



Americana Roots & Roll

LONESTARMUSIC

July/August 2004 | vol 7 • issue 4

John Fullbright

**Writes the songs you wish you'd written.
In the bathtub.**

By Lynne Margolis

**Miranda Lambert's
platinum-plated truth**

Q & A with Billy Joe Shaver

Plus

Bruce Robison & Kelly Willis
Micky & the Motorcars
Corb Lund
Robyn Ludwick
Nikki Lane
The Mastersons
& more



Good people,
great music,
best of times...

6 DAYS * 5 MOUNTAINS * 50 BANDS
1 REALLY BIG TENT

"See y'all
Slope Side"

- ANNE HUDSON -
MusicFest Emcee, Radio/TV Personality

JANUARY
5-10, 2015

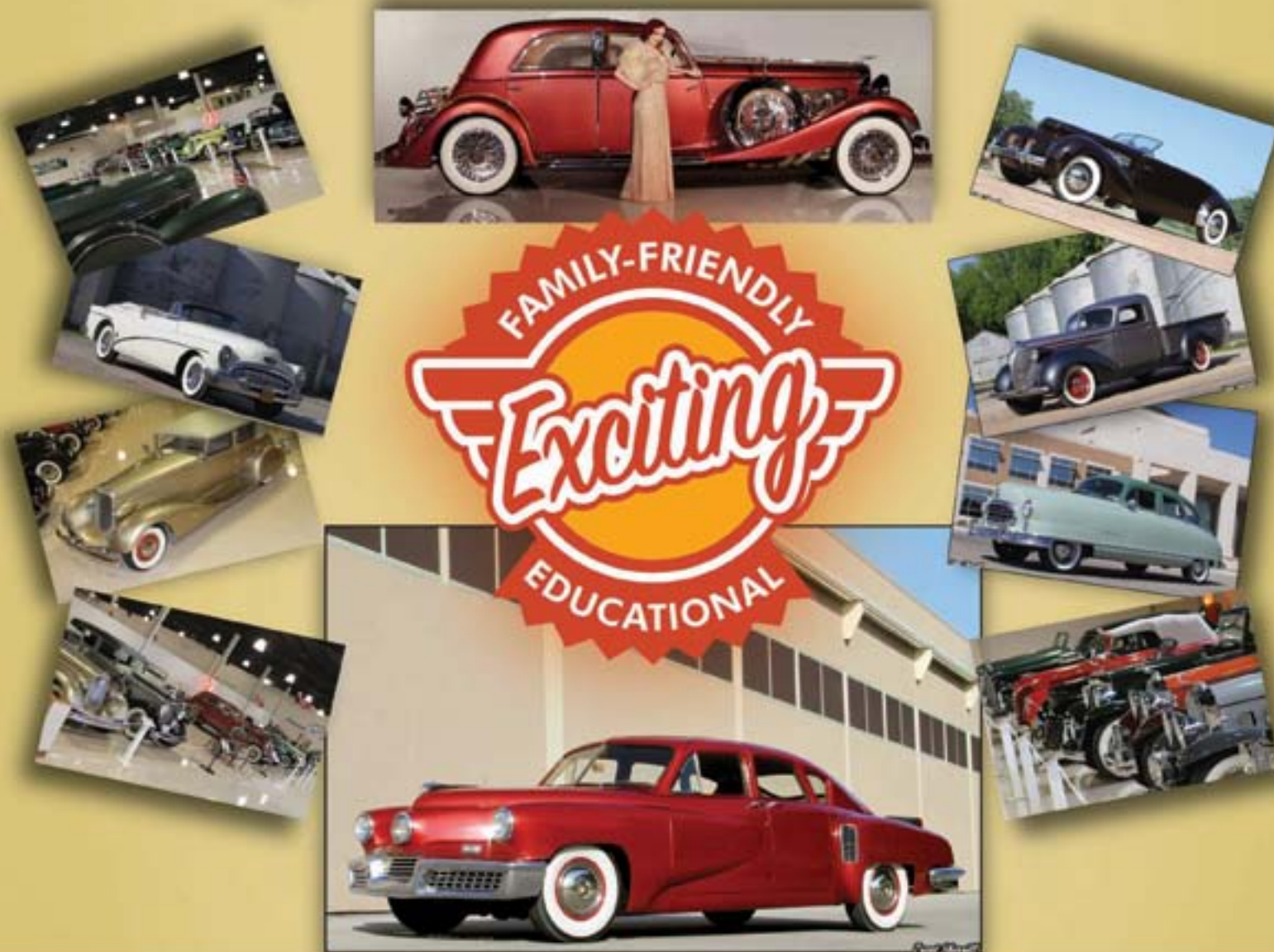


STEAMBOAT
COLORADO

THEMUSICFEST.COM



The
Greatest Cars
of American History



OVER 80
VEHICLES
ON DISPLAY

Dick's
CLASSIC GARAGE
CAR MUSEUM

HOURS:
MON - SAT
10 - 5
SUNDAY
12-5

WWW.DICKSCLASSICGARAGE.COM / 512-878-2406
120 STAGECOACH TRAIL, SAN MARCOS, TX 78666



INSIDE THIS ISSUE



JOHN FULLBRIGHT pg30

“What’s so bad about happy?”

The Oklahoma tunesmith seeks answers to that burning question and others while crafting the songs of his life.

by Lynne Margolis

FEATURES

- 26 Q&A: Billy Joe Shaver — By Holly Gleason
- 38 Miranda Lambert: The true heart and real deal behind the platinum supernova — By Holly Gleason
- 42 The Mastersons: The duke and duchess of Americana power pop embrace their chemistry on *Good Luck Charm* — By Holly Gleason
- 43 Corb Lund: Americana’s favorite Hurtin’ Albertan goes to Memphis — By Adam Dawson
- 46 Kelly Willis and Bruce Robison: “This will be our year, took a long time to come ...” — By Richard Skanse
- 50 Robyn Ludwick: Hard woman with a heartache — By Richard Skanse

John Fullbright photo by John Carrico

Publisher: Zach Jennings
 Editor: Richard Skanse
 Creative Director/Layout: Melissa Webb
 Cover Photo: John Carrico
 Advertising/Marketing: Kristen Townsend
 Advertising: Erica Brown
 Artist & Label Relations: Kristen Townsend

Contributing Writers	Contributing Photographers
Richard Skanse	John Carrico
Lynne Margolis	Lynne Margolis
Holly Gleason	Jim McGuire
Mike Ethan Messick	David McClister
Michael Corcoran	Randee St. Nicholas
D.C. Bloom	Amy Price
Rob Patterson	Chuck Grant
Drew Kennedy	Joespeh Lianes
Jim Beal Jr.	Chad Wadsworth
Kelly Dearmore	Scott Newton
Cody Oxley	Susan Roads
Mario Tarradell	Todd V. Wolfson
	Steve Circeo
	Shane Kislack
	Joel Calvin
	Mike Barger
	Sarah Bork Hamilton
	Tracy Pitcox
	Les Leverett

Subscriber Service:

To subscribe, email us at readers@lonestarmusic.com. For address changes, email readers@lonestarmusic.com with a subject line of “address change” or write to: 202-C University Drive San Marcos, TX 78666, Attn: Subscriber Services

Advertising:

For rates, ad specs or advertising information, email Kristen Townsend at Kristen@lonestarmusic.com or call 1-800-TXMUSIC.

Reviews:

To be considered for a review, please submit CD and/or press kit to: LoneStarMusic, Attn: Richard Skanse at LSMMag Reviews, 202 University Drive San Marcos, TX 78666.

LoneStarMusic Magazine is published bimonthly by Superfly Music LLC. 202-C University Drive, San Marcos, TX 78666. Copyright © 2014 by Superfly Music LLC and/or individual contributors. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission is prohibited. Views expressed herein are those of the author exclusively. Typographic, photographic and printing errors are unintentional and subject to correction. Artists themselves contribute much of the content of this magazine. Think of the magazine as being rated PG-13, occasionally R.

Notes from the Editor | By Richard Skanse

I can’t, for the life of me, remember what song it was that John Fullbright played the first time I saw him — but I damn sure remember the impact.

It was back in February 2011 at the 23rd International Folk Alliance Conference in Memphis, sometime well after midnight, when the private showcases overrunning the top three floors of the Marriott were in full swing. I’d wandered from room to room for what felt like (and probably was) hours, catching a song here, a short set there, and foraging for drinks and late-night snacks the whole time. The one room I kept going back to — both for the consistently stellar line-up and because they had a bottle of whiskey I really liked — was the Will Sexton-hosted “Wine & Nut” suite, which felt about as packed as a sold-out Cactus Cafe the whole night long.

By the time Fullbright’s turn came up, elbow room was at a premium — but you could have heard a pin drop the moment he started playing. Everyone in that room, which was probably at least 90-percent songwriters — many of them pretty well known, at least in folk/Americana circles — hung on every word that 22-year-old kid from Oklahoma sang. After he finished, the silence lingered for a pregnant second or two ... until someone in the back said, “You still suck, Fullbright!”

The resulting laughter — Fullbright’s included — felt like a collective sigh of relief, but the air of genuine respect and awe for both the song and artist was undeniable. No doubt there was a fair amount of jealousy in the mix, too, given that songwriters and musicians are only human. But if you had polled everyone in attendance that night for an honest assessment of Fullbright at the time, then still a year away from the release of his first studio record, *From the Ground Up*, the verdict would have been unanimous: *The Force is strong with that one*.

Lynne Margolis didn’t make it to Folk Alliance that year, but she’s seen Fullbright cast that same spell over crowds and fellow songwriters plenty of times herself, estimating that she’s caught him on upwards of 20 or more occasions at venues and festivals all over the country. It’s an experience she likens to “witnessing a bird graduate from flying to soaring,” and you better believe she took keen notes the whole time, because I think her cover story on Fullbright is one of finest artist profiles we’ve ever run in these pages. I’m actually a little jealous I didn’t write it myself — which, given the subject, seems entirely fitting. Listening to any of Fullbright’s three albums — 2009’s *Live at the Blue Door*, 2012’s *From the Ground Up*, and especially the new *Songs* — makes me really relieved I’m not a songwriter. Especially given the fact that the punk’s still years away from 30.

Fullbright was our chosen one for the cover from the get go, but truth be told, I don’t think we’ve ever crammed so many worthy contenders into a single issue. For our Q&A, Holly Gleason catches up with living legend Billy Joe Shaver, and further back you’ll find Holly’s terrific feature on none other than Miranda Lambert — a certified superstar whose latest album, the very-aptly-titled *Platinum*, debuted at No. 1 on both the country chart *and* the *Billboard* Top 200. We’ve also got features on long-time LSM favorites like Bruce Robison and Kelly Willis, Corb Lund, and Micky & the Motorcars, plus profiles on such formidable rising stars as Robyn Ludwick, Nikki Lane, and the Matersons. And back in Reviews, you’ll find enough recommended new and recent releases (including the best Willie Nelson album in a very long time) to soundtrack your life well into, well, September. Which, coincidentally, is right about when we’ll have a brand new issue of *LoneStarMusic* for you to dig into.

But until then, let’s all savor this one, shall we? Just like I’m still savoring the sweet, sweet rush of watching my San Antonio Spurs win their fifth NBA championship — and clinging to that joy as tight as I can before football season kicks off and my incurable Cowboys Fan Anxiety Syndrome kicks in again ...

Oh, sorry, did I drift off topic there a bit? Must be my cue to sign off. Until next time, then ... happy reading. And listening.

NOTES FROM THE EDITOR

4 After Awhile — By Richard Skanse

NEWS

- 6 *Austin City Limits* 40th anniversary celebration
- 7 Heal in the Memories: Kerrville Folk Festival recap
- 8 Americana gets cozy with Tennessee town
- 9 Black Fret roundup
- 10 Jeff Tweedy previews songs from solo debut
- 12 The LSM Soundtrack
- 13 New & Recent Releases
- 14 Artist Profile: Matt Hillyer — By Kelly Dearmore
- 16 Artist Profile: Wendy Colonna — By D.C. Bloom
- 18 Artist Profile: Nikki Lane — By Rob Patterson
- 20 Artist Profile: Micky & the Motorcars — By Mike Ethan Messick

COLUMNS

- 22 Heartworn Highways: Remembering Allan Goodman — By Drew Kennedy
- 24 True Heroes of Texas Music: Floyd Tillman — By Michael Corcoran

REVIEWS

- 52 Album Reviews
Willie Nelson, Billy Joe Shaver, Miranda Lambert, Shovels and Rope, Joe Ely, John Hiatt, BettySoo, Kelley Mickwee, the Jayhawks and more

LSM MUSIC CHART

- 67 LoneStarMusic Top 40 Albums
Staff Picks

VENUE SPOTLIGHT

- 68 John T. Floore Country Store, Helotes, TX — By Jim Beal Jr.

ACL reaches the BIG 4-0

Stars align onstage to celebrate 40 golden years of live music on TV — and to add one more name to Austin City Limits’ new Hall of Fame.

By Lynne Margolis

When PBS agreed to air a TV show featuring Austin musicians giving intimate performances inside a University of Texas broadcast studio, no one had any idea it would last more than one season. Much less 10. Or 20.

But when *Austin City Limits* celebrated its 40th anniversary with an all-star concert on June 26, it confirmed its status as the longest-running live-music TV show in the country — possibly even the world. That event, taped at the show’s 3-year-old digs at ACL Live at the Moody Theater, will be combined with footage from the inaugural Austin City Limits Hall of Fame induction ceremony, held April 26 in the show’s original Studio 6A, for a two-hour special to air Oct. 3.

In those 40 years, ACL certainly put Austin on the world’s radar as a hotbed of authentic music, while capturing performances by such a who’s-who of talent, it’s almost easier to list who *hasn’t* appeared on the show. The anniversary concert, co-hosted by Sheryl Crow and Jeff Bridges, started out with Bonnie Raitt, Alabama Shakes’ Brittany Howard and homeboys Jimmie Vaughan and Gary Clark Jr. trading riffs on “Wrap It Up,” the hit by Vaughan’s old band, the Fabulous Thunderbirds. Kris Kristofferson, Doyle Bramhall II, the Shakes, Grupo Fantasma and the other artists all got spotlight moments, too, backed by a house band led by Lloyd Maines. The four-hour-long extravaganza even featured a Foo Fighters appearance — via videotape captured in Studio 6A, doing Austinite Roky

Erickson’s “Two-Headed Dog.”

But Robert Earl Keen and Joe Ely just about stole the show with their surprise induction of pedal steel/dobro/guitar player Maines into the ACL Hall of Fame. Maines, who has logged more appearances on the show as a sideman than any other performer — at least 16 — was feted with his own ACL tribute in 2013, but was not among the first batch of inductees honored in April: Willie Nelson, Stevie Ray Vaughan & Double Trouble, show creator Bill Arhos, and UT Longhorns coach Darrell Royal.

“I met Lloyd back in the ’70s in Lubbock,” Ely said. “The way he played the steel guitar just scared me to death.” Keen presented Maines with a T-shirt on which he’d printed his poem, “I Wanna Be Lloyd,” a hilarious ode to the good-natured player who’s “friendly to all and never annoyed/by singer-songwriters, pickers and gridders/bipolar divas or high-lonesome tenors.”

Admitting he was overwhelmed to receive the honor, particularly from two of his best friends (his first ACL performance was in Joe Ely’s band), the Grammy-winning producer and dad of Natalie said, “My goal in life was to be a sideman. I never really enjoyed being in the spotlight.

“But I’ll tell you right now,” he added, “I could get used to this.”

That formed a perfect lead-in to the finale, a kick-ass rendition of fellow Lubbockite Buddy Holly’s “Not Fade Away,” with the headliners and house players forming a 10-guitar army, plus Crow on harmonica. It spoke not just to the longevity of those onstage, but to the show itself.

Earlier that evening, as she exited after performing “Your Good Thing (Is About to End),” Raitt shouted “Long live *Austin City Limits*!” With its namesake theater and Austin City Limits Festival; a new, not-yet-physical hall of fame; an in-the-works documentary; live streaming; and move into worldwide syndication, it’s a safe bet that ACL will not fade away for a long, long time.

ACL Hall of Fame



I WANNA BE LLOYD

By Robert Earl Keen

In my next lifetime I wanna be Lloyd
Friendly to all and never annoyed
By singer-songwriters, pickers and gridders
Bipolar divas or high-lonesome tenors
Managers, agents, roadies have tried
To make Lloyd annoyed ... all of them died
Record execs have gone to great pains
But as you’d expect, they ain’t shit to
Lloyd Maines
All of the things that drive me insane
Don’t ruffle a hair on the head of
Lloyd Maines.
So when I light out for that blue beyond
And stand in the doorway with my
music baton
I wanna be Lloyd in God’s studio
That fine angel band, raring to go
And I’ll hold up one finger, ask this
one thing
“Can you please check your tuning
On that open B string?”

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU, AUSTIN CITY LIMITS: (From left) Brittany Howard, Sheryl Crow, Jimmie Vaughan, Robert Earl Keen, Joe Ely, Bonnie Raitt, and Jeff Bridges channel Buddy Holly during the grand finale; Gary Clark Jr. pitches in with some rockin’ blues; Robert Earl Keen, reminding all that the party never ends ... and that ACL Hall of Fame inductee Lloyd Maines (above) is the *man*. (All photos this page by Scott Newton/courtesy of KLRU-TV)

Heal in the memories

Kerrverts come together to pay tribute to Rod Kennedy and carry on his dream at 43rd annual Kerrville Folk Festival

By D.C. Bloom

The 2014 Kerrville Folk Festival, which ran from May 22 through June 8 at Quiet Valley Ranch, featured many of the things Kerrverts have come to expect from the three-week celebration of song held annually since 1972. There were the genuinely heartfelt hippie-dippish “Welcome home’s” from longtime friends and the corps of ever-smiling volunteers; the nightly song circles at interestingly decorated camps like Camp Stupid and Camp Misinclin’d that have kept Kerrville weirder than Austin can ever hope to be again; the occasional tent-rattling, passing Texas cloudbursts that always threaten to blow it all away; and an array of main-stage performances from popular and perennial favorites like Judy Collins, Trout Fishing in America, Terri Hendrix and Eliza Gilkyson.

But the more things stayed the same, the more Kerrville changed this year. Because this was the first Kerrville without its beloved founding father, Rod Kennedy, watching proudly from his reserved seat at the side of the stage. Kennedy, who retired a decade ago but kept attending the festival year after year, passed away just weeks before the gathering of the music-loving tribe his vision inspired.

“I’m sure many of us felt his presence during the festival,” said producer Dalis Allen, Kennedy’s longtime friend and protégé. For Allen and many other attendees, performers included, the multi-artist “For the RodFather” tribute set that closed out the third night was one of the highlights of this year’s event — albeit a bittersweet one.

“As much as I loved hearing the songs, it was the stories told about Rod that really celebrated his memory,” Allen continued. More than a few remembered initially finding Kennedy — a former Marine — a rather intimidating, hard-to-read presence who subsequently became one of their biggest supporters. “Others talked about how surprised they were to see the promoter of a festival sitting there truly soaking up their performances and really listening. That’s not always the case. But with Rod, the whole purpose was to hear the song.”

One of the many legacies Kennedy leaves behind is the festival’s New Folk Contest, which he — along with Peter Yarrow — created to help emerging songwriters find an appreciative audience. The imprimatur of “New Folk Winner”

is, today, perhaps one of the most highly coveted titles of songwriters worldwide.

One of this year’s six New Folk winners, C. Daniel Boling from New Mexico, who calls New Folk “the holy grail of performing songwriter competitions,” beat the odds and earned the New Folk Winner designation after seeing his name, not among the 32 finalists, but listed as the third of four alternates. Grabbing a slot days before the festival when a third finalist had to cancel, Boling found himself going all the way from also-ran to the winner’s circle. It was the third year in a row an alternate has taken that route.

“As much as I loved hearing the songs, it was the stories told about Rod that really celebrated his memory.”
— Dalis Allen

“I think that just shows that what Dalis tells us is true,” Boling said. “There are just so many great songs entered every year and it may just have been our time.”

Boling and the rest of this year’s New Folk winners — Frank Martin Gilligan, Matt Nakoa, the Lovebirds, Caroline Spence, and Connor Garvey — will be touring Texas later this fall and taking part in a special concert on the opening night of FischerFest, scheduled for Nov. 7-9 at the Fischer Dancehall in Fischer, Texas. Joining them will be previous New Folk winners such as John Gorka and Hal Ketchum. Before that, though, Kerrverts who can’t wait until next year to go “back home” to Quiet Valley Ranch can look forward to the Kerrville Fall Music Festival over Labor Day Weekend (Aug. 29-31). Artists announced so far include Vance Gilbert, Jon Dee Graham and son William Harries Graham, Ponty Bone, Amilia K. Spicer, Nora Jan Struthers, Charlie A’Court, Willy Porter, and more.



ROD’S ANGELS ... AND LEGACY: (Background) Dalis Allen, Vickie Bell and Merri Lu Park, who cared for Kennedy during the last days of his life, at the “For the RodFather” tribute; (above) Kennedy’s dream lives on with a new crop of Kerrville New Folk winners. (Photos by Susan Roads)



AMERICANA GETS COZY WITH TENNESSEE TOWN

BY LYNNE MARGOLIS

As the popularity of Americana music continues to grow, the tiny town of Franklin, Tenn., is putting itself on the map as Americana Central. The Factory, a newly renovated office/retail space in this Nashville suburb, is now home to the Sugar Hill Records label, the weekly *Music City Roots* live-radio/webcast/public-television show, and the Americana Music Association headquarters. In May, the AMA’s second Americana Cross-County Lines Festival became the first music event ever staged at Franklin’s Park at Harlinsdale Farm, a National Register of Historic Places horse farm-turned-city park.

