with my dad at that show and I turned to him and said 'I want to do this.'



> "Travis lives about 15 minutes from where I grew up, so he was a big hero of mine as a kid because he was someone from where I'm from, who made it big time."

A song that reminds you of growing up?
It would probably have to be *It's a Great Day to be Alive* by Travis Tritt. Travis lives about 15 minutes from where I grew up, so he was a big hero of mine as a kid because he was someone from where I'm from, who made it big time. So he kind of made the dream real and that's my favourite Travis song.

A song you can no longer listen to?
There ain't a song that I can no longer listen to, even if it hurts, sometimes it's good to feel that, you know? But for me, I choose to make only what I would call feel good country music. I think that's just what my purpose is in life, to make that kind of music. But I love a good sad song - *Whiskey Lullaby* by Brad Paisley and Alison Krauss is one of the greatest country songs of all time so I like me a good sad song too!

An album that made you want to be a musician?
Probably The Eagles Greatest Hits, I mean that record is just banger after banger, it doesn't stop! Sometimes you forget how many hits they had. What I loved about them was, they sat in a place that was hard to identify - they weren't country, they weren't pop, they weren't rock. You didn't really know what they were, it was just good music. I love all different kinds of music, I'm a country artist, but I love music in general. There's beauty defined in every genre to me, and they had some of the catchiest songs of all time.

Craziest story behind a song you've written?
Keep Me In Mind by Zac Brown Band has a wild story behind it. I wrote that with Zac Brown and Wyatt Durrette. We were in Dallas, Texas in a bar and Wyatt sees this girl and decides to go and say hi. He came back and said, 'man she's got a boyfriend but I told her if things change to keep me in mind.' We thought that was funny and that's where the song started. Fast forward two years, we've already written the song, and it's number one now and we're back in Dallas in a different bar and this same girl is there. So Wyatt has to go up to her, he asked her if she's heard the song and she tells him it's her favourite song. He said, 'Well, I'm glad because that songs about you.' She didn't have a boyfriend at the time so they got to talk and exchange numbers. They started dating, and they got married a couple years later! M


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