The festival featured John Hiatt (who lives in the Williamson County community), Patty Griffin, Ashley Monroe, Parker Millsap, Luther Dickinson, Brandi Clark and Joe Pug. It occurred in conjunction with the Americana Experience, a 10-day series of performances and other events held in Franklin and nearby Leiper’s Fork. That event brought artists and dignitaries from Clarksdale, Miss., Muscle Shoals, Ala., Louisiana, Nashville and elsewhere to perform and celebrate the sonic cultures of a five-state region undergoing connective branding as the Americana Music Triangle.

The brainchild of Aubrey Preston, who spearheaded Leiper’s Fork’s preservation and development as a historic village, and the \$8.7 million restoration of the historic Franklin Theater, the triangle links historical and cultural attractions in the southern locales that birthed nine distinct musical genres. When it launches this fall, tourists will be able to use the americanamusictriangle.org website to plot travel routes along the “Gold Record Road,” anchored by Memphis, Nashville and New Orleans, and learn more about the origins of blues, jazz, country, rock ‘n’ roll, r&b/soul, gospel, southern gospel, zydeco/Cajun and bluegrass.

Americana also continues to grow with the addition of a Best American Roots Performance Grammy Award, announced in June by the Recording Academy. It joins existing awards for Best American Roots Music Song and Best Americana Album. And this year, the Americana Music Association marks a milestone with its 15th annual festival and conference Sept. 17-21, and its 13th annual Americana Awards & Honors. The Sept. 17 awards will once again be broadcast live on AXS TV and air later in edited form as an “*Austin City Limits* Presents” special. Among this year’s nominees are Wimberley native Sarah Jarosz, for Album of the Year; former Houston residents Robert Ellis (Album, Artist and Song of the Year) and Rodney Crowell (Artist of the Year); and Austin resident Griffin (Song of the Year).



INSIDE THE AMERICANA MUSIC TRIANGLE: (from top): John Hiatt, Patty Griffin with Luther Dickinson, and Parker Millsap sharing the Americana Experience in Franklin, Tenn. (All photos by Lynne Margolis)

Artist nominees for 2014 music grant get acquainted with industry pros named to Austin non-profit’s advisory board

Early on a Sunday — as in, before *noon* early — may seem like a strange time to call a meeting of music artists and professionals. But the fact that some of the Austin music industry’s most decorated and experienced behind-the-scenes players and many of its brightest up-and-coming talents came together on the morning of June 22 at the home of Colin Kendrick, founder of the non-profit Black Fret, was testament to how much they all believe in the cause of keeping Austin’s legacy as one of the best music towns in the world alive and well.

“Black Fret’s mission is to help our musicians make and perform great new music,” explains Kendrick, who adapted Black Fret’s model from the age-old tradition of private arts patronage. Each year, the public charity will award \$10,000 grants to 10 different Austin music artists or bands, as picked by patrons who have purchased \$1,500 Black Fret memberships. Members also vote on the initial 20 nominees in the running for the grants, and get to attend private concerts and other Black Fret events throughout the year. All of the grant nominees, meanwhile, are allowed to schedule mentor/mentee meetings with Black Fret’s advisory board, a distinguished pool of industry professionals including producers, studio owners, managers, booking agents, radio promoters, and entertainment lawyers.

The purpose of the Sunday get-together in June was to allow this year’s nominated artists — Amy Cook, Danny Malone, Dawn & Hawkes, East Cameron Folkcore, Elias Haslanger and Church on Monday, Elizabeth McQueen, Emily Bell, Erin Ivey, Gina Chavez, Graham Wilkinson, Jitterbug Vipers, Jonny Gray, Lincoln Durham, Little Radar, Mother Falcon, Quiet Company, the Rocketboys, the Whiskey Sisters, Wild Child, and Zeale — an opportunity to introduce themselves to the advisory board. The artists and “mentors” paired off with each other one-on-one for a few minutes at a time, “speed-dating style,” before rotating around so everyone got a chance to meet.

“That was the first time that all the mentors got together with the group,” said advisory board member Heather Wagner Reed, president and founder of Juice Consulting, an Austin-based public relations, marketing and artist development firm. “I don’t know if anyone really knew what to expect, but afterwards we were all blown away. It was just inspiring to see the energy in the room and the kind of connectivity that these artists and advisors had together.”

In addition to Wagner Reed, the rest of the just-announced Black Fret advisory board members (not all of whom were able to attend the initial meet-and-greet) are: Mark Addison, Roggie Baer, Mike Crowley, CJ Eirksson, Jenni Finlay, Will Hoffman, Terrany Johnson, Terry Lickona, Weston McGowen, Davis McLarty, Matt Noveskey, Tim Palmer, Peter Schwarz, Carlos Sosa, Joe Stallone, Stuart Sullivan, Mike Swinford, Kevin Wommack, and Tom Vale.

Going forward, artists and advisory board members will arrange additional mentor meetings with each other as their respective schedules allow. The nominees will also have the opportunity to perform for Black Fret members at regular events throughout the rest of the summer and fall “listening period.” It all leads up to the first annual Black Ball, at which the 10 grant winners will be announced. The gala will be held in November, with venue and date to be announced.

— RICHARD SKANSE

Black Fret Roundup



ALL IN THE BLACK FRET FAMILY: (from top) Black Fret advisory board members and 2014 grant nominees at the home of Black Fret founder Colin Kendrick in July; advisory board member Davis McLarty (booking agent and drummer for the Joe Ely Band) gets acquainted with nominee/Austin singer-songwriter Danny Malone during the “speed-dating”-style meet-and-greet session; Black Fret nominees Chris Hawkes and Miranda Dawn — aka Dawn & Hawkes — meet with advisory board member Heather Wagner Reed of Juice Consulting. (Photos by Amy Price)

JEFF TWEEDY PREVIEWS SONGS FROM SOLO DEBUT

Wilco frontman's upcoming *Sukierae* features his son on drums

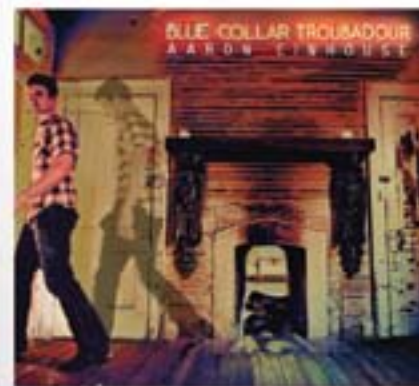
By LYNNE MARGOLIS

Wilco frontman Jeff Tweedy is one of *Austin City Limits*' most popular performers, but until June 20, he'd never appeared on the show without the band he's been with for 20 years. This time around, he brought a brand new batch of players, including his son, 18-year-old drummer Spencer. The band, appropriately, is named Tweedy. And as it turns out, the kid's a good time-keeper. Both the ACL taping and the following night's sold-out show at the Texas Union Ballroom showcased songs from Tweedy's first-ever solo album, *Sukierae*, releasing Sept. 16 on Wilco's dBpm label.

"It took 18 years to make a solo record because I had to grow a drummer," the elder Tweedy joked during his ACL show, which featured more than a dozen of the album's 20 tracks. Highlights included the beautiful "Desert Bell," "Honey Combed" (with ethereal vocals by Lucius' Jess Wolfe and Holly Laessig) and "Where My Love," a sweet, "California Stars"-like love ballad. Noting many of the songs have "love" in their title, he cracked, "There's all sorts of love on the new album. ... What else is there to write about?"

Another elegant tune, "Summer Noon," appears on the soundtrack to Austinite Richard Linklater's lauded film, *Boyhood* — coincidentally, about a child growing up (the soundtrack also includes Wilco's "Hate It Here").

Those well-received songs were followed by a catalog-spanning solo set that included Uncle Tupelo's "New Madrid," Golden Smog's "Please Tell My Brother," and Wilco's "I Am Trying to Break Your Heart," "Born Alone," and, with the Lucius ladies, the divine "Jesus, Etc." The encore included "Give Back the Key to My Heart," a song Tweedy recorded years ago "in the greatest city for music in the world ... with the guy who wrote it" — Doug Sahm, who joined Uncle Tupelo in the studio for their made-in-Austin swan song, 1993's *Anodyne*. It was a sweet moment from a guy who not only appreciates his history, he seems to be doing a fine job of passing it down.



AARON EINHOUSE
New single
"Blue Collar Troubadour"
at radio now.

VISION
ENTERTAINMENT

Also Available:



Sam Riggs



The Statesboro Revue



The Rusty Brothers

**WILLIE NELSON
& FAMILY
LIVE IN CONCERT**

WILLIENELSON.COM
FACEBOOK.COM/WILLIENELSON

**JOHN T. FLOORE
COUNTRY STORE**

TWO NIGHTS!
FRI. OCT. 17TH
SAT. OCT. 18TH

WWW.LIVEATFLOORES.COM

14492 OLD BANDERA

HELOTES, TEXAS

the LSM soundtrack

JUST A FEW OF OUR FAVORITE CUTS FROM THE ARTISTS AND ALBUMS
FEATURED AND REVIEWED IN THIS ISSUE.

1

“When You’re Here,” from John Fullbright’s *Songs*

A knockout combination of melody and imagery, this song defines desolation, then turns anguish into hope with just a whisper. Brilliant.

2

“The Wall,” from Willie Nelson’s *Band of Brothers*

On this standout from an album full of terrific brand-new Willie songs actually written by Willie, our hero reflects on the rewards and cost of living life at unstoppable force.

3

“Bathroom Sink,” from Miranda Lambert’s *Platinum*

Strip it all away, and Lambert is a visceral songwriter whose songs impale with the most basic moments and language. Anyone who’s ever feared who they are behind the mask will know the potency of this thoughtful ballad.

4

“Somethin’ Good,” from Robyn Ludwick’s *Little Rain*

“Tell me somethin’ good about love,” asks/pleads/demands Ludwick on this up-tempo highlight from her Gurf Morlix-produced fourth album. But before you answer, ask yourself this: does it beat rock ‘n’ roll?

5

“A Hangin’ On” from Bruce Robison and Kelly Willis’ *Our Year*

Kelly Willis singing “Harper Valley PTA” is pretty hard to beat, but her husband gives her a run for the money in the “Best Vocal Performance on a Bruce & Kelly Album” category with his flat-out beautiful cover of this Vern Gosdin classic. This is the way good country music is supposed to hurt.

6

“Checkers and Chess,” from Billy Joe Shaver’s *Long In the Tooth*

Socio-economic analysis from the ultimate blue-collar hero; Shaver drapes some common sense and callin’ out the privileged against this rocking back and forth, feel-good romp.

7

“Hurtin’ Albertan” from Corb Lund’s *Counterfeit Blues*

Canada’s own Americana hero and his seasoned band of Hurtin’ Albertans went all the way to Memphis to kick new life into this road-tested calling card (and other fan favorites) at Sam Phillips’ legendary Sun Studios.

8

“What’s Shakin’ Tonight,” from Joe Ely’s *B4 84*

Hop in and take a wild ride with the Crazy Lemon at his kinetic best. Like many songs on *B4 84*, this was re-recorded in a Hollywood studio at MCA’s insistence for Ely’s 1984 *Hi Res* album, but the home-cooked original, unreleased until now, is where it’s really at.

9

“Closer to You,” from the Mastersons’ *Good Luck Charm*

Sweeping, chiming, shimmering, the notion of being pulled in and never close enough is perfect for this Rickenbacker-steeped confection that feels a bit like the Bangles and the Jayhawks getting frisky in the moonlight.

10

“Love’s On Fire,” from Nikki Lane’s *All or Nothin’*

Co-writers Nikki Lane and producer Dan Auerbach duet together on this irresistible, rootsy paean to passion burning wild: “Started with a spark but the wind came ’round, and now our love’s on fire.”



Photo by John Carrico



NEW & RECENT RELEASES

on the LoneStarMusic radar

June 30

Joe Ely, *B4 84*

July 1

Corb Lund, *Counterfeit Blues*

Jim Lauderdale, *I’m a Song*

Old Crow Medicine Show, *Remedy*

The Jayhawks, *Sound of Lies; Smile; Rainy Day Music* (reissues)

July 8

The Mastersons, *Good Luck Charm*

Texas Renegade, *Surviving the Flood*

Peter Rowan, *Dharma Blues*

July 15

Robyn Ludwick, *Little Rain*

Jana Pochop, *Throats Are Quarries*

Green River Ordinance, *Green River Ordinance*

John Hiatt, *Terms of My Surrender*

Cowboy Jack Clement, *For Once and For All*

July 22

Kelley Mickwee, *You Used to Live Here*

Richard Thompson, *Acoustic Classics*

Chris Smither, *Still on the Levee*

July 29

Micky & the Motorcars, *Hearts From Above*

Noel McKay, *Is That So Much To Ask*

August 5

Billy Joe Shaver, *Long In the Tooth*

Sunny Sweeney, *Provoked*

August 12

Lucero, *Live from Atlanta*

The Polyphonic Spree, *Psychphonic*

August 19

Ruthie Foster, *Promise of a New Day*

Paul Thorn, *Too Blessed to Be Stressed*

Cory Brannan, *The No-Hit Wonder*

Mike Ryan, *Bad Reputation*

August 26

Shovels & Rope, *Swimmin’ Time*

Sept. 9

Ryan Adams, *Ryan Adams*

Drew Kennedy, *Sad Songs Happily Played*

Sept. 16

Tweedy, *Sukierae*

The Fautleroyes, *Below the Pink Pony*

Various, *Dead Man’s Town: A Tribute to Born in the U.S.A.*

Sept. 23

Lee Ann Womack, *The Way I’m Livin’*

Sept. 30

Lucinda Williams, *Down Where the Spirit Meets the Bone*

Sons of Bill, *Love & Logic*

SUBSCRIBE TO
LONESTARMUSIC
MAGAZINE

6 issues
(1year) \$24



Card# _____

Exp Date _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

email _____

Check Enclosed - Made payable to
LoneStarMusic



Bill me later



I am a LoneStarMusic.com customer—
charge my card



Charge my credit card

Visa ☐ MC ☐ Discover ☐ AmEx ☐



Artist Profiles

Matt Hillyer

The Eleven Hundred Springs frontman gets a little more personal on solo side trip.

By Kelly Dearmore

There are any number of reasons that can lead the frontman of a successful group to break rank and a record a solo album. But in the curious case of Matt Hillyer, none of the typical factors really apply. Sure, he’s spent more than 15 years at the helm of the Dallas-based outlaw/honky-tonk outfit Eleven Hundred Springs, touring statewide and beyond and recording fistfuls of albums (the most recent being 2012’s *Midway*) — but as Hillyer proudly attests, the band is still going strong with all members intact and in fine spirits. On top of that, he already has a side project in the rockabilly-flavored Matt the Cat Trio. And the fact that Hillyer’s also married with two kids at home certainly rules out any notion of him just having too much time on his hands.

So, ruling out things like creative differences and boredom, what exactly was it that led to Hillyer’s solo debut, *If These Old Bones Could Talk*? The 38-year-old singer and songwriter and self-appointed “long-haired, tattooed hippie freak” (whose trademark ponytail is long gone but whose ink is as striking as ever) actually credits his grandmother for first encouraging him to embark on the solo trip, years ago. Beyond encouragement, she also gave him the album’s catalyst, pictured right there on the album’s cover photo of Hillyer sitting at a table with a set of vintage dominoes. The “bones” he sings about in the album’s title track happen to be the kind you play.

“My grandfather died when my mother was young, so I never met him,” Hillyer says. “But when my grandmother found out I like to play dominoes, she gave me his old dominoes. It’s the only thing I have of his. I’ve always wondered what kind of situations they’ve seen. What could they tell me if they could talk?”

After Hillyer co-wrote “If These Old Bones Could Talk” with fellow Dallas country artists Dave Perez (of the Tejas Brothers), Mark David Manders and Max Stalling, he decided the sentimental tone of the song just wouldn’t quite fit right in the context of his usual creative outlet. “I feel like ‘If These Old Bones Could Talk’ is a little outside of what Eleven Hundred would do,” he explains. “It’s got more of a singer-songwriter vibe than the standard honky-tonk fare. For me, the main difference is in the lyrical content of the record. People may or may not hear it, but I know. A lot of the lyrics on this record are

decidedly more personal to me.”

He did enlist the services of a longtime Eleven Hundred Springs collaborator to help him make the record, though: producer Lloyd Maines. The end result — recorded at the Zone in Dripping Springs with Maines pulling double duty both at the control console and laying down his legendary pedal steel licks — is a sparkling country gem that manages to separate itself from everything else Hillyer’s ever done — albeit not so drastically as to necessarily scare anyone off. Take, for example, “The Run Up Tree,” which apart from a little bit of rock guitar isn’t wildly different from Eleven Hundred Springs. But the lyrics find Hillyer paying heart-felt tribute to his mother and the stories she told him as a child about the family vacations she would take in the 1950s. Elsewhere, he gets intimate on a level that would *never* work in a typical honky-tonk setlist; the romantically poetic “Dancing With the Moon” features Hillyer almost whispering — and talking rather than singing — all sorts of sweet scenarios to a lover while a billowy gallop softly taps in the background along with just the slightest tickling of faintly audible piano.

Hillyer credits Maines with helping him to hone the sounds that envelop the lyrics, and praises the producer’s style of advising without demanding as hugely impactful throughout the sessions.

“On the song ‘My Enemy My Heart,’ I had in mind to do it as a shuffle,” he says. “But something about doing it that way made it kind of unremarkable. Arjuna Contreras [drummer for Eleven Hundred Springs] suggested switching to more of a Waylon beat. Lloyd really dug that and suggested some different chords that changed the song’s entire scope. It’s not just that he makes the suggestion. It’s that when you’re tracking he becomes a part of the band, encouraging you to try everything you can to get the most out of the song. Ultimately it’s your call, but he gives you more options.”

And now that he’s finally added a solo album to his already plentiful catalog, longtime fans of Matt “the Cat” and Eleven Hundred Springs have one more option to choose from, too.

“The main reason people are familiar with me is because of that band,” Hillyer admits. “And I’m not ashamed to say that if you’re a fan of Eleven Hundred Springs, I think you’ll like this album, too.”



Photo by Shane Kislack



Wendy Colonna

From the sweet response to her latest album *Nectar* to her new Coke commercial, this Austin singer-songwriter has lots to smile about.

By D.C. Bloom

“I spent about three hours in a Starbucks yesterday,” jokes Wendy Colonna to a standing-room-only Saturday afternoon crowd at Austin’s Strange Brew. “I just wanted to make sure they’re really playing it. And I *still* haven’t heard it!”

But you can bet hundreds of thousands of other chai latte sippers have heard the “it” in question — “The Water’s Fine,” a song from Colonna’s latest release, *Nectar*, that the coffee giant has licensed and put in heavy rotation in its more than 23,000 stores around the world.

Colonna can be forgiven for feeling a tad highly-caffeinated these days. Because a second big brand name, Coca-Cola, is making use of another one of her tunes in a charming 30-second animated commercial that is encouraging movie-goers to go on out to the lobby and order themselves up a perky soft drink.

There’s sweet irony in Colonna’s music reaching this “brand” new — and much broader — audience, because it comes on the heels of her decision to alter the tried-and-true approach that had served her well on five previous studio albums, each showcasing her sultry, powerhouse vocals.

“I didn’t want this one to sound like anything else I’d done,” the Louisiana native and longtime Austin resident says of *Nectar*, which she released last October. “I wanted to write more courageously than I had before. I wanted to write about the feeling of being very hungry for reconciliation, of struggling with vices, of almost dying when my immune system crashed from an 8-month-long lung fungus that scared the tar out of me. Adult-content stuff! I whittled these songs out of a lot of suffering, so I made this record for me. And if people love it, I am psyched.”

Colonna enlisted Mark Addison, with whom she’d done various one-off projects over the years, to produce *Nectar* and help realize her vision of making an album that “didn’t pretend like life was so peachy.” The two had forged a friendship and level of trust during their previous work together that grew even deeper in making such a personal and self-revelatory album. Taking a page from the “less is more” college of musical knowledge textbook, Addison encouraged Colonna to “break her

standard rules of engagement” and reminded her that there’s a marked difference between stage and studio.

“He encouraged me to sing every song with one-quarter of the big vibrato voice I usually use,” Colonna explains. “Mark would tell me ‘This isn’t a show, it’s a record. Let’s get intimate.’”

Nectar’s most intimate moment comes in “Bring Me Water,” a song Colonna wrote after thinking about what she would like to say to “all the people with whom I’ve had bad endings. How would I ask for reconciliation? That’s a bold, vulnerable place to go. I’ve left some real messes, but I’d like to think that somewhere there’s an opportunity for forgiveness.”

And in the process of letting go, taking things down a notch or three and trusting her instincts, Colonna has redefined what success means to her. “If you’re really present with doing your best then every moment is a success. If you follow what your gut says, every moment is a sacred space.”

And the soulful and spiritual Colonna, who sprinkles talk of career and life’s journeys with references to “surrendering to what is to come,” “the beauty of walking into grace” and the importance of “honoring the path and the opportunity that is being given” is doing just that in employing her seasoned songwriting skills in both making the most personal of art *and* moving product — whether it’s her own CDs or caffeinated beverages.

“The funny part is, I don’t feel like I’ve sold out by writing that commercial,” says Colonna of the Coke spot. “I felt it was a challenge. And if it was gonna work, it was gonna work ... and that’s where I left it.”

Colonna was among a handful of songwriters given the chance to write a one-minute song for the suits at Coca-Cola to consider, and sure enough, her submission worked. And its writer believes she knows why, suggesting, with nary a tad of irony: “Probably because it’s not overly saccharine.” And it’s a little “ditty,” as she playfully calls it, that perhaps only someone who unapologetically bared her soul and shared her scars on *Nectar* could have written. “No matter what life throws our way, no matter what will be,” you hear her sing in the commercial, “Each moment that I spend with you means the whole wide world to me.”

Photo Courtesy of Wendy Colonna

NOW THAT’S AMERICANA!



KNBT FOR iPhone ANDROID

STREAMING • PODCASTS
VENUE SCHEDULES
AND MORE!

KNBT.FM



KNBTFM



@KNBTFM

REAL COUNTRY FOR THE HILL COUNTRY

KGNB FOR iPhone ANDROID

STREAMING • PODCASTS
LOCAL/NATIONAL NEWS
AND MORE!



KGNB.AM



KGNBAM



@KGNBAM



Nikki Lane

How fate, luck, and hard work conspired to turn a flea market fashion designer into a rising star of Americana.

By Rob Patterson

She’s due onstage in just a little bit, but Nikki Lane is currently in the middle of trying to get her, well, *stuff* together. She’s sitting in the dressing room at Stubb’s BBQ in Austin, idly sorting through an array of little items scattered across two cocktail tables: bracelets, trinkets, and totems, plus a toothbrush, Sharpie, rolling papers, embroidery thread, and various other essentials Lane can’t leave home without. Nearby, her boyfriend carefully glues back into place a broken bit of the small vintage tweed carryall the items travel in.

“It’s at least well-enough made that we are able to make it keep coming along — and it’s just so *cool*,” Lane says of the case. She likens it to a survival kit, but that’s really just the half of it.

“I’m the kind of person who keeps a lot of souvenirs,” she explains. “I like to buy things, collect things, have things. So out on the road I just kind of get depressed if I don’t have my stuff. This is just some of it, the tip of the iceberg.”

Lane may have a lot of baggage, but she sure knows how to make it work for her. Her new album, *All or Nothin’*, is rich with jabs at ex-lovers and all manner of lusty declarations and girl-power assertions gleaned from a still-young life lived fully — all of it fashioned into smart neo-trad C&W with the assistance of producer Dan Auerbach, of Black Keys fame. Since the album’s May release on New West Records, she’s toured non-stop, with several dates opening for Americana/indie-rock stalwarts the Old 97’s, and the heady buzz she’s collected along the way is a palpable presence in Stubb’s music room when Lane and her band take the stage. The good-sized crowd she’s drawn would be

impressive even if it wasn’t a Sunday night; it’s thick with hipsters and especially hip young women just like Lane herself (“All you dudes out there oughta be thanking me,” she says). Lane also remarks that it’s one of her first shows as a headliner, and she makes good use of her expanded set time, running through most if not all of her new record as well as few songs from her 2011 debut, *Walk of Shame*, and a wildcard, non-obvious Tom Petty cover (“Saving Grace.”) Between songs she sasses playfully with her band and the audience, taking requests and even the hat off a fan in the front row during her encore.

And yet, as much as Lane’s confidence both onstage and on record suggests a woman doing exactly what she was born and always wanted to do, the fact is that her career is anything *but* the result of lifelong dreams, schemes, and ambitions. The whole time she was growing up in Greenville, S.C., she never even thought about wanting to be a musician, even though she was surrounded by “tons of music” her entire childhood.

“My mom loves Motown and oldies, my dad was really into ’80s and ’90s country, and my best friend, who was my next door neighbor, her dad was into Pink Floyd and Zeppelin, classic rock stuff like that,” she recalls. “And my grandfather was really into mountain music. But still, I really wasn’t that into music myself.”

“I wanted to be a marine biologist, like every young girl of the ’90s,” Lane quips. “Then, I wanted to be an architect. But then I as like, I don’t nearly have the patience for something like *that*.”

At 19, bored and itching to get out of her hometown, Lane packed her stuff into a U-Haul trailer and headed to Los Angeles — still not entirely certain what she wanted to do. “I was going to be a fashion designer — and/or an A&R person; I couldn’t decide,” she says. “I thought an A&R person was a girl who went around with a credit card and fucked with rocker dudes.”

Instead she did time as a karaoke bar waitress and as a nanny, and eventually started designing and decorating shoes. When music

Photo by Chuck Grant

finally presented itself as something else she could dabble in, it came about almost by happenstance. She started by singing background vocals on friends’ recordings after impressing them with her chops singing along to songs in the car. Then, just as casually, she began writing songs with a pal, just to do something with the melodies and lyric lines that just sorta started coming to her. But it was still nothing more to her than a casual dalliance. “I couldn’t even play guitar then,” she says with a shrug.

Fashion remained her main interest. After landing a lucrative sales gig in a high-end clothing store, Lane assisted a shopper who turned out to be fashion mogul Mark Ecko. She didn’t know who he was at first, but within 10 minutes Lane managed to talk him into giving her a job designing a women’s denim line. That’s the gig that landed her in New York City, which is where destiny finally caught up with her with a vengeance. “When I got there and got my heart trampled by my boyfriend at the time, all of a sudden there were *songs*,” she says. “Sometimes shit happens and it shocks shit out of you or into your head.”

Lane made an album out of a lot of those songs, but it never got released: she had it stored on a hard drive that ended up getting filched by a housekeeper. So she made another one, this time with far better luck. She secured a deal with a small indie label, I Am Sound, which released *Walk of Shame*. That record started netting her some attention, but not quite enough for her to comfortably keep on living in the Big Apple, so Lane packed up and headed South — albeit to Nashville rather than back home to Greenville.

Although her music career was already underway, Lane continued to make ends meet by exploring her other interests — namely, collecting and selling vintage clothing. “I made a decision to buy anything that I liked that had a good margin,” says Lane, who started vending her wares under the banner High Class Hillbilly. One day a guy poking around her flea market booth asked Lane if she’d sell him the jacket she was wearing, and she gave it up for a generous profit. The buyer turned out to be Dan Auerbach.

“It made him remember me when we met again through music,” Lane says. “He later sent me a text saying he’d finally heard one of my songs and liked it, and I wrote back: ‘Cool. Make my record.’”

Lane’s label at the time balked at the cost of having Auerbach produce, but neither Lane nor her luck were about to be deterred. She wrangled her way out of her deal, found a way to make the record with Auerbach on her own, and then Auerbach gave a copy to his backyard neighbor, Americana music heavyweight and New West Records recording artist Buddy Miller. And more or less just like that, *voila* — Lane had herself a new and far bigger record company in her corner *and* a very hip disc for them to get behind.

Of course it goes without saying that the Auerbach factor alone is going to open some doors for any up-and-coming young artist; in addition to his Black Keys fame, his stock as a producer is booming of late in the wake of projects he’s worked on for Dr. John, Valerie June, Ray LaMontagne, and even Lana Del Rey. Still, *All or Nothin’* is a record that would probably turn heads even without Auerbach’s marquee name on the back flashing, “Hey people, listen!” Lane’s singing throughout exudes her sweet-yet-tuff belle ’tude with a conversational lilt that covers the spectrum from languid embers to smoky flirts to searing licks of flame. She recalls many voices you likely know and love — think Loretta, Dusty, and Wanda, for starters — but ultimately sounds like no one but herself. The songs hit a similarly potent fission of familiar yet fresh, with Lane confidently hitting the mark whether aiming for vintage country twang (“Man Up,” “I Want My Heart Back”), sexy rockin’ psychobilly/New Wave swagger (“Sleep With a Stranger,” “I Don’t Care”), Muscle Shoals soul (“All or Nothin’”) or straight-up, catchy-as-hell Americana (“Love’s on Fire,” co-written with Auerbach and recorded as a smoking duet).

It’s a delightfully fun and varied mix, just like the myriad goods Lane has for sale at her merch table after her show: not just the usual CDs, vinyl, and T-shirts, but patches with her handmade skull logo (remember that embroidery kit from her survival bag?) and even her own line of coffee beans. Clearly, all that time she spent in retail, fashion design, and flea markets wasn’t for naught.

“All the things I’ve become good at came out of proving to myself that I could be good at it,” Lane says, tracing that motivation all the way back to growing up an “awkward, weird, badly dressed, bad-haircut little girl.” But seeing as how music seems to have chosen her as much as she chose music, she agrees that fate has played a pretty big role in her life, too. Or more to the point, fate and the willingness to roll with it. She sums up her secret to making the most of her fate as simply “flexibility ... and the ability to change.”

“When I moved to California as a kid, I said the worst case scenario was that I would have to go back,” she says. “So far, I haven’t had to go back to shit.”



Photo by Chuck Grant





Micky & the Motorcars

Bolstered by a brand new cast of bandmates — and a little brotherly love in the studio — Micky and Gary Braun soar with *Hearts From Above*.

By Mike Ethan Messick

“This is kind of the calm before the storm ... or before the tour, anyhow,” says Micky Braun of Micky & the Motorcars, squeezing in a quick phone interview in what little downtime he has left before hitting the road again. “You actually caught me at home, and that’s gonna be hard to do for a while. We’ve got three and a half weeks booked just for the West Coast leg of the deal.”

The area code on the incoming call might indicate Austin, Texas, but with a guy like Braun it’s good to have some clarification as to which “home” he’s talking about. He gets his mail in Austin, of course, but the ancestral Braun family home up in Idaho is steadfastly in his heart and history. And the road and the stage are home, too, which sounds clichéd but bears extra mention since even the hardest of musical road warriors probably didn’t start their ride as early as Micky and his brother and bandmate, Gary Braun (more on that later).

Gary’s been rounding out Micky’s creativity as a co-writer, multi-instrumentalist, and fellow vocalist from the get-go, but the rest of the Motorcars lineup has been in serious flux since their last album, 2011’s solid *Raise My Glass*, hit the shelves. So much so, in fact, that the Motorcars’ new album, *Hearts From Above*, marks the studio debut of what could technically be deemed a brand new band.

“Going into the studio on this one, things had really changed for us,” Micky explains. “The bass player was new, the drummer was new, and the lead guitarist, too. There was a lot of comings and goings, stuff that shook us up. We’d lost a good friend, our old bass player Mark McCoy, to a tragic [boating] accident.”

That was back in 2012, after McCoy had left the band to move

back home to Idaho. His replacement, Joe Fladger, was the first new member added to the fold, followed soon after by drummer Bobby Paugh and guitarist Dustin Schaefer. The Brauns road-tested the new lineup for months before booking studio time, which is why *Hearts From Above* as a whole sounds too taunt, self-assured, and focused to be mistaken for the work of anything but a seasoned outfit. But the infusion of new blood also gives both the record and the band’s live shows an invigorating sense of urgency and optimism that makes the Motorcars sound positively reborn, bringing new life to a sound that Micky and Gary have been cultivating for years and pushing their songwriting to new levels.

Sometimes that songwriting takes grandiose grabs at history (“From Where the Sun Now Stands,” which tackles the viewpoint of Chief Joseph, the iconic Native American leader from the turn-of-the-century Pacific Northwest); other times, it rallies rebels to righteousness (“Tonight We Ride.”) But mostly it just takes a heartily adult swing at the ups and downs of love — and on *Hearts From Above* moreso than any other album in the band’s catalog, the “ups” are winning. And for good reason: in contrast to most of the songs on the darker-themed *Raise My Glass*, which Micky wrote while coming to grips with a breakup, the new album finds his proverbial glass more than half full.

“Well, I’ve got a fiancé now,” he explains. “And I guess it shows there in the songs. It felt different, like it was the first time I was writing all these love songs from the point of view of someone who’s happy and positive about it.

“And she’s a speech pathologist,” he adds, “so I think she’s even got me enunciating these songs better.”

Asked which of the songs spoke most directly from his current lot in life, Micky offers up the big-hearted title track. “You know, I got the idea for that one walking home from the Continental Club [in Austin] after going to see Alejandro Escovedo on a weeknight, and it was such a damn good show and I was just in a great mood, a happy place, excited to be writing and recording something new again.”

Escovedo’s influence on Micky & the Motorcars is evidenced

Photo Courtesy of Micky & the Motorcars

even more directly on *Hearts From Above*’s lone cover, the searching “Sister Lost Soul.” The song has actually been a regular standout on the band’s setlist for years, ever since Micky fell in love with Escovedo’s original on his 2008 album, *Real Animal*. “That’s probably the only song on the record we’ve been playing on the road for a long time, the cover,” he says. “The original stuff, I like to keep it under wraps until the record’s almost out. I’m not worried about the audience getting tired of it; I just don’t want the band to be burned out on it. But that Alejandro song, I just love it ... I would’ve recorded it the year he put it out but I figured it’d make more sense to wait a little while.”

Hearts From Above also bears the imprint of a few of the Motorcars’ peers and friends closer in age to the Braun brothers. Brian Keane lent some of his signature wit to a trio of co-writes, while Jason Eady, recently acclaimed for his hard-country material, helped Micky pen the album’s punchiest and hardest-rocking number, “Hurt Again.”

“We were running through that one in the studio, and Willy perked up and asked, ‘Who’s the cowriter on that one again?’” Micky recalls with a chuckle. “He thought I was kidding him about Jason.”

That Willy would of course be Micky and Gary’s older brother Willy Braun, who in addition to co-writing a handful of songs on *Hearts From Above* (including the title track) also produced the album. It was his first time working with the Motorcars in that fashion, though the brothers are no strangers to collaboration. Willy’s own Austin-based roots-rock band, Reckless Kelly — which features yet another older Braun brother in multi-instrumentalist Cody — has shared many a stage and tour with Micky & the Motorcars, and all four Brauns have played music together in one form or fashion since childhood. Their father, the well-travelled Idaho singer-songwriter Muzzie Braun, not only raised them on a blend of hardcore country and progressive folk rock but recruited

each of them into his band. Instrument lessons started shortly after toilet training, and touring commenced around the time the training wheels came off the bikes. The family band played rodeo, festival, and small venue gigs all over the American West and even landed appearances on *The Tonight Show*.

When Willy and Cody got old and brash enough to split from the nest and migrate down to Texas, it was only a matter of time before Micky and Gary set out on their own, too. Shortly after the turn of the millennium they were Austinites themselves, and by 2003 they were releasing *Which Way From Here*, the first in a string of increasingly tuneful and self-assured albums. Comparisons to Reckless were inevitable, given that the leaders of both bands shared not only the same genes but also the same early influences — not just their dad Muzzie and his old running buddy, Pinto Bennett, but also Texas stalwarts like Escovedo, Joe Ely, and Steve Earle, along with such ’60s innovators as the Byrds and the Beatles. All of that is still in the mix, consciously or otherwise, but five studio albums and countless gigs down the line, Micky and Gary have gotten to the point where first and foremost, they just sound like Micky & the Motorcars.

“I’m glad to say we’re at the point in our career where everything’s personal, in a good kind of way,” says Micky. “The writing is personal, sure, but so’s the tour itself. It’s another round of seeing all these people and places that have helped us out before. It’s hoping people come across us on Pandora and stuff like that; it might not pay much but it also doesn’t cost us anything and it puts asses in seats at the shows. We’re fortunate ... fans help, radio helps, the Internet helps. Radio stations with an ‘Americana Hour’ or ‘Texas Hour’ or whatever help a lot.”

Great records help, too. And the Motorcars just made one.



“The music studios had their money machines and didn’t see the upcoming change in music production ... The world of music was to change forever and Joe was a pioneer ... He was an early adopter and leading generations to follow.” — Steve Wozniak

New from Joe Ely’s
Rack ’Em Records

Pearls From the Vault — Vol. 5

B4 84

Featuring Joe’s original “garage” recordings of “What’s Shakin’ Tonight” and “Cool Rockin’ Loretta”

Liner notes by Steve “Woz” Wozniak

CD available now at
www.LoneStarMusic.com
and
www.Ely.com

“File this between ‘ahead of it’s time’ and ‘better late than never’ ...” — Richard Skanse, *LoneStarMusic*

Heartworn Highways

By Drew Kennedy

Live forever Remembering Allan Goodman

We struggle.

We live and breathe and learn and fight and write and sing and we struggle for our lives to be heard above the noise.

We push forward even though we know the odds of ever “making it” — as they say ... whoever they are — are slim.

Here’s what you don’t realize about the term “making it”: whoever came up with it was not one of us. Not one familiar with this particular struggle. Not one of the fighters of noise.

None of us would have come up with a phrase like that. We have too much respect for everything that goes into what we do to create some imaginary line, across which one group of artists is clearly more accomplished — this level of accomplishment demarcated exclusively by monetary compensation — than those on the other side.

We’ve all *made it* as soon as we record our first offering of music for the world to hear. It’s as simple as that.

Here’s the best part about playing music for a living — about writing songs and making records and touring for your living: In doing so, you become *immortal*.

That’s right.

If you have courage enough to put yourself out there ... waaaaay out there on an emotional limb, all by yourself, all alone, with nothing to protect you ... If you have courage enough to share the entirety of your soul in the songs you write and the music you play for complete strangers ... then regardless of fame, fortune, tour busses, headlined festivals, branded liquors, signature guitars, Grammys, or groupies — you, my friend, get to live forever.

Seriously.

Live. For. Ever.

You’ve made it.

[Editor’s Note: California-born guitarist and songwriter Allan Goodman, who became a fixture on the Texas music scene upon moving to New Braunfels in 2008, died of cancer on May 20. His friend and fellow troubadour Drew Kennedy posted this moving tribute online the following day, and later gave us his blessing to publish it in our pages.]

“Do you not know that a man is not dead while his name is still spoken?”
— Terry Pratchett



FOR THE GOOD TIMES: (from left) Allan Goodman, Drew Kennedy and Javi Garcia onstage at Tavern in the Gruene in New Braunfels, Texas. (Photo by Steve Circeo)

Allan Goodman was my friend. He was a few years older than me. He was a good hugger. He sang like Neil Diamond. He liked this video game called *Halo* that I never understood. He enjoyed a Dogfish Head 90 Minute IPA. He was a baseball fan — an Angels fan. He was a son, a brother, and a husband. He was funny. He played drums like it was akin to breathing. He played the guitar like Mozart, if Mozart would’ve been able to get ahold of a Stratocaster. He played through this little solid state amp that sounded better than a solid state amp should sound. He played bass if you needed a bass player, and he was incredible at that, too.

Allan and I toured together, along with Matthew Briggs and Austin Gilliam. It was pretty much the only time in my career where I had a dedicated band. Everyone played incredibly well together. Matthew was on drums, Austin on bass, Allan on lead guitar. It was more fun than you can imagine.

Then, I went back to the solo thing.

The following year I had this idea on how to make what would become my *Fresh Water in the Salton Sea* record. Basically, the idea was that it was possible to make a really great album with a couple of close friends who played a few different instruments apiece, and together we could cover almost everything that was needed for the record. So, I called Allan. He was all for it. Then I called my friend Stephanie Macias. She was all for it.

So we went into the studio and came out with the *Salton Sea* record. It was the single biggest jump in overall quality, from songs to production, that I’ve ever made as an artist, and the three of us did it together.

If you really listen closely to the 10th song on the album, “The Life and Times of a Sad Song,” you’ll hear a lot of Allan. He played all of the acoustic guitar on that song, mostly because he and Stephanie came up with this idea for a bridge in the song and I wasn’t a good enough guitar player to pull it off. So he tackled the whole thing. He sat on a creaky chair to play the part, and you can hear the chair on the record if you know what you’re listening for. That’s Allan. That’s his brilliant guitar playing, and his brilliant body shifting ever-so-slightly on a chair that was probably too noisy for a recording studio. Now that Allan is gone, I find those tiny creaks to be one of my favorite sounds on that whole album.

Allan fought cancer for a long time. He was amazingly calm about it. I don’t know how he was able to be so calm, but his approach made the rest of us feel better about what he was dealing with. It made us feel like it was no big deal, and that it’d be gone before we knew it.

Actually, I’m not sure that I can speak for everyone else on that point. I don’t know if his demeanor made anyone else feel like that — but that’s how it made me feel.

He fought it for a long time, and then a few days ago word started to spread that things had changed. It sounded bad, but there was a large part of me that was convinced that Allan would handle it, like he’s always handled it.

My friend Bryan flew up to Nashville, where Allan and his wife Ashley had been living, to see him. The report I got from Bryan was not good. That was yesterday.

Today, Allan is gone.

Except he’s not.

Allan *made it* — remember?

He put his heart and soul into songs, and he shared those songs with the world. He fought against the noise of the universe and rose above it with his music. He left a piece of himself to float forever through our ears and into our minds. To listen to Allan’s music is to keep Allan alive.

So listen.

Listen, and hug someone, and take risks, and leave your mark.

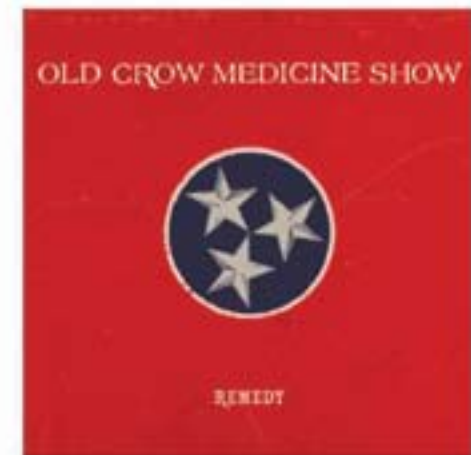
Do something that will last forever and *you* will last forever. Maybe not you as in exactly who you are right now ... but the essence of you — the idea of you — the spirit of you. Those are the things that make you who you are, after all. It’s not your body or your hair or your bones or your blood. It’s your thoughts and ideas and feelings and art. Do something that will last forever and *you* will last forever.

Allan Goodman knew that. The *man* might not be with us any more ... but Allan Goodman *the person* will always be around. All you have to do is listen.

OLD CROW MEDICINE SHOW

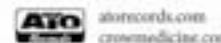


The New Album



REMEDY
Available Now
Includes “Sweet Amarillo”

Produced by Ted Hutt



True Heroes of Texas Music

By Michael Corcoran

Slipping around with **Floyd Tillman**, country music’s original gypsy songster

After Floyd Tillman died in 2003 at age 88, I called Willie Nelson to get a few quotes for the obit. Willie’s people turned down most of those sorts of interview requests, but the living legend wanted to talk about the musician whose singing, playing and songwriting had an everlasting effect on him. Tillman was the last of the great 1930s honky-tonk pioneers, an early great electric guitarist whose songwriting credits include the tune that created the country cheating song subgenre.

“I grew up under the influence of Floyd Tillman,” Nelson said. “He was a great, great writer. But he was also a great, great friend. Floyd always had a big smile, and you knew it was real.”

Tillman was also the original country gypsy songster, but he never grew his hair long and always wore a Western-cut suit onstage until later in life. “You could tell, right away, that his music wasn’t the typical country music of the time,” Nelson said. “He had some of those Django (Reinhardt) rhythms in his guitar playing, and he was singing about subjects that just weren’t being sung about at the time.” Tillman’s laconic vocal phrasing also had a profound effect on Willie Hugh, who came up in the same Texas joints Tillman did, a decade later.

But it goes much deeper. What I didn’t know back in 2003 was that Willie Nelson’s most famous song started off as a Tillman recording. Patsy Cline’s 1961 recording of Nelson’s “Crazy” copies the first part of Tillman’s “Gotta Get My Baby Back,” with “crazy” replacing Tillman’s “baby.” The drippy jazz piano was nicked from Ray Price’s 1958 cover of “Gotta Get My Baby Back.” Play it on YouTube and you’ll find yourself cutting Led Zeppelin some slack. They

all stole ... even Willie.

“Willie has said he grew up under the influence of Floyd Tillman ... Tillman was a member of the Willie Nelson family from way back,” said Joe Nick Patoski, who wrote the essential Willie Nelson biography, *An Epic Life*. “If there was any bad blood over the similarities of those songs, they certainly didn’t show it.”

The Texas music messiah was always quick to acknowledge Tillman’s impact on his formative years, but the mentor has become little more than a footnote in country music history. He wrote Bing Crosby’s 1939 smash “It Makes No Difference Now,” recorded his first No. 1 single in 1944 with “They Took the Stars Out of Heaven,” and traveled and recorded with a self-contained combo, influencing a Lubbock country-singer-turned-rocker named Buddy Holly.

But Tillman’s name is mainly recognized for one song, 1949’s “Slipping Around,” which may not have been the first “cheating song,” but it was the first to top the charts. Tillman was in a diner in West Texas when he overheard a woman sweet-talking on the phone with a man he assumed was her husband. When she asked the man to call her at home, but to hang up if her husband answered, Tillman had a song idea. Adultery was a taboo subject at the time, and since “Slipping Around” didn’t moralize that cheating was wrong, the song was

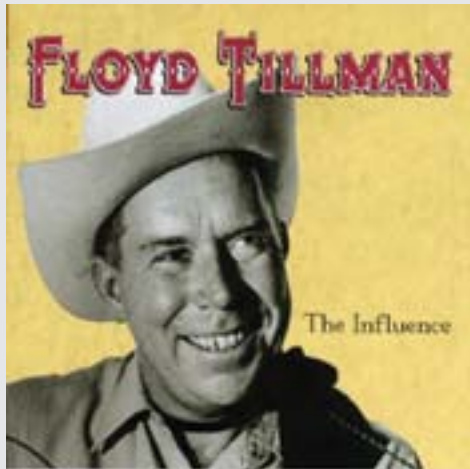
traveling on untested territory. But Margaret Whiting and Jimmy Wakely had a huge hit with “Slipping Around” in early 1949, topping the charts for 17 straight weeks. Months later, Tillman’s version peaked at No. 5. Tillman went on to write his own “answer song,” “I’ll Never Slip Around Again,” which warned of the consequences of stepping out on a spouse.

Tillman’s final album couldn’t have been more perfectly named: *The Influence*. Such admirers as Dolly Parton, Merle Haggard, George Jones, and Willie all sang duets with Tillman on the record, which was released posthumously.

Given all this high-profile adulation, you have to wonder why Tillman still isn’t as well known as Bob Wills or Ernest Tubb. But according to Brady, Texas DJ Tracy Pitcox, who produced *The Influence*, fame just wasn’t Tillman’s thing. “Floyd didn’t get much out of accolades,” Pitcox said in 2003. “To him the biggest thrill was having the respect of his peers.”

A longtime resident of Marble Falls, Texas, Tillman was born in Ryan, Okla., in 1914, but moved to Post, near Lubbock, before he was a year old. He started playing guitar and mandolin as a pre-teen, often backing fiddle players at ranch dances. In 1933 at age 19, he joined Adolph Hofner’s house band at Gus’ Palm Garden in San Antonio. Two years later he was recruited into the Houston-based Blue Ridge

With his simple, direct lyrics about everyday life, Tillman helped transform country music from songs about train wrecks and gunfights into the white man’s blues.



HONKY-TONK HERO: (from top) Floyd Tillman onstage circa 1978 (Photo by Les Leverett); Tillman’s last album, *The Influence*, released posthumously by Heart of Texas Records in 2004; Tillman with friend and fellow country great Hank Thompson in 2001. (Photo by Tracy Pitcox.)

Playboys by fiddler Leon “Pappy” Selph. That great band, whose membership included Cliff Bruner, Moon Mullican, Ted Daffan, and Bob Dunn, was where Tillman started singing his own songs.

After Selph passed on putting out a recording of Tillman’s “It Makes No Difference Now,” the guitarist-singer left to form with his own band and signed to Decca. He joined the Army during World War II, and although he stayed in Texas during the war, he identified with the loneliness and separation of soldiers being shipped overseas and penned such songs as “G.I. Blues” and “Each Night at Nine,” which became top 5 country hits in 1944. With his simple, direct lyrics about everyday life, Tillman helped transform country music from songs about train wrecks and gunfights into the white man’s blues.

As a singer and bandleader, he was also inspiring a young breed of postwar West Texans who wanted to make music their way. “You can’t underestimate the influence Floyd Tillman had on rock ‘n’ rollers like Buddy Holly, Roy Orbison, and Buddy Knox,” said local musician Monte Warden. “The honky-tonk guys like Tillman and Hank Thompson showed that you didn’t have to look to New York or Nashville for your songs. You could just play your own.”

Among Tillman’s other notable songs were “Driving Nails In My Coffin” (1946), “I Love You So Much It Hurts” (1946), and his last hit, 1960’s “It Just Tears Me Up.” His songs have been recorded by everyone from Gene Autry and Tex Ritter to the Supremes and Ray Charles.

He played a few shows in his 80s with fiddler Johnny Gimble, who met Tillman in 1948, when Gimble was with Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys. “It was always fun to back Floyd,” recalled Gimble in 2003. “Even in the last few years, Floyd would have a ball. He’d forget something, but he’d just laugh and the audience would get a big kick out of it.”

Like the great Gimble, who turned 88 in May, Tillman was an unassuming legend in his last few years. You’d see him backstage at a Willie Picnic or at some awards ceremony, and you’d have to remind yourself that this elderly gentleman with the remnants of a Howdy Doody face was a key figure in the creation and evolution of country music. And if he had something to say about how Nashville wasn’t putting out real country music anymore (this is not a new issue), you gave it a little more weight. Floyd Tillman wasn’t a traditionalist, he was the tradition.

GRUENE
Hall
TEXAS' OLDEST DANCE HALL



LIVE MUSIC DAILY
★
AUGUST 8 - JOE KING CARRASCO



AUGUST 14
CHRIS ISAAK

AUGUST 16 - MARSHALL TUCKER BAND



AUGUST 22 & 23
HAYES CARLL

AUGUST 30 & 31 - CHARLIE ROBISON
SEPTEMBER 12 - LOS LONELY BOYS



OCTOBER 25
ZIGGY MARLEY

★
GRUENEHALL.COM

LONESTARMUSIC.COM

Billy Joe Shaver

“Long in the tooth” but strong as ever, the unstoppable and seemingly indestructible old chunk of coal talks love, loss, and faith. | By Holly Gleason

Legend has always cloaked Billy Joe Shaver: As an 8-year-old living with his grandmother, singing on the counter and extending his grandma’s old age pension with his precocious gifts; as a roughneck songwriter who told Waylon Jennings if he didn’t listen to his demo tape, he’d kick his ass — and ended up being the lion’s share writer on Jennings’ landmark 1973 album *Honky Tonk Heroes*, considered by many to be the birth of the Outlaw movement; as a man who lost his guitar-partner son, Eddy, his wife, and his mother within a matter of months — and in the abyss of grief found the grace to carry on. And yes, as a man who shot another man outside a bar, fled to Willie Nelson’s place to negotiate his surrender — and was eventually acquitted of the deed, claiming self-defense.

All those stories are true. Great as they are, though, they miss the root of what makes Shaver iconic. More than the humility to walk with a real man’s confidence, the ability to surrender all to the Lord and, ahem, shoot out the lights, Shaver’s songs — like his life — capture the fragility that comes with strength, the faltering realm of conviction, and the hard, ragged edge of love as well as its thrilling rush and incandescence. Distilling life to small things of profound proportions, his songs have perhaps most famously been recorded by Bobby Bare, Johnny Cash, Tom T. Hall, Jennings, and Nelson (who sings two brand new Shaver songs on his latest album, *Band of Brothers*). But Shaver has also supplied signature songs for John Anderson (“I’m Just an Old Chunk of Coal”); Patty Loveless (“When Fallen Angels Fly”); Asleep at the Wheel (“Way Down Texas Way”); and a pair of raucous fringe roots outfits, Commander Cody & His Lost Planet Airmen and BR-549 (“I Been to

Georgia on a Fast Train”). And the list goes on and on: Elvis Presley and Alison Krauss (“You Asked Me To”); the Allman Brothers (“Sweet Mama”); Jerry Lee Lewis and bluegrass icons the Seldom Scene (“Ride Me Down Easy”); Kris Kristofferson (“Good Christian Soldier”); and Joe Ely (“Live Forever”). And of course Shaver has recorded all of these songs and many more self-penned gems on his own albums, too, beginning with 1973’s Kristofferson-produced *Old Fiver & Dimers Like Me*.

But Shaver, who lost three fingers in a saw mill accident and still shakes hands firmer than most men, knows it isn’t about what’s already happened. With shoulders wide enough to carry the world, he looks forward and takes whatever steps are in front of him. Those steps recently led him from his home in Waco back to Music City, U.S.A. to record his first new studio album since 2007’s Grammy-nominated, gospel-leaning *Everybody’s Brother* — and his first album of all new songs in nearly a decade. Working collaboratively with Ray Kennedy (Steve Earle, Ray Davies, John Hiatt, Todd Snider) and longtime friend, guitarist and now co-writer Gary Nicholson (Delbert McClinton, Chris Knight, Bonnie Raitt), Shaver created *Long In the Tooth*, a loose, roots-grounded take on country, blues, and roughneck rock.

Shaver may be turning 75 this August, but his latest batch of songs proves the Outlaw’s outlaw is still every bit as committed, wild,

“I don’t listen to the radio much. But what little I’ve heard seems like kids who don’t like to think too much, and just wanna be having fun. I’m not too much like that. I like to have fun, you know, but I’m coming from a whole different place. I want my songs to last forever.”

and willing as ever. He opens the album on a bawdy note with “Hard To Be an Outlaw,” in which a 21-year-old girl spends the night playing with his “gun” and leaves at daybreak, whimpering and unable to take any more. After Willie joins him later in the song to question the legitimacy of some modern-day, so-called “country” stars, Shaver moves onto the stomping title track, all saber-tooth tiger growl and warning. But he keeps his faith, too, tackling the divine on “I’m In Love,” a song of passion and commitment to his savior.

The divine and mortal have always marked Shaver’s records. On *Long In the Tooth*, those themes define and deliver him. With palpable joy in his voice, after a decade of personal struggle, the Corsicana-born Texan is back and ready to sop it all up like a biscuit in gravy. At a not-so-rock-’n’-roll 10 a.m., Shaver is on the phone from his home, getting ready to pack for a few-week run of shows and ready to talk about where he is in his life, his music, and his reasons for believing. Sounding positively jubilant, the hardcore songwriter is fired up about being back in a creative zone. For one who has bottomed out, hit the wall, and somehow always come back, his new music seems to signal a different kind of rebirth. If he’d been up late the night before, he was certainly ready to meet the day.

Did you have extra strong coffee this morning?

[Laughs] Naw — I get up earlier than this! Even when we’re playing ... and we start Saturday night. Doing Houston, over to Mississippi, then Nashville. We play for three nights, then we travel ... we’re going up north, to New York. Eddy and I played up there so much, we have a great following. They really come out, all kinds of people. Heck, the people and their kids, even their grandkids. That’s how long we’ve been doing it.

It’s hard to draw people out for a lot of acts these days. What’s your secret?

Well, we toured pretty hard. People know what they’re gonna get, and I know we’re gonna get people showing up. Especially on Sundays. We got a lot of Christians who come out. I pretty much stay in the same place. People know ... and it’s simplicity. I got that cornered. You don’t have to put no grease on it. The music’s easy to understand. Nothing tricky. Just plug in, listen.

Is that what defines *Long In The Tooth*? How did it come about?

You know, it was a low-budget record. We had to do it when (co-producers) Gary and Ray could get the time. Ray’s always busy, so whenever he got time, I’d drive up to Nashville to get a little something done. I love to drive anyway, so I’d get in the truck. Sometimes it’d be in a hurry, but that’s how serious we all were about it. And it felt like a lot of fun. Leon (Russell) and Tony Joe (White), all the players were such good friends. We love and respect each other so much, just getting together was reason to celebrate.

Gary played guitar with me back when Eddy was alive. We had twin guitars, kinda like the Allman Brothers. Gary goes way, way back. He was one of the Can’t Hardly Play Boys, back when I was Slim Chance. [Laughs] Gary came down to Waco to get me stirred up a little bit. It’d been seven years since I’d made a record, and he thought it was time. We’d be setting and talking, start writing a song — and I’d never co-written with anyone before. But Gary’s a good friend so it didn’t feel weird.

How was it working with your new label?

Lightning Rod Records! Logan Rogers gave us everything he had. That’s the thing about smaller labels: everybody’s really hands on all the way. Everybody’s part of what they’re doing, and you get more attention that way. Plus, they let you make the record you want to make. That’s the deal.

That’s not always the case! The first track on the album, “Hard to Be an Outlaw,” sure hits Nashville on the chin.

[Laughs] I ran the title by Willie, and he said, “Write that!” So I did, and I ran it by him. He said, “That’s great ...” If you can get one by Willie, that’s pretty good.

Q&A

Billy Joe Shaver

It’s a pretty straight-up take on outlaws versus today’s country.

I’m an old country throwback. Country, to me, is just being honest about it: simple and honest, and I’ve got that simplicity thing cornered. I don’t have much schooling; what I’ve learned I’ve picked up by osmosis. So I write about myself, because I don’t want to be judging anybody else. But I’m enough like people, a song about me might apply to them, too. So that’s what I do.

I don’t listen to the radio much. But what

little I’ve heard seems like kids who don’t like to think too much, and just wanna be having fun. I’m not too much like that. I like to have fun, you know, but I’m coming from a whole different place. I want my songs to last forever. You gotta have humor in life, too, don’t get me wrong; otherwise life would be a pretty dull place. But I call it ‘whistling by the graveyard.’ It’s a whole different kind of fun.

Like the title track, “Long In the Tooth”? Where did that one come from?

My friend Paul Gleason, who was a movie star — he was in *The Breakfast Club* as the principal and a bunch more — he was good people, and before his death, we used to hang out. We were writing on this one before he passed, and I went on and finished it. He was a good songwriter; had this book with poems in it, and that’s where I saw “Long In the Tooth.” It even sounded like me!

At the other end of the spectrum, there are the love songs. For a rugged guy, you’re pretty tender. Look at “I’ll Love You as Much as I Can.”

Yeah, there’s not a whole lot more you can do. I’d already *had* a wonderful love, and I knew that. So I told her [Shaver’s latest girl]

this from the git go. But we got married three times and divorced three times, and now she’s back over at the house, so it seems like that divorce thing isn’t working out.

Well, that makes it sound like you’ve actually given up on “real” love. Have you?

I’m just about done with the romantic part. But who knows? You don’t jump on love, it jumps on you. You can’t go find it, it’ll find you. That’s how it did me before, and I have a feeling that’s how it’ll happen again.

Well, if you’re done with romance, what’s left?

Right now? I’m married to Jesus Christ. I wear a ring. Literally. So, I try my best to walk the line and do like Jesus. I know it sounds funny, but you get stronger and stronger every day if you’re trying to live like Jesus Christ.

Faith has always been important to you.

I wouldn’t make it without it. It’s almost an obligation, but also a labor of love. I’m a sinner; I know I’ll fall short. I always do. But if you have forgiveness for a sin — you can ask seven times 70, and I’ve pushed it! — you gotta have some salt, too. That’s about salt of the earth. If you don’t have a little of that,

God doesn’t want you. He doesn’t make sour pussies. He didn’t create us for that. Because when God forgives you, then he forgets. It’s over. He wipes the slate clean! Some of us hold onto things, though, and that’s the pain of it.

So on the new record, is “I’m In Love” actually a song about your faith?

It *sounds* like a love song, but it’s a spiritual. It’s about being born again! [*Laughs*] I feel like somebody will record it as a love song, but it’s not that. It’s about the moment when the umbilical chord is finally severed.

When were you born again?

It’s so far back — years and years. It was ’80-something. So long ago, I almost don’t remember. I don’t wanna preach to nobody, but it’s true. It’s the truth, the way and the light, and singing songs like this, it lets people know where I’m going. Laying it all out there for them so they can know, too. When I wrote “Old Chunk of Coal,” that’s when it started. When I wrote this one, it was completed. And when I’m playing, I always do a spiritual song about the Lord. Because I wrote it, people can *hear* it; they know I mean it.

Your song “Live Forever” is like that, and one of your most covered later songs.

Yeah, and I’ve sung it too much lately. Poodie Locke, a good friend of mine from Waco who worked for Willie, I sang it as his funeral, and a few more. I decided I was gonna stop, just stop doing it. But I know (death) is as perennial as the grass. It’s gonna happen; whether you want it to or not, it is.

You first recorded the song on *Tramp On Your Street*, with Eddy. You must think of him every time you sing it. [*Released in 1993 on the Los Angeles-based rock/alternative label Zoo Entertainment, Tramp was the first of a handful of albums Billy Joe and his son recorded under the band name Shaver, giving equal billing to Billy Joe’s singing and songwriting and Eddy’s blistering guitar work.*]

Me and Eddy wrote “Live Forever” back in 1989. And today’s his birthday. He’s not with us anymore, but that is the beginning of forever: when they pass.

Some people think that when life leaves the body, the soul stays with the people they love.

[*Laughs*] I can’t get rid of him! He stays with me all the time. We were more like brothers than father and son, the way we knew each other and understood each other. I never had to guess where he was going

when he was playing: I just knew.

We were everywhere together, and now that he’s gone ... I’m doing a few things I used to get on to him about. When he’d take his pajamas off, he’d just stomp ’em down into the floor, kinda mash ’em down. Now I’m doing it. [*Laughs*]

But the people we love, I truly believe we absorb them when they pass.

The good things and the lightness of them will melt into you ... Absolutely.

Losing loved ones is something we all have to come to terms with. But the fact that Eddy, your wife and his mother, and your own mother all died so soon one after the other must have been ...

I got left by everybody! The dog died even. I can’t imagine why I’m the one left.

“I’m an old country throwback. Country, to me, is just being honest about it: simple and honest, and I’ve got that simplicity thing cornered. I don’t have much schooling; what I’ve learned I’ve picked up by osmosis.”

Cause I’m so hardheaded? I’m pretty strong. I don’t know. But I’m here.

Have you always thought of yourself as hardheaded?

I think (people in the business) thought I was a joke. Or maybe I *was* a joke ... I don’t know. I was my own worst enemy; I stepped on everybody’s toes. So maybe that’s part of it. *Tramp On Your Street* was kind of a stepchild ’cause it was so different ... But it’s catching on now, finally.

You may be hardheaded, but not hard-hearted. Did it get to you much back before things started to catch on for you?

When you’re really good, it bothers you — you get your heart broke! But it seems like I’m getting everything I didn’t get back then. I feel good about everything now. I’ve actually settled in a spot I really, really like. My writing’s always been good, and I know that. And I know some of the songs on this album are going to be recorded, some of the others will be discovered. But I also enjoy getting up there and singing them myself. I sometimes listen to the old records and I think I sing a little better than I used to. But (listening to them) makes it a little easier to remember, to

know where I was going when I wrote those songs. In some ways, it’s like a time capsule. You put it on, and the record takes you back.

You’ve led a life.

Well, you live. You do that, that’s what you do.

And you’ve made some pretty amazing friends along the way. A lot of them are on this record, too. Willie recorded his own version of “Hard to Be an Outlaw” on his new album, but he’s also singing it with you on yours.

When we were making this record, everybody was coming around. We love and respect each other so much, and we had so much fun together! I’m thinking about moving back there to Nashville ’cause so many of my friends are there. All the folks

on my record: Shawn (Camp), Jedd (Hughes), Gary, Ray ... And it seems like most of my friends here in Texas are goin’ on.

But *you’re* still here. And you still sound pretty strong.

Ahhh, hon, I’m 75, you know. I still have a young man’s brain and lots of young man’s ideas, but I don’t always know if the old locomotive can keep up. I’m gonna keep goin’, though. I’m gonna keep goin’.





“What’s so bad about happy?”

Oklahoma tunesmith **JOHN FULLBRIGHT** seeks answers to that burning question and others while crafting the songs of his life

By Lynne Margolis

Photos by John Carrico



Photos by John Carrico

John Fullbright likes to joke that he'd have trouble naming a cat, much less an album. But the truth behind the title of his new release, *Songs*, has nothing to do with mere indecision, or even a case of laziness.

That choice, it turns out, is intended to reflect the album's true essence — and Fullbright's greatest desire in life, which really is to write songs. Songs that speak for themselves — that come from the soul and penetrate the heart, and don't need ruffles and feathers or any other fancy adornments to distract from their mission. Songs that inspire fellow tunesmiths such as Butch Hancock to say, while sharing the stage during a beyond-sold-out song pull at Austin's renowned Cactus Cafe: "Every once in a while, you hear a song you wish you'd written. Tonight, I've heard about a dozen."

In fact, the songs on *Songs*, the follow-up to Fullbright's Grammy-nominated 2012 debut, *From the Ground Up*, are so strong, their arrangements wound up having to be stripped nearly naked to allow more air for their nuances to breathe, like wine. The spare, uncluttered approach doesn't just enhance a word here, a note there. It gives these compositions an energy, a power that carries both the blast of gale-force winds and the electricity of a feather-light caress — either of which can totally blow a listener away.

In the two years since *From the Ground Up*, Fullbright, now 26, has elevated his already substantial songwriting and performing prowess to new heights; as his confidence has grown, so has his comfort level — as both a writer willing to reveal his psyche and a player able to relax and have fun, even groove a little, onstage. (Not to mention tell jokes both genuinely funny and utterly groan-worthy.)

But the buzz that's been building since overnights at Okemah, Okla.'s Woody Guthrie Folk Festival first started talking about this new campfire kid a half-dozen years ago has turned into such loud trumpeting, including stellar reviews from just about every media outlet that matters, because Fullbright is not just another hot young talent. He's the rare entity who makes

you just as excited to consider what he might do 10, 20 or 40 years from now, who might become as revered as his own heroes — from Townes Van Zandt to Harry Nilsson — or even bigger names, if he chooses, though stardom is not his goal.

He doesn't envision himself as a stadium-stage puppet viewable via giant screens, a la fellow piano men Billy Joel or Elton John; he's more of a Randy Newman guy. And unlike those players, he's also an adept guitarist. But regardless of the venue or instrument, Fullbright's performances are something to behold. He simply knows how to command attention, whether he's pounding out Chuck Berry's "Downbound Train" on piano, as he did for the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame & Museum's American Music Masters tribute; dropping fellow Okie Leon Russell's influences into Porter Grainger's bluesy "Ain't Nobody's Business" — a show-stopper complete with hound-dog-howlin', Jerry Lee Lewis-meets-Paul McCartney "woohs"; or bringing an audience to pin-drop silence with just a few bars of his love song, "She Knows."

"He's the finest young songwriter I've ever encountered, period. And he is one of the best musicians I've ever known," says Greg Johnson, owner of the Blue Door, the Oklahoma City listening room where Fullbright got his start; he also serves as Fullbright's manager, though he swears, "I'll stand on anybody's coffee table and scream that, 'cause it's true. It has nothing to do with me managing him."

A skilled instrumentalist who started playing piano at 5, followed by guitar in his early teens, Fullbright's also got the kind of vocal ability that lets him slide from a low whisper to a cloud-grabbing wail with seeming effortlessness. There's an undertow to his voice — not really a whiskey-burn or cigarette scratch, nothing that obvious, but *something* — that adds depth we don't expect to hear from a guy his age.

Reflected in the shiny lacquer of a concert grand in an elegant theater, his face is just now starting to show enough contouring to justify removing the "baby" prefix from descriptions. He seems to lose a few years, however, when he clips a harmonica rack around his neck or stands at a microphone with his guitar. That

youthfulness is heightened by the cleft in his chin and the way he wears his medium brown hair — parted far to one side in a sort of '60s look that has nothing to do with trying to be retro cool; it's more like the kid actor in a *Lost in Space*-era television show.

Fullbright, it must be noted, could absolutely care less about being hip (which, paradoxically, would make him more so, if it mattered). Raised on an 80-acre farm in Bearden, Okla., a 7.6-square-mile town of fewer than 150 residents, he just might have been a bit lost in time. He lives in a house originally owned by his grandfather — the same house in which he spent his first nine years. His parents likely conceived him there; they now live "next door," a quarter-mile down the road, in a house his grandfather built. That's where he spent the rest of his growing-up years. His older brother Michael (John's the youngest of three brothers spaced over nine years) recently moved back to Oklahoma with his family, and his sister-in-law just opened a much-needed coffee shop in Okemah, the nearest actual town.

Fullbright claims he wouldn't have his sense of humor — which leans toward sly, dry and subtle, though when close friends and alcohol are involved, he reveals a repertoire of off-color jokes — if it weren't for Michael. Judging from his tendency toward self-deprecation and gift for sometimes-mocking, just-clever-enough wordplay, one suspects that's highly unlikely. His girlfriend, Angelica Baca, swears he's actually the life of the party, and guitarist Terry "Buffalo" Ware, who performs on both of Fullbright's studio albums and many of his road gigs, notes his stage patter has gotten downright funny. Unlike his friend Kevin Russell, Fullbright skips ham, but he sure goes for wry.

WRITING "SONGS"

To record the 12 tracks on *Songs*, Fullbright returned to his friend and co-producer Wes Sharon's 115 Recording in Norman, Okla., where he successfully created *From the Ground Up* after scratching an earlier attempt.

Songs gets a bump or two as well, according to Johnson. After hearing the first batch of songs, he recalls, "I said, 'Well,

John, compared to anyone else out there, this is really great. Compared to you, it's not.' Ooh, he was not happy. He was mad as hell."

Johnson's musical sensibilities are well honed; he spent several years as an Austin-based music journalist before returning to his home state, where he opened the Blue Door 22 years ago. That's where he first heard Fullbright, then a cheeky teenager. Actually, their first meeting went so badly, it's surprising they bonded as strongly as they have. As Johnson recalls, Fullbright showed up during a memorial for Red Dirt Rambler Bob Childers, "and he was talkin' shit."

Fullbright, who overheard this account, admits, "I had more of a punk mentality then, but basically, you were either in on the joke or you weren't." Laughing, he adds, "Poor Greg. He's an easy target — easy to rile up. We had some fun at his expense and he gave me his famous line about 'you haven't paid your dues yet.'"

Eventually, Johnson got a chance to hear what Fullbright could do. "I could tell by the melodic structures of his songs that it was in Jimmy-Webb-melody world," he says. "It was that strong. He also had this Townes Van Zandt thing goin'. I told somebody, 'I swear to God, this is like Jimmy Webb and Townes Van Zandt in the same fucking body.'"

He called and told him, "I've never said this to an artist before, but I want to work with you. I think I could help you out."

Johnson relates this story while sitting backstage at Austin's State Theatre, where Fullbright performed an album release show in May. Baca, a dark-haired beauty from New Mexico, sits nearby. She and Fullbright have been dating about a year, but have been friends for 10. (Fullbright's brother Michael, Baca's close friend and former roommate — he shared a house with her and her then-boyfriend near the Marine Corps base in Twentynine Palms, Calif. — actually dated her sister at one time.) As Fullbright's voice soars from the stage during soundcheck, she confirms that he was indeed angry at Johnson's appraisal of his new recordings, but that he also gruffly admitted, "'Greg's not wrong about this kind of stuff.'"

Johnson adds, "That wasn't easy for me to do. I mean, I'm known to be blunt and speak my mind completely sometimes, to my detriment. But with somebody like John, I just

instinctively know when something's really working, when something's really clickin'.

"I knew that John would ... John deliberates a lot," Johnson continues. "He takes a long time to come to a decision. And I always get all frustrated and go, 'fuck it. Whatever happens, happens.' ... And then he called and said, 'I had an epiphany.' I said, 'Imagine that!'" Johnson laughs heartily. "He said, 'We're gonna strip this back; we're gonna go in and redo it.'"

"So he comes back and he brings me this little record. And I said, 'This is fantastic. This is *it*. It's simple. It's you.'"

"It's really the story of a young man growing up," Johnson says. "Not just finding new love, not just [finding his path]. From 20 to 26, I've seen this kid grow as a man. And I've always told him, 'John, I'm more concerned about your personal life and your happiness than I am about your music career. If that ever starts gettin' squirrely, then it's time to think of something else.'"

"Every once in a while, you hear a song you wish you'd written. Tonight, I've heard about a dozen." — Butch Hancock, at a song-swap with John Fullbright

MORE TRUTHS

After running out of time for an interview at the State Theatre, Fullbright and I agree to catch up by phone. By the time we do, it's five weeks later, the album has come out, and he's just returned home for a few days amid nearly non-stop touring, including the first of three European trips this summer. For the first time, he and his players (a somewhat rotating list including Ware and bassist David Leach) shared a camper, staying in state parks. Baca accompanied them, learning the ropes of tour support (from merch sales and driving to emotional rescue). After almost nightly performances and a full-court press and radio push, they were thrilled to be back at the homestead — a subject Fullbright addresses on the *Songs* tune, "Going Home."

Asked if he felt any pressure to outdo the first album, he answers, "Yeah, but what I figured out was that pressure only exists within the confines of my own mind. It's not like I have a team of people who survive because of the John Fullbright operation or campaign. It really is just my own brain, my own ego, where the pressure exists. Once I came to terms with that — in the studio, as we were recording — I could make that pressure go away, because it's not real. And no one else really cares. I had to just make the best album I could make."

Before he could do that, however, he had to, he says, "find goals." He decided his main one was "to make a record that represented who I am right now, and not a persona that some people expect or want you to be."

"I'm a better vocalist and performer and musician than I was two years ago," he continues, "and I didn't want to make a record that was so swamped with production that you couldn't hear that. That was the main pressure: putting an album out there that was so stripped down and so raw in so

many ways. Not just instrumentation; I mean the subject matter. It's so raw and it's so personal and so intimate that I didn't want a bunch of people goin' 'This doesn't sound like the last record; we wanted another *From the Ground Up*.'"

He was all ready with his defense: "'Look a little deeper, and you'll find everything that you need in this record. It's multi-layered. It's well thought out.'" A negative reaction would have stung, but he would have gotten over it and moved on to the next record. Luckily, that defense proved unnecessary.

As for the revamping, which pushed *Songs'* release back two weeks, Fullbright clarifies: "I don't want to say that we came in and recorded a whole record and just said this sucks and went back in, because that's not what happened. You have to think about



how these records — *From the Ground Up* and *Songs* — are made. [Wes Sharon and I] don’t have a clear plan going in. I got a handful of randomly written songs that reflect what I’ve been thinking or experiences that I’ve had. And we throw ‘em all on the table and we look at ‘em and go, ‘Is there any common theme here? Is there any common thread?’ And we start trying to build these songs up.

“A couple of these songs sounded different when we first started out. And a couple songs didn’t make it because they didn’t make sense. ... And that’s a decision I have to make. But there definitely was some fighting going on — the song fighting itself, trying to figure out whether it was a stripped-down piano song or a great big band song. But at the end of the day, it’s gonna tell you what it wants. If it doesn’t feel right, it’s because it’s not right. You need to go back and try again. ... There’s millions and millions and millions of options when it comes to recording a song, and you just have to go with your gut instinct. It’ll work, if you just listen to your gut.”

Case in point: the song “Going Home,” an almost jaunty tune complete with a whistling interlude, as well as a few almost nonsensical-sounding lyrics (i.e., “crooked limbs from crooked mens,” one of those many lines that require deeper contemplation — and yes, even the cough after the line “the voice stopped singing” is intentional).

““Going Home” was this *huge* song, with a lot of production,” Fullbright says. “And I’d sit and get a little crazy with overdubs. It was just this slow-rocking little ballad, and it just never sounded right. It was so big that it lost energy, if that makes any sense. So we went back. What you hear on that record was a live recording of me and a bass player in one room looking at each other, and all that harmonica stuff was live-tracked. We

went back and added a couple of things. And then stopped and said, ‘We don’t need to add one more thing. The energy’s there; the performance is there. It’s all good.’

“I always listen to something that I’ve recorded and think, ‘Would I buy this? Would I listen to this? Would I feel anything if I were listening to this?’ Because it’s not about you; it’s about your listener. A lot of times I’ll listen to something that I’ve worked really hard on and say, ‘You know what? I’ve put a lot of work into this, but it really doesn’t mean anything to anyone else but me.’ And I’ll start again. I do the same thing with songwriting.”

Told that’s a hefty insight for someone who’s still rather young, he tosses the notion of sage wisdom aside, saying, “Aw, you know, you just have to look at it in terms of who’s listening. Why are they listening? What do I have to offer; what do I have to bring to the table? If all you’re doing is just forwarding your diary and saying, ‘I’m sad,’ and not trying to say, ‘Have you ever been sad? Here’s my sad. What’s your sad like?’ ...” With a laugh, he adds, “There’s a certain little magic line of empathy when it comes to songwriting that you just have to jump in. And if you don’t get it right, you gotta scrap it and try to do something else.”

Pulling the listener in with empathy. Like the Penn & Teller of songwriting, he’s just exposed the trick.

“That’s 100 percent it,” he confirms.

Another of life’s mysteries, solved. His young-genius reputation — of which he’s very wary, by the way — just got some new cement.

WATCH ME PULL A SONG OUT OF MY HAT

There’s a song on *Songs* called “Write A Song” (layer alert, for those in need) that conveys just how good Fullbright is at making the magic. Over gentle electric guitar chords, he sings, in a weary, melancholy voice:

Write a song

Write a song about the very song you sing

Pen a line about a line within a line

Write a song about a song.

He follows that stanza with:

Think a thought

Think a thought about the very

thought you think

Hold the pen and write a line about the ink

Think a thought about a thought.

On paper, those words might set off every cliché alarm in your head, along with concerns about whether he’s over-reaching for cleverness. But then he throws in the next verse:

Live a life

Live a life that is a life you want to live

Give a gift that to you will always give

God knows fear is not afraid.

There’s the money shot, so to speak. The words to the universe. But even so, it’s the music that elevates this song to a thing of arresting beauty instead of the songwriting equivalent of, shall we say, self-pleasuring.

Fullbright confesses “Write A Song” did indeed start out as a joke.

“I hate songs about songs, unless it’s John Hartford, or somebody [else] who’s real good at it,” he explains. “There’s a trend in

country music now where it’s like, ‘Rolling down the back roads, listening to “Sweet Home Alabama.”’ You can’t do that! You can’t write a song about a song you like. You have to write your own fucking songs. It makes me so mad. So I wrote that as kind of a protest. But what happened was, I wrote the words down and it was really funny to me. If you just read it, it’s different than listening to it. And I don’t know if it was a mistake or not, but musically, it’s almost kind of sad, like really bittersweet. I don’t know why it turned out like that, but it did. It’s almost confusing when you hear it, because you can’t tell if it’s really sentimental or if it’s really playful or what. And I didn’t like it; I didn’t like that song very much.

“I played it for a couple of my friends, and I ended up posting it on SoundCloud, which is where a lot of my songs go to die. I always put kind of ridiculous demos and stuff on there. It’s not a business tool for me; it’s just something I mess with. But I posted it on SoundCloud and left it up there for a couple of days, and of all people, Kevin Russell sent me a message. He said, ‘Hey, that song you posted on SoundCloud really knocked me out. It’s so good. You should put that on the record.’”

Russell, for the uninitiated, also goes by the *nom de singer-songwriter* Shinyribs.

“It’s really not about getting to the top at all ... It’s about being true to yourself. It’s about being sustainable. That’s my main thing. It’s like, with the big bad music business and songwriting and all this stuff, is it a sustainable operation, or is it just something that young people get credit for and then disregard as they reach a certain point, or a certain age? I’m just trying to be the best John Fullbright I can be, whether it’s writing a song or building a birdhouse.”

He’s been gaining considerable renown in the Americana/folk world Fullbright inhabits — even more than he had with his former band, the Gourds.

“That gave me confidence to say, ‘You know, it’s not bad. Maybe I will put it on the record,’” Fullbright says. “I sent him a note right when the record came out — just a thanks. I would not have recorded that song if he hadn’t said anything.”

Russell is far from the only songwriter noticing Fullbright’s work. In 2012, his friend and fellow Oklahoma native Jimmy Webb presented him with the ASCAP Foundation’s

Harold Adamson Lyric Award for “Moving,” which appears on *From the Ground Up* and Fullbright’s very first recording, 2009’s *Live at the Blue Door*. (They’ve performed together there, and in May, both helped celebrate the first anniversary of Tulsa’s Woody Guthrie Center.)

On June 27, Fullbright received the Oklahoma Music Hall of Fame’s Rising Star Award. On June 30, he appeared at the Grammy Museum at L.A. Live. Before taking off for his latest European sojourn, he headlined WoodyFest, the annual musical birthday celebration for Okemah’s most famous son. That’s the same WoodyFest where Fullbright first earned notice as a young troubadour; where Butch Hancock first heard him play. Where he often sits in with pals including Michael Fracasso, Oklahoma-reared Kevin Welch and Welch’s son, Dustin — one of Fullbright’s best friends, as well as occasional tour manager and co-author of the sneering *From the Ground Up* commentary, “Gawd Above.”

“It feels great,” Fullbright says of the recognition. “The one thing I wanted when I came into this was validation from my peers, and now I’m getting it. In that sense, it’s a dream come true.”

But he takes care to keep it all in perspective. In 2013, after losing the Best

such awards would steal his focus? “That’s a good question,” he responds, “because it is a marathon, it’s not a race. It’s not about who gets to the top first; it’s about who stays there.

“But it’s really not about getting to the top at all, is it?” he continues. “It’s about being true to yourself. It’s about being sustainable. That’s my main thing. It’s like, with the big bad music business and songwriting and all this stuff, is it a sustainable operation, or is it just something that young people get credit for and then disregard as they reach a certain point, or a certain age? I don’t care about any of that stuff. I’m just trying to be the best John Fullbright that I can be, whether I’m writing a song or building a birdhouse.”

SERIOUSLY, IT’S THE SONGS

“We were planning for a little slower build,” Johnson acknowledges. “But I also told John, ‘That Grammy thing, I don’t care what people are telling you. It means nothing. All it means is a bunch of people in the industry favored you over somebody else.’ Don’t get me wrong; all of us who’ve been in the business forever, we bitch and moan and cuss about the Grammys unless one of our friends or one of the people we really like wins, and then it’s like, ‘Oh, yeah!’ So I’m not gonna look a gift horse in the mouth and say, ‘Well, no, we’re not gonna take it.’ I don’t believe in that, either. But I also believe in takin’ it with a grain of salt and realizing that it’s just one step on the path.

“What I like about working with John, as opposed to other people I could be working with, is that it’s all about the song quality and about getting better at what you do,” Johnson continues. “Not getting more famous; not gettin’ more celebrity; not getting more of this and more of that. It’s nice that the money is really decent now and John’s not gonna have to totally struggle. But it’s all about being a better songwriter and a better artist. He just wants to get better as a writer and be as good as he can be. And that’s the kind of people I want to work with.”

Watching Fullbright perform at venues all over Austin, hotel ballrooms and suites-turned-listening-rooms at International Folk Alliance conferences in Memphis and Kansas City, indoor and outdoor stages (and after-hours gatherings) at WoodyFest, and even Nashville’s Ryman Auditorium, has been like witnessing a bird graduate from flying to soaring. From feeling the breeze to catching the wind — and riding it like a surfer rides waves. Aside from the fact that he’s clearly enjoying himself more onstage (and earning frequent standing ovations), he’s learned to communicate his thoughts in interviews —



Photo by John Carrico

and avoid communicating those he’d rather not reveal — with a finesse some artists twice his age haven’t mastered.

Surprisingly, Fullbright confesses, “You know, I dropped out of [college] because I was too shy. I couldn’t raise my hand in class. I couldn’t speak in front of a group of people. And now here I am.

“But it’s different,” he adds. “It’s more of a one-sided conversation. I’ve got an hour and half to speak my mind, whether you like it or not. When I first started, I was trying to please everybody under the sun. If I didn’t bring [down] the house, I was concerned. I worked so hard at trying to please and impress everybody. And I don’t do that so much now. Now it’s just trying to be more comfortable and more confident onstage. Accolades don’t hurt in that regard, I’ll admit that. Being able to say ‘Grammy-nominated’ anything, that doesn’t hurt the old confidence at all. Not that it even means anything. You say it to your uncle and he’s mighty impressed. It doesn’t mean that you’re any good or not. It just means that people are impressed. But being out there and just doin’ it every night, you have to get better at it.”

He’s actually a little off-base regarding that Grammy nod; it really *did* mean something, particularly because *From the Ground Up*, released on his own Blue Dirt label, earned it without any organized lobbying effort.

“It came about organically,” he agrees, “and then we had a choice. It was basically, ‘Do you want to pour a bunch of money into this and get the story out there of how grassroots it is and try to get people swayed

and get votes?’ Most people don’t know that’s how it works; it’s just as much politics as anything. And I said ‘Hell, no. I’m not gonna put money into something like that. It doesn’t mean anything.’ And we didn’t.”

WHAT’S SO BAD ABOUT...?

Unlike *From the Ground Up*, which offered a more narrative approach, only one of *Songs’* tracks, “High Road,” tells a story with characters. The rest of these lyrics are clearly personal, a head-on confrontation with loss and longing, love and, yes, contentment — as well as the craft of writing, from Fullbright’s curtain-lifting, and certainly sarcastic, perspective. The opening track, “Happy,” poses the question, “What’s so bad about happy?” as if it’s the plea of a lonely man dying to find out. Fullbright has mentioned that it actually questions why songwriters — or artists in general — find so much more inspiration from misery.

“I wrote it as a joke to myself,” he says. “‘What’s so bad about happy?’ What a ludicrous thing to ask.”

The world-weariness Fullbright conveyed on *From the Ground Up* is still there, and still belies his age. What’s striking is how he plays it against his current optimism, giving this album a balance that feels both oddly precarious and just right. And thank goodness he pulled back on the production. It would be an outright sin to clutter up the stark, stunning power of a couplet like *I didn’t know about silence/until you were gone*. Or the lines *In*

my heart stands a scarecrow/if he’s hurt he doesn’t say so/and he chases everything he loves away. Or all those exceptional melodies, which insert themselves very deeply into the brain, and stay there.

Fullbright, it turns out, is less inclined to talk about love than sing about it; he deftly deflects questions about his relationship with Baca. She’s more forthcoming, however, noting that only one song, the gorgeous “She Knows,” is actually about her. But Johnson rightly observes that songs can morph in meaning over time, for both writer and listener. Regardless of who they’re about, it does make one curious.

“I’ve had a couple of relationships,” Fullbright offers. “That’s not something I advertise. But yeah, I mean, I’m a grown person.”

As a shy kid, did he find himself fulfilling the “friend” role?

“Hell, no,” he says with a laugh. “I wasn’t even a friend! I started playin’ the guitar just so I could have a leg up, and then it didn’t even work ‘cause I got obsessive about it and I ignored all other social aspects of my life. So it kind of came around and bit me in the ass. But I don’t worry so much about that stuff now.”

He tells audiences that “Very First Time,” the song that closes *Songs* like a sigh of relief, is the first really truthful song he’s ever written. It contains the lyric, *Between love everlasting/and meaningless rhyme/sits feeling good for the very first time*.

While attending one of Fullbright’s South By Southwest showcases “just as a fan,” Dustin Welch mentions Fullbright wrote

it while sitting in a bathtub, without even touching an instrument (“without making a sound,” Fullbright later clarifies). “By the time the water drained out, he had the song,” Welch marvels.

“There was a breakup involved,” Fullbright says, “and just kind of coming to terms with this life; everyone’s life, I guess. But this life can be such a — like just a damned NASCAR race sometimes. It’s like who can get there first, and stuff gets broken along the way. It becomes very easy to get overwhelmed and to just say to hell with it; I’m just gonna roll with it. If you’re not making decisions, someone else is making a decision for you, and I got pretty good at letting other people make my decisions because I was so overwhelmed that I would just sit, silently. After some stuff had gone down, I woke up and said, ‘You know what? I’m as good as I’ve ever been in every way, and it’s time to stand up and start taking control of my life.’ And that song was that — a rebirth of John Fullbright. Just me going, ‘This is who I am. Exactly. Put into words. And this is the dawning of a new age.’ That sentiment fuels a lot of this record.

“I am content now, right now, in my life, because I get onstage and I say what I mean and I mean what I say,” he continues. “And it’s taken me so long to figure out how to do that. That’s how I am in everyday life. That’s how I am with everyone that I know and everyone that I love, but I could never be that person onstage; there was too much anxiety and self-doubt. And right now, I’m actually starting to move toward that person. And to not have to — I wouldn’t say act out a part, but it is sort of like that. I don’t have to get onstage and be falsely confident and act out this character, because I’m actually being myself onstage. And good lord, the confidence that comes with that is so empowering. The happiness, like, it’s really great. I want to see how long I can ride this thing out before the inevitable next wave.”

Even though he laughs when he says it, he’s reminded to consider the longevity some of his heroes have had. (OK, the longevity Randy Newman has had. Van Zandt and Nilsson, not so much — though musically, they’re still going strong.)

“You have to ask yourself what you want,” he responds. “That’s so much of it. Because I never knew what I wanted. I wanted to write songs, and people couldn’t accept that. ‘Sure, you want to write songs, but what else?’ ‘I don’t know. I’ve never done this.’ Now I’m starting to inch toward knowing exactly what I want.”

ALL THE TIME IN THE WORLD

John Fullbright is 26 years old. His new sophomore album is even better than his Grammy-nominated debut. He’s in love; he’s got a presumably mortgage-free home; and he’s got a deep well of songs, like the recent concert addition “Stars,” that might even be better than anything he’s already recorded. So what does he want, exactly?

Well, believe it or not, he’d like to get off the road at some point, at least for a bit. He recognizes that career momentum is not a thing to ignore, but he’s already thinking about scheduling a break. Though Baca describes Fullbright as generally reserved and fond of his privacy, he says that’s not it; he finds it’s easy enough to hide when he needs to, and when he traveled alone, he stayed in his room, sad and lonely. With others, he’s more likely to explore and sightsee. “That keeps you happy,” he says. “It keeps you thinking that you’re lucky to be able to travel instead of unlucky and forced to travel.”

But it gets back to the sentiments expressed in “Going Home.”

“I didn’t get into this because I needed to be on the road for 360 days a year and playing a show every night in a different city,” he says. “That came accidentally. Not to say I’m not grateful for the people who come out to shows, but it does take its toll, psychologically and physically. I can probably do a better job of dialing that back a little bit, and I’ve been workin’ on that. I’d say two years from now, my schedule will not be the same as it is right now.”

At home, he’s got family, including nieces and nephews. He’s



FULLBRIGHT & FRIENDS: (Top) Fullbright with (from left) Liz Foster, Kelley Mickwee, and Jamie Wilson of the Trishas, and his manager, Greg Johnson, at the 2012 Americana Music Festival & Conference in Nashville. (Bottom) Fullbright, Ray Wylie Hubbard, Jason Eady, and Kevin Welch backstage at the 2013 Lone Star Music Awards in San Marcos, Texas. (Photos by Lynne Margolis)

got history, and inspiration. Friends. And quiet time. The woods. The barely broken-in half-gas, half-charcoal grill he got for his birthday in April (he claims to be “not a terrible cook”).

Of course, touring less might also mean touring bigger. He doesn’t see himself headlining arenas and stadiums, but knows better than to say never. “There’s definitely an aspect to this that I didn’t ask for, as far as just, like, the need to be onstage and the need to be loved by thousands of strangers, and to show off and shake my ass,” Fullbright admits. “I don’t have a lot of that, ‘cause it’s not in me. Not that I can’t do it. I can certainly do it.” But those who’d like to see that John Fullbright shouldn’t hold their breath. Even if he should find himself in enormodomes, he’d likely use a Bruce Springsteen approach, where the music, not a stage set or prancing dancers — or his own ass — is the focus.

He says he’s more worried “about the day I say fuck it and walk away and then figure out that that wasn’t a smart thing to do.”

“I’m more inclined to do that than to change who I am as an artist,” he confesses. “So yeah, we’ll see. I plan on taking a little time off and maybe even going and getting a real job for a little while, just to make sure that I’m not completely losing my mind. I’m pretty handy. I could always find something to do. I can work outside. I can work inside. It doesn’t really matter. As long I’m not working with an asshole, I don’t really care.”

But first, there’s another trip to Europe. And a fall tour with Shovels & Rope. And the Cayamo cruise in January. And if another Grammy nomination should materialize, maybe a February trip to Los Angeles.

The road, it seems, isn’t yet ready to give him up. In which case, he’ll keep reminding himself to roll over its bumps and potholes by repeating the mantra, “I don’t deserve anything. I don’t deserve any special treatment.”

Because he damned sure knows writing songs about songs — or anything else — is a pretty awesome job to have.

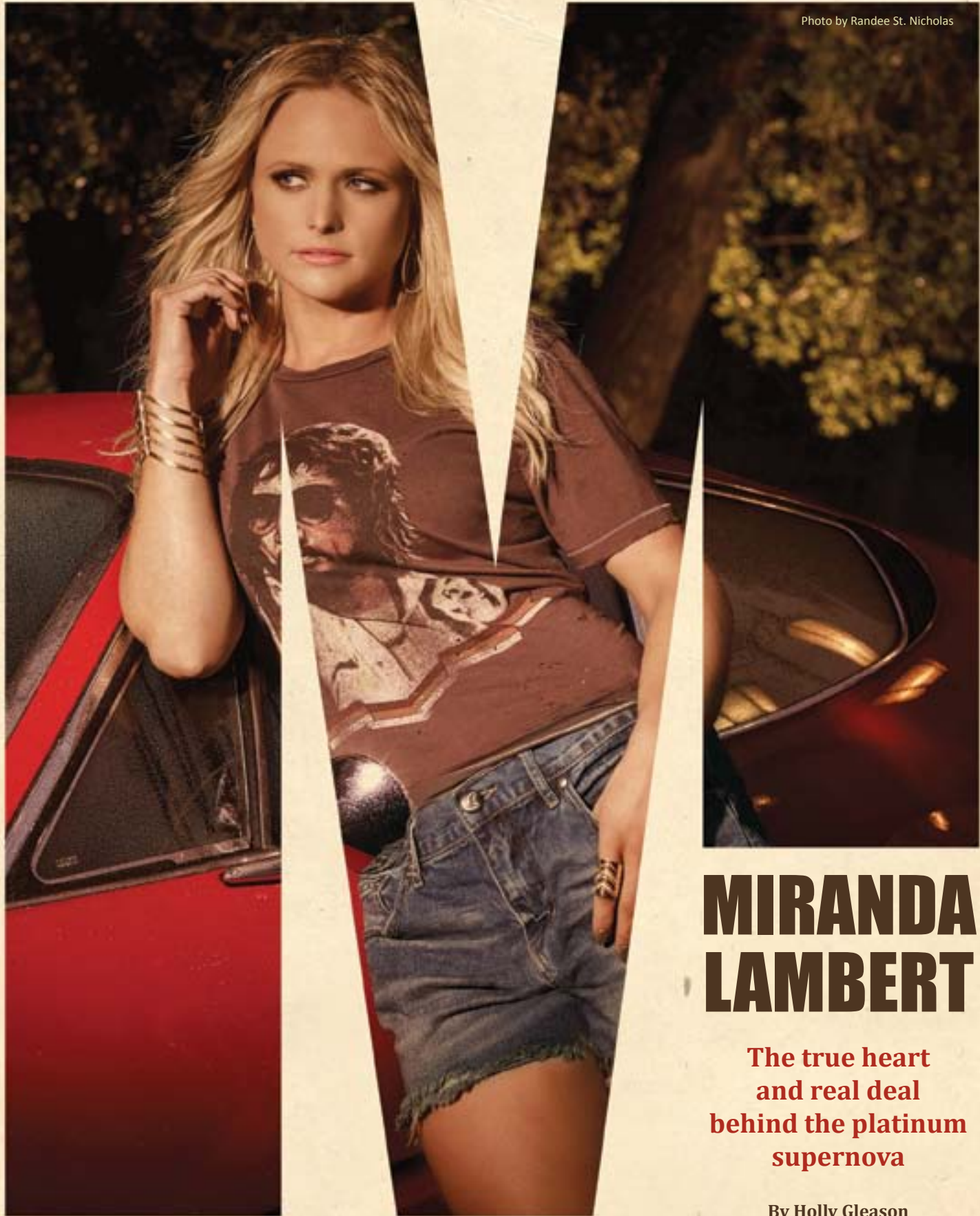


Photo by Randee St. Nicholas

MIRANDA LAMBERT

The true heart
and real deal
behind the platinum
supernova

By Holly Gleason

“That’s not anywhere in the *So You Want to Be a Country Singer Handbook*,” Miranda Lambert says, explaining the vertigo of sudden fame. Or more specifically, the kind of *super* fame that results when one very famous person marries another very famous person, a la Lambert and her husband, fellow country star and *The Voice* coach Blake Shelton. “It’s gone from being one thing — being people with songs on the radio, out on the road — to a whole other kind of interest.”

Of course, Lambert, 30, has long been a fascinators to the media and country music fans for her straight-talking, keep-walking, anti-Barbie sort of girly-yet-hardcore grrrl power. This is the firebrand Texan who once walked out of a session as a teenager because “it was too pop”; whose early songs like “Kerosene,” “Gunpowder & Lead,” and “Crazy Ex-Girlfriend” made her a RIAA-certified platinum blonde long before the chart-toppers started happening. But there’s a difference between being on the radar and literally blowing up the radar. And Lambert, once a feisty li’l thing who could draw a bit of attention for her art and attitude, has become a tabloid mainstay. For her marriage. For her weight. For her haircuts, her clothes, and heavens knows.

“Her celebrity right now is enormous,” affirms Cynthia Sanz, assistant managing editor of *People* magazine. “Ever since she and Blake got married, it’s been a supernova. People like them, and want to know more about them — *all* the time. That (kind of) fame thing can be very scary, and she can’t get away from it. That’s the reality. When she says anything, it’s going to be everywhere. Little things you thought meant nothing. And sometimes people interpreting it to fit their story instead of your intention ...

“It can’t be easy seeing your life on the cover of tabloids every other week,” Sanz continues. “To let that roll of your back, you have to take a long look at yourself.”

It’s a long way from just being the daughter of two private investigators who just wanted to write gritty songs that matter. “It’s a lot like I expected,” Lambert admits of the full-force blast of a TMZ reality. “But the thing that surprises me the most is how *fast* the change happens.”

That new state of visibility is what no doubt drew her to “Priscilla,” from *Platinum*, her new album. Containing the lines “Golden gate, we had to put up a gate/to find time to procreate/or at least that’s what we read ...,” the song reflects how jarring the media frenzy can be. Still, the learning curve hasn’t been as bumpy for this woman with a license to carry as you’d think.

“I realize at certain moments when people get in your face, and they’re looking for a reaction, I have to laugh it off,” Lambert

offers. “What else? So you do. And you can be bugged, or you can realize you get to live your dream, too.”

Lambert is calling from the beauty shop chair in the cramped make-up room at *The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon*, where she is in the midst of the usual big-star promotional tromp to set up her new album, set for release the next day. “This one isn’t too bad,” she says of the current publicity blitz. “But tomorrow is the 4:30 call (for *Good Morning America*) — *that’s* the one you dread all year.”

She’s not really tired, though; certainly not in the way you’d think someone who’s been chasing the dream with a major-label deal would be after nine years. If anything, she sounds almost charged — and with good reason. *Platinum* is Lambert’s fifth album, and its success is assured. The lead single, “Automatic,” which she’ll perform on *Fallon* later, is already in the country Top 5, and coming after “When We Were Us,” a No. 1 duet with Keith Urban, and heading into “Somethin’ Bad” with Carrie Underwood, both Lambert and the album have momentum in their favor. To wit: *Platinum* will debut at No. 1 on both the *Billboard* Top Country Albums chart *and* the magazine’s all-genre Top 200.

But right now, at least, in the last few hours before the album’s release, Lambert does have a hint of anxiety. Because beyond fame and sales figures, she still cares first and foremost about the music itself. Knowing this is the final push to deliver the baby, she continues, “It’s weird. I recorded this record in August, and it’s just now coming out. I’m ready for (*Platinum*) to be here, to know what they think of the record. It’s been building up and building up ... I want some feedback! I want some people to hear it. I’m anxious, not in a bad way, but in a wanting to share it way — and that builds up. You wanna *know*.”



Musically, *Platinum* is a wild ride. Beyond ruing the lost way of doing things in “Automatic,” which has the same innocence as her very award-winning “The House That Built Me,” Lambert opens with the hard-to-hold truth of “Girls”; goes for a churning big-top put-down with “Two Rings Short”; snarls across the raucous cacophony of “Little Red Wagon”; Western swings with the Time Jumpers on “All That’s Left”; truculently winks ‘n’ nudges through the coming-of-age (and saggage) admission “Gravity Is A Bitch”; and twangily homages junk-shop treasures in “Old Shit.” There’s also a late-70s Texas dancefloor lament, “Hard Staying Sober,” the laconic-yet-sultry country blues of “Holding Onto You,” and even a John Prine-evoking number, “Babies Making

Babies,” that looks at teenage re-population without judgment, perhaps even kindness.

It’s a lot of songs and a lot of flavors. Still, it’s the sassily brazen “Platinum” and the pensive “Bathroom Sink” that stand out as the album’s two most defining tracks. Shamelessly embracing all of her worldly knowledge, physical attributes and sense of humor, the title track offers a game plan to all girls who aspire to make their way in the world, while “Bathroom Sink” — written by Lambert alone — is a raw moment of reckoning with the doubts and falters all women face.

“The one thing I can say about Miranda,” Frank Liddell, the producer she wanted to work with — and has — since her stint on *Nashville Star*, says, “is that every record she’s ever made is reflective of exactly where she is in her life at that moment. She is real and honest about her life, and you can hear it.

“She was married for one week when we started the last record,” he continues, referring to 2011’s *Four the Record*. “Literally — got married, went on a honeymoon and started on a record. You can hear that newness on it. Now she’s a celebrity; the microscope is always on her, and there’s a lot to deal with. But what’s even more interesting is, she’s still that girl from Lindale, Texas — now obviously a celebrity, but she hasn’t forgotten that. And all the songs on this record reflect that.”

Or, as Radney Foster, a celebrated Texas songwriter, says of the frisson between small-town girl and high-watt celebrity, “Not everybody’s married to a great big superstar, but I promise you there’s still plenty of petty jealousy at the country club in Tyler, Texas, the church group in Amarillo, or the PTA in Nacogdoches. So, there are lots of ways to relate to these songs.”

“When I was getting ready to start making this record,” Lambert says, “I did a little inventory: going back to *Kerosene*, listening to all the songs and all the things I’d said. I know I’ve changed a lot, but I have this common thread that runs through everything. It’s a female empowerment thread, no matter where you are in life; but also, there’s a vulnerability. I’ve always been honest in my music. I’d rather be honest even if it’s hurtful, because to start there, you can tell the truth. Because I don’t have a lot of fake in me, its just not an option — and it takes strength to be willing to say those things that are uncomfortable to say. You don’t know how it will be received, but you still have to suck it up and do it.”

“Bathroom Sink” unflinchingly captures that jagged edge of the truth. It’s about a woman staring down her reflection, the make-up mask that creates an illusion gone and the flaws only she can see revealed — along with the fractured reality of pressure, expectation, and the feeling of not quite ever being enough to go around. The song

serves up hard truth about the way so many women treat themselves, and yet it is also unquestionably one of the most personal songs Lambert has ever shared on record.

“Everything in the song, that all came from me,” Lambert says quietly. “I’d just had an argument with my mom, and it’s all the things you want to say, the things you feel ... and looking in the mirror, it just adds up.

“I was getting on a flight when it happened, so I wrote it in my phone. Then when I got to the bus, I picked up my guitar and went straight to the back. The idea my mom’s gonna be hurt was hard, but you know that’s what happened. Because you look in the mirror and see yourself without the make-up, you can’t hide. All the make-up and hairspray in the world may hide what’s underneath from people, but it’s still there. So how are you going to handle it? What are you going to say?

“Music is a way to make an excuse for yourself,” she explains. “You can get it all out when you’re writing: put it all down, be confrontational, because it’s a song.”

“She’s remarkably honest on this new record,” says Sanz, a fellow Texas woman who was born in San Antonio and graduated from the University of Texas’ journalism program. “The looking in the bathroom and seeing all that? Every woman does it, pretty much. Writing a song about it, let alone just admitting it? That’s what makes her who she is. And it’s interesting, because with her it is who she is as an artist as much as anything. In some cases, the music is second to the celebrity. But not with her. She’s always challenging herself. She puts out a record and it does well, and some people would do that [same thing] again — but she follows her heart.”



You’d think winning three consecutive Academy of Country Music Top Country Album Awards for *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, *Revolution*, and *Four the Record* — as well as *Revolution’s* “The House That Built Me” and *Four’s* “Over You” winning almost every song and/or single award out there — would be pressure enough for an artist going into her next record. But this time around, the glare of Lambert’s celebrity was also in the studio. If the songs on *Platinum* are musically more diverse, perhaps a bit more grown-up, they are also informed by the sense of knowing that this time around, more so than ever before, people are really watching and listening.

“The interesting thing about this record is, we used pretty much the same cast of characters,” Liddell recounts. “I asked her if she wanted to use the same players, and she said, ‘Yes.’ It’s always throwing caution to the wind, and these guys understand that.

But you could feel it: everybody showed up not quite knowing what to expect. To do things different for different’s sake is never good. We’ve never done that with her. But the tracking this time, everyone felt more pressure than we ever had. The success was in the back of everybody’s minds.

“Every time she’s getting ready to make a record, she gets a little panicky,” the producer continues. “And I get that, too. You know, you can talk about it all you want, but then you have to put up. That’s the deal. I think the elephant in the living room really pushed us.”

Lambert’s albums have never been by-the-books Music Row propositions. Her lyrical attack is edgy, and the playing has always reflected that. But on *Platinum*, the stakes raised. Guitars really do lacerate, the beats hit hard; in a world of “you throw good for a girl,” Lambert’s record has the same velocity as Eric Church or Jason Aldean.

“Miranda’s always pushed buttons,” Liddell explains. “But you don’t just push ‘em for the sake of it. Over the years, she’s pushed so many, so then where do you go? There’s more to (the way she looks at her music) than just ‘You can’t say that? Watch me ...’ or ‘You can’t play that on a country record? I can!’

“In some ways, the pushing is in the approach. I think it’s the most musical record she’s even made.”

Sanz, who’s tracked Lambert’s career for *People* since the beginning, concurs. “She came out guns blazing, all the time. It was her thing. She’s mellowed a little. She’s 30, and she’s a superstar. Now, you know there’s a reason when she reaches for her gun.”

There’s also the influence of the Pistol Annies, Lambert’s all-girl trio with songwriter/artists Ashley Monroe and Angaleena Presley. Like a sorority with songs, the three have great fun — but also push each other’s boundaries. Though Lambert’s success far eclipses that of her friends, there is no diva at the center in their dynamic. If anything, the Annies, whose *Hell on Heels* and *Annie Up* have been critically lauded and Country Album Chart-topping, provide an opportunity to take things even farther. Whether it’s the (al)luring “Hell on Heels,” the joyously hard-living “Taking Pills,” or the lament of “The Hunter’s Wife,” there’s a glimmer of humor beneath the audaciousness. Full-tilt to the extreme, the Annies land the truth in their confessions of wild living, gold-digging, small-town hypocrisy and the plight of a wife forgotten with a glimmer in their dark-kohled eyes.

“It was so much fun,” Lambert enthuses about the Pistol Annies. “Like a slumber party but more fun, because of the music ... and it was so different from being a girl singer onstage with an all-guy band. Instead, it was a bunch of girls out making music and having fun, and sorta ...”

Lambert doesn’t pause, but the gear shift

in the answer is evident. “It gets a lot riskier because you’re not up there alone; you’ve got someone else up there saying it, too. It made me a little more comfortable, broadened my horizons. And all the things people say didn’t matter — the ‘it’s too country, it’s too rock ‘n’ roll, too punk, too Texas,’ whatever ... We let the lyrics speak ‘cause that’s the leveler in the end: What does the song say?”

Radney Foster recognized that quality in Lambert when he wrote with the 19-year-old fresh from *Nashville Star*. He was struck by her intent and her focus, as well as her charisma.

“She had all the goods,” he enthuses. “She sang like an angel; God reached down and gave her a thunderbolt for a voice. She had all that character, but she wasn’t trying to be recognizable, she just was.

“Most modern country music is idealizing the world, creating some nostalgic vison, but that’s not real. But the world in Miranda’s songs — I know people who live there.”
— Radney Foster

“She figured out how edgy she wanted to be yet, or could be,” Foster continues. “She and Frank started experimenting, and our sweet bluegrass song didn’t fit. But even then, when we got together, all she wanted to do was write something very real. Miranda didn’t just want to write a hit song, that wasn’t the reason for her sitting down to write. Most modern country music is idealizing the world, creating some nostalgic vision, but that’s not real. But the world in Miranda’s songs — I *know* people who live there. When you step back and look at the real greats — Merle Haggard, Waylon Jennings, Willie Nelson, Loretta — they were all real. Loretta Lynn is a singer-songwriter; she’s also a big country star, but it’s the *writing*. Same with Dolly Parton. I mean, you don’t get to ‘Jolene’ without being real.

“Miranda’s the same way,” he says.

Lambert notes that her candor, both in song and in person, isn’t *always* embraced or understood. “I think people take it the wrong way sometimes,” she admits. “It’s gotten me into trouble, saying things that I think.” But Sanz disagrees; in her professional opinion, Lambert’s refreshing frankness has only served to endear her to the public. As

someone who gauges celebrity value for the nation’s top celebrity news weekly, Sanz’s job depends on assessing America’s hunger for different bold-faced commodities. And in a world of shock, gawk and gape, rare is the celeb wanted for something other than scandal, stupidity, or egregious excess.

“She’s certainly beautiful, but she says what she thinks ... and people feel like they know her,” Sanz says. “When she talks, you get a sense of who she is, and what matters to her. She lives her life her way, and she doesn’t take crap from people. That’s not easy to do. She’s in a business where people want to shape her into something, and she has stayed true to herself. That courage ... the ‘say what you think’ thing? There’s an old saying: ‘Texans are like tea bags. They do well in hot water.’ Miranda proves that all the time.”

Liddell concurs. “Miranda is unapologetically exactly who she is. When we cut ‘Baggage Claim,’ she said ‘shit.’ When it was a single, we had to edit it out ... but there was never a question of whether to say it or not when we were recording. That’s not for effect, that’s just how she talks. That’s exactly what she’d say to someone whose crap she was over.”



If that’s what people notice, or have focused on, though, Lambert seems to land on the opposite polemic. For her it’s not the “oh, yeah” thrust of her songs that define her life, but more the “oh, wow ...” moments. Making her way through a very complicated, very busy pair of careers — because Shelton and his career must always be factored in — there’s still a part of her amazed by the experiences she gets to have.

In “Holding On to You,” she sings of drinking with the Highwaymen and watching the Rolling Stones. In those moments, she is once again a 12-year-old girl gobsmacked by music. “There are moments where I go, ‘Am I really doing this right now?’” she confesses. “In those moments, it seems really unreal. Getting to perform with heroes like George Strait and Merle Haggard? Hanging out with Loretta Lynn and Sheryl Crow while making a video at (Loretta’s) house? I look and it’s like, ‘Wow ... How did this happen?’”

She pauses, trying to measure it all. Finally she acknowledges the centrifugal force of her life, and how it has pinned her against those moments with such velocity from the *next* six things, it can be hard to fully embrace the experience.

“I’m learning to soak it all in,” she says. “The last 10 years, it was always trying to get to the next thing, next level, next milestone. ‘What’s next? What’s next?’ Because it does just keep coming at you, and you have to keep

“I see myself as a 12-year-old girl at the George Strait Country Festival,” says Lambert. “I thought he saw me ... George Strait saw me! That was so important. And I want my fans, when they come to the shows, to feel like that, too — The idea that I saw them.”

dealing with all of it. You can’t hit pause.”

Marion Kraft, Lambert’s longtime manager, laughs thinking about the path, the alternative version of how one becomes a superstar without the standard radio hit/radio hit/radio hit/tour paradigm. “Four years into her career, people were coming up and saying ‘Congratulations’ for her success. We didn’t get what they were talking about ... We thought she was already successful ‘cause she got to do what she loved! Years one and two, we thought we were successful once she had a little airplay and could go tour ...

“You know, having more money and more hits, that’s not why she does it.”

Lambert, who knows she’s going to have to hang up soon, is thinking before she answers. The notion of that moment when everything changed is so cliché, and yet for some performers, there really *is* one moment when they realize what can be. And it’s not always winning that first Female Vocalist of the Year Award, or headlining a major tour or even earning that fourth platinum album.

Lambert understands, and she’s taking the question seriously. Because beyond the glam squads, red carpets, long bus hauls, true l-o-v-e with Blake, there is a truer, deeper reason why she does this.

“I see myself as a 12-year old girl at the George Strait Country Festival,” she says. “I thought he saw me, and I really believed it! George Strait saw me! That was so important. And I want my fans, when they come to the shows, to feel like that, too — the idea that I *saw* them.

“Parts of me are still that girl and parts of me are more world savvy,” she continues. “But I’m pretty much the same overall. Yes, I’m a little more business savvy than the little wide-eyed 12 year old, but that little girl is still the person I try to focus on. When you think about those fans, and you remember when

you were just like them ... those moments keep me in check! When I get tired, and maybe I’m not appreciating the little things, the reality of all of this, I think about what (country music and the stars) meant to me growing up, and I hang onto that.”

She’s a long way from the wheat-colored blonde with the two little braids hell-bent to sing, but Lambert doesn’t forget. She had a big dream, in some ways bigger than she knew — and she made it come true. With grit and determination, but also with a lot of pink, crossed pistols as a logo, big make-up and bigger hair and cut-offs, a don’t-mess-with-me attitude and infinite sweetness, she forged a whole new kind of country girl singer: brash and lovely, tart and sweet, redneck and sophisticated.

Lambert laughs when you point out the contradictions, reminds you all those things are her. She knows all those things are most women, too, and maybe that’s part of it. In a world of brokered femininity, where magazines tell girls who to be and how to measure up, Lambert doesn’t bother considering Madison Avenue’s take.

Thinking about all those 12-year-old girls and 20-something young ladies trying to sort it all out, even the 30- and 40-something women trying to make sense of what happened, she knows just what she’d tell ‘em.

“Believe in who you are, and stick with it!” she says. “It’s gotten me through this life. It’s what keeps you from turning into someone you don’t now ...

“You can be anything you want to be if you know who you are inside,” she insists. “My mama told me that growing up, and throughout all of this. Hang onto who you are, it’s the most important thing. And keep working.”





The Mastersons

The duke and duchess of Americana power pop embrace their chemistry on *Good Luck Charm*.

By Holly Gleason

“There was this article... What was the title?” muses Eleanor Whitmore, the crimson mermaid-tressed and violin-playing half of the Mastersons. “I think it was ‘Married Couple Opens for Steve Earle.’”

Laughter pours down the line, as a tour bus’ diesel engine hums softly beneath her phosphorescent mirth. Whitmore and husband Chris Masterson are calling from Prince George, British Columbia, where they are, in fact, opening for Steve Earle. It’s double duty: the two native Texans have also been members of Earle’s Dukes & Duchesses for almost four years. It was Earle, one of their staunches fans, who pushed the Mastersons to make *Good Luck Charm*, their second album and first to fully capture their chiming, breezy power-pop instincts.

“It’s funny how people hear this,” marvels Chris Masterson, the duo’s Elvis Costello-glassed, licorice whip-legged guitarist. “Some people see the fiddle, and think (we’re) country. In Britain, it was more the folk/Americana influence. In Spain, people were talking about Matthew Sweet and the Jayhawks, so by the end of the tour, we were doing a Flaming Groovies cover for the encore.”

Jim Scott (Tom Petty, Dixie Chicks, Wilco) saw that country/pop split, too — and played it up as he began the back-and-forth process of emailing demos to the Mastersons while they were on the road. “All these songs could totally go cosmopolitan or countrypolitan,” Whitmore remembers him saying. “And we liked the that idea he could hear both things, and didn’t want it to be one or the other.”

The result, as heard on *Good Luck Charm*, suggests the Bangles running through Uncle Tupelo’s garage. It’s a jaunty, confident leap forward from the slightly more dour mood of the Mastersons’ 2012 debut, *Birds Fly South*. “When I go back and listen, we wrote this in motion,” Masterson says of *Charm*. “Our first record was written in

New York in the winter, and it sounds like it. This was written on the road, and recorded in California.”

“The last record was a lot of broken character love songs,” Whitmore says. “And we didn’t want to keep writing the same songs over and over. So we wrote ‘Uniform,’ ‘Good Luck Charm’ and ‘Cautionary Tale,’ and then thought, ‘How about a fluffy love song?’ We hadn’t done that.”

Masterson’s parched-plank voice on “Anywhere But Here” offers a turpentine sorta Bakersfield post-country, while Whitmore’s sober-eyed reality check on the interventionistic “Cautionary Tale” is one of the few places her gleam is a bit more muted. And when the two sing together, as they do on “It’s Not Like Me” — a fizzy jangle of an unlikely love unfurling — it’s an intoxicating delight that’s equal parts Everly Brothers wide-eyed innocence and Tom Petty surrender.

Part of the new sheen is their willingness to embrace the obvious. Rather than eschew their husband-and-wife reality, they welcomed it into the mix. Masterson explains, “Danny (Goldberg, their manager) gets a lot of credit for this. ‘Your relationship is low-hanging fruit,’ he told us. ‘Why are you fighting something like the fact you love each other so much?’”

Still, like most married couples, they also liked having an outside sounding board. When it was finally time to record, producer Scott became an invaluable piece of cementing the magic.

“We recorded and mixed this album in 15 days,” Whitmore says. “We had the rhythm section and keyboards for four days, then all the vocals and overdubs, then mixed in three days. Jim took such great notes, we’d finish a track and he’d send us to the bar, then have us come back and listen when there was a rough mix.”

“He was always looking for the big note, which isn’t necessarily a note,” Masterson offers. “A crescendo in the song, the way a chorus moved: that place where the song ascended — and he’s really good at finding it. He pays such attention to everything as it’s happening, he really hears what’s inside a song and a performance.”

Whether it’s the loose-limbed tandem shuffle “Closer To You” or the Flying Burrito Brothers-evoking “Time is Tender,” the notion of how life slips away tempers the bliss with a reverent respect for

Photo by Joeseeph Llanes

CONT. ON PAGE 65



Photo Courtesy of New West Records

Americana’s favorite Hurtin’ Albertan on recording *Counterfeit Blues* with the ghosts of Sun Studios, partying with the Canadian Prime Minister and Hayes Carll, and playing country music that doesn’t suck.

By Adam Dawson

A few years back, Corb Lund and his band, the Hurtin’ Albertans, were touring across Canada with Texan Hayes Carll when they were invited to a sit-down lunch with Stephen Harper, Canada’s Prime Minister. The invite came from none other than Mrs. Harper; it seems the Prime Minister’s wife had been a fan of Lund’s music for some time, and also hailed from the singer’s native Alberta. “A good country girl,” notes Lund. The ensuing event was quite the scene, with 15 or so road-weary, music-playing cowboys stumbling into the Canadian equivalent of the White House sporting tour beards, scraggly hair, and Led Zeppelin t-shirts to be served bottles of Coors Light by suit-wearing butlers.

“We all had to submit our names and shit ahead of time so the security at the residence could check us in or whatever, and Hayes got drunk or something and forgot his ID the morning that we went over there,” Lund recalls. “So the security guard has the clipboard and earpiece and is checking our

IDs, and Hayes is like, ‘Oh dude, I forgot my ID, but I got this CD with my name and face on it ...’ And the guy was okay with it!”

Lund laughs as he tells the story over the phone from his current home, not far from the cattle ranch where he was raised. That ranch has been in his family for six generations, ever since his ancestors crossed over the Canadian border just a few miles north of Glacier Park in Montana.

Not surprisingly, life on the ranch now routinely finds its way into Lund’s music, which is as pure country and gritty Americana as anything coming out of his security-crashing tour buddy Carll’s home state of Texas — and pretty far removed from the Black Sabbath and Slayer records that informed his earliest endeavors. Lund’s metal side came through loud and clear, though, in the Smalls, the eclectic Canadian speed/punk band he toured and recorded with as a bass player for more than a decade.

The Smalls lasted until 2001, but even as they were winding down, Lund was looking back and beginning to embrace his country roots. All of those Marty Robbins songs he heard as a youth were starting to catch up with him, inspiring him to write songs of his own. And it didn’t take him long to figure out that the performance edge and confidence he’d honed over all those years playing the hard stuff could still be put to good use.

“I think being in a metalish band for 10 years, you get a completely different perspective on writing songs than if I had just started playing country music from the start,” Lund says. “So I think incubating my writing style in that scene for years and years forged my style, and now if some of my country stuff

is a little quirky or weird, it’s because of that — and I think it’s a good thing.”

Fans and critics north of the border have concurred for years. Starting with 1995’s *Modern Pain*, Lund and the Hurtin’ Albertans (formerly the Corb Lund Band) have made quite a name for themselves in Canada. Lund now has eight records under his belt to go along with multiple Canadian Country Music Association awards and even a Juno (aka “Canadian Grammy”) for Best Roots and Traditional Album, which he won in 2006 for *Hair In My Eyes Like a Highland Steer*. And with a helping hand from Carll, a deal with New West Records, and a tiring touring schedule, Lund has at long last started to make significant headway south of the border, too. He’s now been a bit of an underground favorite with Americana fans from Austin to Nashville for years, with 2012’s *Cabin Fever* — his second album for New West — pushing him squarely into “next big thing” territory.

Meanwhile, up in his homeland, Lund is already established enough that CMT Canada approached him last year with an offer to record his own television special, which would be taped over two days at the historic Sun Studios in Memphis, Tenn. But Lund, downplaying any notion of his own fame, is quick to note that it was most likely the Hurtin’ Albertans’ reputation as a tried-and-true *band* that secured the TV offer.

“Being together for 11 or 12 years is kind of why CMT picked us,” Lund says. “It’s funny, because in Canada we are (still) sort of an anomaly; they play us on CMT, but we don’t fit in sonically with a lot of the other bands they play. But they like us there. And in a lot of cases, we’re more like a band than a lot of the

country artists they deal with. A lot of times it’s the singer/writer guy or whatever and whoever he hires, which is how the country guys do things sometimes. Whereas with us, we really are a band — it’s been the same guys for a long time.”

So with camera crew in tow, the whole band (Lund on lead vocals and acoustic guitar, Grant Siemens on electric guitar and lap steel, Brady Valgardson on drums, and Kurt Ciesla on bass) travelled to Memphis, set up their gear in the legendary recording studio built by Sam Phillips, and got down to business. They recorded for two days, live and straight to tape. “The first hour or so was a bit weird,” says Lund, “but once you got up and running it felt really natural.”

Not that there weren’t plenty of chills to go around. “They have a big X on the floor where Elvis stood to record, and all the pictures of Jerry Lee Lewis and Johnny Cash

recording and we just played songs that we knew like the back of our hands,” says Lund. “And it turned out kinda cool, because it’s a much more raw, organic, and down and dirty recording of these songs. I think I like them in some ways better than the originals. At Sun it’s like a ’50s-style studio, just one room, so there’s no studio tricks or overdubs. You just put the four guys in there and hit record and you either play them or you don’t.”

After the special, dubbed *Memphis Sun*, aired on CMT Canada, Corb and New West decided to take the songs from the session and release them as his new record: *Counterfeit Blues*, which came out July 1. The album finds the band in top-notch form from start to finish, ripping through tunes such as “Truck Got Stuck,” “Five Dollar Bill,” and “(Gonna) Shine Up My Boots.” Throughout the set, Siemens’ tasteful guitar licks find their way perfectly in between Lund’s

old speed metal pals in the Smalls for a few shows across Canada — Lund will commence work on his fourth New West album (and 10th overall). That record is tentatively scheduled for release in the spring or summer of 2015.

Lund will be smack in the middle of his 40s by then, which by his accounting should be the beginning of his songwriting prime. “What’s Willie Nelson now, 80?” he asks, only a year off. “Rodney Crowell’s still making music and Emmylou (Harris) is still making music, and it’s great. I’m pretty convinced that it’s hard to write and I’m not really too interested in anyone’s country songs until they are like 30 or 35, anyways.”

And if that thinking puts him at odds with the increasingly youthful demographic of today’s mainstream country chart, well, this Canadian is more than happy to keep on making inroads with the Americana crowd.

“They have a big X on the floor where Elvis stood to record, and they’ve got this picture of the Million Dollar Quartet — Elvis, Johnny, Jerry Lee, and Carl Perkins — up in the studio, and that was pretty intense.” — Lund on recording at Sun

and all of those guys,” Lund recalls. “They’ve got this picture of the Million Dollar Quartet — Elvis, Johnny, Jerry Lee, and Carl Perkins — up in the studio, and that was pretty intense.

“It’s kind of crazy how in those days, people called Sun the birthplace of rock ‘n’ roll, but back then you had Elvis and Johnny Cash hanging out and one of them is a country icon and one of them is a rock icon,” he continues. “So you had country and rock and even gospel all coming from the same place.”

All of the tracks they laid down at Sun were already very well road tested, having originally been recorded for the aforementioned Juno-winning *Hair In My Eyes Like a Highland Steer* and Lund’s 2002 album, *5 Dollar Bill*. “They are some of the older songs that we have been playing live for years, because we only had two nights to do this

comfortable country singing, and Ciesla’s upright bass playing, always a signature of the band’s sound both live and on record, is featured on many a song, including the appropriately titled “Big Butch Bass Bull Fiddle.”

“It’s funny,” offers Lund, “because in Canada it’s like a live ‘greatest hits,’ but in the States it’s a little mixed, as some people know that old music of ours but a lot of people have just heard us through our last record, *Cabin Fever*. So in a way to a lot of American people, it’s a new record because they don’t know the older tunes.”

As for brand new tunes, Lund fans both seasoned and still learning the ropes won’t have long to wait. After spending the summer on the festival circuit supporting *Counterfeit Blues* — and squeezing in a reunion with his

“Americana to me just means country that’s not on the radio and doesn’t suck,” he says. “The Americana scene — and especially the Texas guys — have been really, really good to us. The Texans have kind of adopted us and it’s really fun to come down there and play. It feels like we are part of the community now.”

Naturally, he singles out Hayes Carll (who co-wrote and sang on Lund’s *Cabin Fever* song “Bible on the Dash”) for helping to really open doors for him in the Lone Star State and beyond. But then again, one could argue that until Hayes introduces Corb to, say, the President, isn’t it *Lund* that has the leg up in that friendship?

Lund demurs with a chuckle. “Only in Canada,” he says.



GREENFEST14

2 DAYS of PEACE & MUSIC
JULY 26-27

BROUGHT TO YOU BY...

TICKETS 2 DAYS \$15 BUCKETS \$100

DAZE-ONE
SHINYRIBS
LEROY POWELL AND THE MESSENGERS
LINCOLN DURHAM • SETH JAMES BAND • FOLK FAMILY REVIVAL
CHRIS KING AND THE LIBERATORS • THE BIGSBYS

DAZE-TWO
WALT WILKINS • DREW KENNEDY • ADAM HOOD • JOE GRIDER
WYATON PAYNE • BEN DAMIANO • KYLIE RAE HARRIS • JAMIE WILSON
KELLEY MCKWEE • LEW CARD • MATE RODRIGUEZ • K PHILLIPS
AARON STEPHENS • BOBBY DUNCAN • JORDAN MINOR • BRANDY ZOGAN
MARK ALLAN ATWOOD • DAN ADAMS • JUSTIN BRAVO

UNDER MOUND ICE HOUSE & LONE STAR FRONT HOUSE
NEW BRUNSWICK, TEXAS

greenfest.preferredfan.com
GALLEYWINTER.COM

DALEY WINTER
JAN 17 - 18

WWW.TUSKHOSS.COM

TUSK HOSS DESIGN CO

MERCH DESIGN
POSTERS
WEBSITES

LOGOS
ALBUM ART
STICKERS



CLASSIC TATTOO & BODY PIERCING

AWARD WINNING ARTISTS
PROFESSIONAL BODY PIERCING
OPEN MONDAY-SATURDAY
GIFT CERTIFICATES AVAILABLE

512.392.0938
237 N. LBJ DR.
ONE BLOCK FROM THE SQUARE
WWW.CLASSICTATTOOTX.COM

Photo Courtesy of New West Records



“This will be our year,
took a long time to come ...”

Photo by Chad Wadsworth

Kelly Willis and Bruce Robison had so much fun making their first album together, they decided a victory lap was in order. But after this year’s *Our Year*, they’re putting the Bruce & Kelly Show on hold: “We don’t want to push it!”

By Richard Skanse

Kelly Willis can’t remember the first time she ever heard “Harper Valley PTA.” “I’m sure I heard it a lot before I ever really even paid attention to it,” she admits over a glass of iced tea on the patio of Austin’s Spider House Cafe. It’s a sweltering afternoon in early June, the day before she’s due to hit the road for a week’s worth of tour dates in the Northeast with husband Bruce Robison, their four young children, and a brand Bruce & Kelly duo record, *Our Year*.

“It’s just one of those songs that’s been around my whole life,” she says.

Quite literally, too: Texan Jeannie C. Riley’s 1968 recording of the Tom T. Hall tune was the No. 1 country song in America the very week that Willis was born in Lawton, Okla. Years later, Willis would grow up to take on the skirt-chasing Bobby Taylor, gin-nippin’ Shirley

Thompson and the rest of the “Harper Valley hypocrites” in her own ultra-confident, head-turning cover of the sly classic. She rehearsed it in secret, determined to “punk” her husband by fielding a supposedly off-the-cuff request for the song at an Austin gig over a year ago. (The audience, or at least the part of the crowd that followed Willis on Twitter, was in on the prank with her.)

Willis nailed the song that night, just as she later did in the studio. Listen to the finished cut on *Our Year*, and you’d swear Willis was born to sing it. But really, it was all just a lark. Asked if she’s ever had any kind of lifelong personal connection to the original, she dismisses the notion with a casual shake of her head. “Not really, no,” she admits, shrugging a little apologetically. “It’s just a fun song.”

Nevertheless, she certainly remembers

another day in June, 15 years ago, when another lark led to her meeting the song’s writer face to face. The independent label Rykodisc had just released *What I Deserve*, Willis’ critically acclaimed “comeback” album that endeared her more to the alt-country set than her first three albums on MCA ever did with the mainstream. Game for a little fun in the midst of the album’s publicity cycle, she accepted an assignment from RollingStone.com — arranged by her then publicist, Joan Myers, and this writer, at the time an editor for the magazine’s website in New York — to play roving reporter at that summer’s Country Music Association’s Fan Fair festivities in Nashville. Her quick run-in with Hall, colored by her self-consciousness about not being too “germy,” was the highlight of her diary report.

“That was the first time I met him, and he

kind of scared me, because he saw the *Rolling Stone* badge I had and I think he maybe thought I was someone coming to make fun of country music,” Willis recalls. “He wasn’t very nice to me at first. And I was already nervous, because I’m *not* an interviewer, and I asked him something like, ‘You tell such great stories in your songs ... do you have any literary writers that you love to read? Do you like to read?’”

She cringes. “And he went, ‘Yeah, I *read*,’ — really mad at me! Like I was suggesting that he didn’t read or something, I don’t know. But I think he saw that I was about to cry, and then he got super nice. And was very sweet to me for the rest of the interview.

“But yeah,” she continues, smiling. “That was pretty memorable.”

Willis has no idea if Tom T. Hall himself remembers their Fan Fair moment — let alone whether or not he’s heard her cover of “Harper Valley PTA” since its release on *Our Year* in late May, or if he would ever connect the dots between the Kelly Willis singing his song and the amateur *Rolling Stone* correspondent he almost made cry all those years ago. (“But wouldn’t that be cool?” she muses.) One

hopes the recording does eventually cross his radar in one way or another besides just being another line on a royalty statement, though, because Willis and Robison do his song proud. Although true in sassy spirit and rootsy arrangement to the 1968 Riley model, the slightly slower tempo and sultry slur of Willis’ vocal infuse every line and note with Tennessee late-summer humidity. You can practically hear the beads of sweat dripping off those PTA members’ brows as Mrs. Johnson calls them out one by one.

It’s a flat-out terrific track, and the fact that it’s surrounded on *Our Year* by nine others just as fine is testament to not just the respective talents of Willis and Robison (whose richly plaintive lead vocal on the string-kissed cover of the 1977 Vern Gosdin hit “A Hangin’ On” is 24-karat A.M. country gold), but to the character and charm of the distinctive sound that they’ve spent the better part of the last four years honing to perfection.

“Man, the greatest thing (about working together) was really coming up with this sound,” enthuses Robison, calling from the Austin airport a few days later, within minutes after their return from the aforementioned

Northeast jaunt. First heard on stages in and around Austin in the months leading up to 2012’s *Cheater’s Game*, the couple’s debut full-length together after nearly two decades of managing separate solo careers under the same roof, it’s a sound that Robison likens to “all the harmony duos that I always loved, where the two things add up to something really different ... It’s like a Simon & Garfunkel thing, where the vocal sound and harmonies are all right there at the front and center, and they’re there to present the song.

“After about halfway into *Cheater’s Game*, I just looked up and it was like, ‘Oh my god, it’s like 1991 again!’” he continues, flashing back to the hungry salad days when he and his older brother, Charlie, were both just starting out on the Austin music scene. (Willis, married at the time to her first husband, drummer/songwriter Mas Palermo, was already one of the hottest things in town and newly signed to MCA.) “You know, you have a period when you’re starting out where you’re putting your thing together, and you work really hard, and then you get to where you’re kind of just wondering what comes next. I was at a point where I was really looking for something to

kind of start the engine up again, and finding that sound together was something that I really found invigorating. It got me excited and looking forward to all the bits of doing this that maybe I hadn't been that excited about for awhile."

Cheater's Game was greeted with considerable excitement by fans and critics, too, many of whom had been clamoring for the "first couple of Austin country music" — Willis the willowy, rockabilly-reared darling of the alt-country set and Robison the Bandera-born gentle giant who routinely wrote smash hits for the Dixie Chicks, George Strait, and Tim McGraw — to record a full album together after years of "Robison Family Christmas" engagements and a 2003 EP, *Happy Holidays*. From the outside looking in, it seemed like a no-brainer. After all, Willis had been covering her husband's songs for years on her own records (most notably "Wrapped" on *What I Deserve*), and the exquisite "Friendless Marriage," a song they wrote and sang together on Robison's 2001 album, *Country Sunshine*, put to shame just about every other

1992 (eventually marrying in '96), they were both already solo artists, "and we just weren't interested in being in a duo or a band. That wasn't our motivation or our thing; it didn't seem like we needed to do that, because we were very happy just making our own music." Even in the privacy of their own home, where they happily share parenting and domestic duties but almost never write together. In fact, apart from a song they came up with right before going into the studio for *Our Year* that didn't make the cut, Willis says "Friendless Marriage" is the only other song that they've co-written.

"We don't sit in a room and write together very well," she says. "And I have no idea why, but we've tried it several times, and we just can't do it."

Over time, though, they came to find out that they actually could, with baby steps, pull off the duo/band thing in tandem with their individual careers. "Little by little, as we worked on these little off-shoots together over the years, it just started to feel like we could do it and it wouldn't threaten either

deciding to try it out as a "one-time thing" and determined to make it count, they played ball and had fun with it, filming their tongue-in-cheek project video with actor friend Bill Wise playing his clueless, trailer-park talk-show host alter ego, Gill Webb. ("And you are father and daughter?" Webb asked at the outset. "Here's a question: Why are y'all here today?") Their fans loved it, ponying up just shy of \$45 grand, and the popularity of their very funny "Gill Webb Show" clips on YouTube and social media continued to help promote the record long after it was paid for and released.

Robison had recently sold his Austin studio, Premium Recording Service, so they recorded the album in Nashville with producer Brad Jones (Hayes Carll, Chuck Prophet, Josh Rouse). After having produced his last several solo albums himself, Robison was more than ready to hand the reins over.

"One of the things I've come to realize over the last couple of years, just doing a lot of listening to the records that I love, is that I don't think we make as good of records as they used to," he says. "And man, I don't care if it was

"Little by little, as we worked on these little off-shoots together over the years, it just started to feel like we could do it and it wouldn't threaten either one of us or make us forever linked musically," Willis says.

male/female country duet ever recorded this side of George Jones and Tammy Wynette's divorce in the mid-70s.

But as far as Willis and Robison themselves were concerned, all of that was more than enough. "The thing is, I always felt like we were already collaborating, even playing a fair amount of shows together, so we really didn't see a big reason to do a record proper," says Robison. "And for decades, I was a fan of Kelly's first, you know? And I've always been very protective of her — of her sound and her career and everything like that."

Willis, of course, has long been a fan of her husband's, too. But she notes that when they met each other and first started dating in

one of us or make us forever linked musically," Willis says. "And as we began to figure out our roles with each other, we knew that it really worked, it was really fun, and people really responded to it and liked it. So it just kind of organically happened, and finally it just felt like the right time and the right place for us to make a record together."

At the encouragement of their manager at the time, Mike Crowley, the couple turned to their fans and Kickstarter to finance *Cheater's Game*. Willis admits that they originally had reservations about going the fund-funding route, "because the perception is that you need money, and it can make you look a little desperate if you don't do it right." But upon

the Beatles, Jackson Browne, James Taylor, or Willie Nelson, but *all* those guys worked with producers. And I realized I couldn't do it all. There were times when I felt like I could do it all, but now I feel like you can't really be there and make the music that you need to make and also be worrying about 'is this the right take' and all that kind of stuff. And after we started talking about working together, I saw just how much Brad understood the songs and the vibe and where we were coming from. It just gives you someone else to bounce things off, and I thought that was invaluable. He had a huge impact on what we ended up with on every song."

The whole experience of making *Cheater's*

Game — not to mention the response — was so positive, that they kept all the same pieces in place (minus the Kickstarter factor) for *Our Year*. Same producer, same studio, same even-split of Willis-sung songs and Robison-sung songs, with shared harmonies by both throughout and only one song (the T Bone Burnett cover "Shake Yourself Lose") arranged as a classic, verse-swapping duet.

"We just let the songs decide who sang what," Robison explains. "Kelly's a little better at that than I am, because I'm more tempted to get excited about too many things at first and just throw a bunch of stuff at the wall to see what sticks, whereas she has a real good center about the material and just knows whether a song fits for her or not."

As was the case with *Cheater's Game*, most of the songs on *Our Year* are covers, with the album bookended by Robison singing his sister Robyn Ludwick's "Departing Louisiana" and Willis taking the lead on the closing track, penned by Chris White of the '60s British rock band the Zombies. In between are two Robison originals ("Carousel," co-written with Darden Smith, and "Anywhere But Here," co-written with Monte Warden) and one by Willis ("Lonely For You," written ages ago with Paul Kennerly.)

"Bruce actually did that song on his first record," she says, "but when Sony bought the record from him, he wrote three new songs for it and kicked three off, and that was one of the ones that got kicked off. I forgot all about it until we pulled it out of the bone pile. Bruce will probably tell you I brought it up, but I think it was his idea."

Willis concedes that it's usually her husband who brings the lion's share of songs to the table. "Bruce spends more of his energy on music than I do in general, because I get more caught up taking care of the kids and worrying about that side of our lives," she says. "I mean, he's a complete hands-on dad, too, but he just makes more of an effort to find time for music than I will, so he did a lot more of the legwork on both of these records than I did."

She certainly makes the exceptions to that rule count, though. In addition to the aforementioned "Harper Valley PTA," which has been a highlight of their live sets ever since that first night she whipped it out and knocked Robison's jaw to the floor of the Continental Club Gallery, Willis was also the one who introduced the Zombies' "Our Year" to their repertoire.

"I think I had just been searching and searching for stuff that we could do at our holiday shows that wasn't just your standard Christmas song that everyone's sick of hearing," she recalls. "I'm not sure what made me think of that one, but it just felt like a good New Year's song: goodbye to the old and hello to the new, this hopeful thing. We've been doing it for years now, sometimes with him singing it and sometimes with me, to the point



Photo by Chad Wadsworth

where we don't even remember who sang it last from year to year. Bruce was actually going to sing it for this record, but then Brad had us switch it around and came up with a great new harmony for Bruce to do that was different from any way we'd ever done it before. And then it was Bruce's idea to do it without drums and to add the steel to it, which I think sounds really sweet."

No matter who's singing it, "Our Year" will doubtless stick around in those Robison Family Christmas shows for years to come. But outside of that annual tradition, opportunities to hear Willis and Robison singing their other songs from *Cheater's Game* and *Our Year* onstage together are running out ... at least for the time being.

"Right now, our plan is to quit playing together at the end of August, and then start working on solo stuff again," explains Willis. "We just need some separation in our life, because it gets a little overwhelming. Being in any relationship involves constant problem solving, but normally you get to go to work and solve problems with other people. But when you live with someone and work together all

the time, too, it can be really draining, because then you're solving problems with the same person both at home and at work. So there's no escape or refuge or comfort to look forward to; you don't get to come home and tell the other person, 'Today was awesome, but ...'"

That's not to say that all their time recording and touring together over the last few years ever brought the couple close to an actual breaking point. Far from it.

"We really do recognize that this is something special," Willis insists. "You can feel it when you're doing good work and when things are connecting, when the band is right, the energy is right, and the crowd comes excited and ready to hear what you're going to do. That's all good, and we know that that's what's happening right now, and we're just enjoying it. So so far, so good — but you don't want to push it if you can help it. So after we got this whole thing running and did all this work to kind of come up with this sound, the idea all along was, 'Let's just get in and cut the songs we want to record, capture this moment in time, and then we'll move on.'"

So, after they've given *Our Year* its due and finished their victory lap together, Willis aims to start recording her next solo album — and first since 2007's *Well Travelled Love* — either at the end of this year or in early 2015. Robison, meanwhile, will busy himself "tinkering" with songs out at his new recording studio in Lockhart (he's calls it Bruce's Country Bunker), though he doesn't have a new record of his own on the calendar yet. (Presently, he's leaning toward the idea of maybe putting out his music single by single.)

Still, regardless of what comes next from Kelly Willis and Bruce Robison as solo artists, rest assured that we probably haven't heard the last yet from the Bruce and Kelly Show.

"I think probably in a few years, we'll do something again," Willis says. "Because I know I will really miss it. Bruce is really fun to be on the road with, and to be onstage with him and singing with him, it just feels like the best music I've ever done. And it also feels so great to have somebody to play with who cares just as much as you do about what's happening."

"So, I'm sure we'll do it again," she assures with confidence. "It's too much fun not to."





Robyn Ludwick

Hard woman with a heartache

By Richard Skanse

The Devil’s Backbone Tavern in Fischer, Texas is the kinda place that looks pretty much exactly like you’d think it would. Not necessarily dangerous or menacing — certainly not at 5 p.m. on a week-day, when the amiable bartender calls you “Hon” and the happy-hour crowd consists of a single table of laid-back, silver-haired locals nursing Lone Stars, Pall Malls and small talk. But definitely weathered and worn, with every wooden surface inside its long stone walls — bar, stools, tables, floorboards, even the ceiling — carved, scarred and seasoned by generations of patrons living and dead. It’s the kind of place where a matter-of-fact “ghost warning” sign seems no more incongruous than the shuffleboard table, and that lights up a woman like Robyn Ludwick the minute she walks through the door.

“Don’t you love this place?” she enthuses after ordering her own Lone Star, selecting a little Vern Gosdin and Conway Twitty from the jukebox, and cracking a side door to take an admiring peek into the large adjacent — and very dusty — dancehall. “This is the coolest part of the bar, but its been closed forever,” she says wistfully. “I really wish somebody would do something with it — it’s gorgeous.”

Ludwick has lived a few miles away in Wimberley with her husband and two kids since 2003, but the Devil’s Backbone has been one of her favorite Hill Country haunts for more than 20 years. “I’ve been coming here since I was in high school, when my brother Bruce was going to Southwest Texas and I would come stay with him during the summer,” she says. Even then, the old beer joint felt like home.

“My mom was a bartender for a long time in Bandera when we were kids,” she explains, waxing nostalgic and bittersweet in equal measures, “so we spent a lot of times in bars and dancehalls.”

Her older sister — aka the “white sheep” of the bunch — managed to grow up and out of that world. Not so Robyn and her two older brothers, Bruce and Charlie Robison. Although their dad was a coach and all three of them were jocks for a spell (“I set a record for the most 3-pointers in one game,” she says proudly), one by one they gravitated toward the neon-lit nightlife. But the lure had very little to do with mother (they’re estranged) and almost everything to do with music. In Robyn’s case, it came down to a virtual showdown between her two favorite female role models as a teenager — and pitted against Lucinda Williams, Texas All-American hoop star Clarissa Davis ultimately didn’t stand a chance. As Ludwick would tell Gurf Morlix years later

when she approached him about producing her third album, 2011’s *Out of These Blues*, “I wanted to be Lucinda Williams when I was 15 years old, which was probably one of the reasons why I started playing guitar and doing bad girl things.”

But although getting into trouble proved easy enough for her, young Robyn originally didn’t get very far in her “Becoming Lucinda Williams” manual. She stopped short at the “fall in love with a bass player” chapter and ended up marrying one John “Lunchmeat” Ludwick, 11 years her senior, when she was 20. Her brothers, both already well along their way with their respective songwriting careers, were less than amused. “They never forgave me for that,” Robyn says with a laugh, still happily married 21 years later. “And I don’t know who else they would have liked me to be with — they love Lunchmeat. But it was like I had broken their hearts because I went and married the bass player.”

And yet somehow, they all got through it OK as family. Lunchmeat remained Bruce and Charlie’s go-to bassist, and Robyn even ended up singing on some of their records as well. That was apparently just enough to scratch what was left of her music itch, though, because she spent the rest of her 20s happily finding her feet in a very different world: forensic engineering. “I actually got my degree in civil engineering, from UT, but I started studying this kind of exotic form of engineering under a guy who was one of the lead expert witnesses in the state, and I found it fascinating,” she explains. “Forensics is sort of the creative side of engineering, because it involves a lot of going-backwards problem solving and failure analysis. It’s almost like the CSI of engineering. And I figured out that I was good at it.”

She started her engineering career proper in 1998; a few years later she and Lunchmeat had their first child, sold their small house in Smithville and found their new place in Wimberley. Life was good. And then she got laid off.

“Long story short, mold happened,” she says. A lot of her job at the time had entailed doing residential foundation claims for insurance companies, and in the wake of “that first big mold case in Dripping Springs that changed history,” a lot of engineering companies that did insurance work were wiped out.

“I thought it was the end of the world, because I got laid off 24 hours before we were supposed to close on our house,” she says. “And I took it personally because I was young at the time, and I had a baby and a bass player for a husband — it was fucking scary, you know? We were able to close on the house and move into this very beautiful community, but I had to cash in all the retirement I had at the time. And then we had this total health scare with my little boy, where I’d read a lot of these potentially very scary type diagnoses,

Photo by Todd V. Wolfson

and I just didn’t sleep for like six months ...”

It wasn’t until then, at 31 years old and at the end of her emotional rope, that Robyn Ludwick started writing songs. And once the floodgates were opened, she couldn’t stop.

“All of these things just kind of hit me at once, so a lot of it was very personal and heavy,” she says of those first songs that came rushing out. “It was a combination of everything I was going through at the time, plus all this other stuff, going all the way back to my childhood, that I had never really got out of my system before because we never had money to get any kind of therapy. We all went through a lot of crazy stuff growing up — a lot of it dealing with our mother — but there was no like, getting anything ‘worked out’ when you were a kid in the 70s; you just survived or you didn’t.”

She remembers being “frightened as hell” the first time she sang any of her songs for her brothers, both of whom were at the top of their game at the time. Bruce recalls being rather nervous himself.

“I think I was scared of whatever it was she was about to do, because she sat me down and it felt like an intervention,” he says. “But then she played me a few songs, and it was amazing. I hadn’t heard them at all before that and didn’t even know she was writing, but they were all obviously really good and very intense — way more than mine. She delves pretty deep into our history and stuff in a lot of them, and they were all so well put together. So it was a really powerful moment when she played those for me.”

Bruce sings “Departing Louisiana,” a song from Robyn’s 2005 debut, *For So Long*, at the beginning of *Our Year*, his new duo record with wife Kelly Willis. Charlie recorded two of his sister’s songs, “Monte Carlo” and “Out of These Blues,” on his 2013 covers album, *High Life*. He first heard “Monte Carlo,” a song about their mother, when Robyn played it at a Robison family song-swap at Steamboat; after she finished it, he got out of his chair and walked over to kiss her onstage. “Out of These Blues” was a song she wrote for him when he was going through his divorce — but he waited the better part of two years before listening to it, knowing full well how deep and true his sister’s loving but unflinchingly honest words would cut.

“I wrote ‘Out of These Blues’ for Charlie because his whole persona, his talent really, is convincing people that he’s the king of the world, that he doesn’t give a shit,” says Robyn. “And he’s a lot of people’s hero because of that, including mine. But at the same time, I’m his little sister and I know when he’s hurting. And he and I don’t always communicate in the ways that we should, but that song was like an unspoken, you know, ‘I’m hurting because I know you’re hurting, and this is my homage to you ... this is me saying I love you, but it’s also about how fucked up you are!’”

Par for her course, Ludwick pulls no punches on the new *Little Rain*, her fourth album and second produced by Morlix. And no target, no matter how dear to her heart, is too close to home. In “Heartache,” for instance, she addresses head-on some of the most personal struggles that come with the territory of spending more than 20 years married to your best friend. “It’s been so long now, forgot how sweet love once was,” she sings with frustrated anguish. “I hope you’re picking up what I’m putting down/I’m growing tired of all this round and round and round and round ...”

“In a way, it’s kind of fucked up that that’s the only way I can communicate sometimes,” she admits with a laugh. “I should be able to just go, ‘This is what I need and what I want and what hurts me,’ but I can’t because I’ve got all these walls and shit. But music is my way of breaking those down, and sharing with people that think I have this really tough exterior or that I have the world by the balls — that I really *don’t*. I’m struggling and battling things just like everybody else.

“A lot of my songs, starting from my first record through to this one, are all sort of an amalgam of my past,” she continues. “And maybe they’re not all about me in particular, but there’s a lot of fam-

ily stories and a lot of underdog stories. Like ‘Longbow, OK,’ which is about a young girl in a small town with no options and lot of difficult adult situations around her, and she’s a total survivor. All of that is a lot like my life, except that I was never actually molested. So I’ll go to extremes like that sometimes; it’s like making a movie — you have to have a balance. But overall I’d say it’s about 75-percent fact and 25-percent fiction.”

Although *Little Rain* has only been out since mid July, Ludwick already has her next record — a duet album with Australian singer-songwriter/guitarist/producer Bill Chambers (father of Down Under Americana star Kasey Chambers) in the can. “We still need to do some overdubs, but it’s pretty much done,” she says. “We did half of it in Australia back in January, and finished it in May at 12th Street Sound in Austin when he was in town.” Tentatively titled *Mr. Saturday Night*, she expects it’ll be out in early 2015.

“Bill and I met a few years ago when he was in Austin producing an Australian singer-songwriter who was a fan of mine,” she says. “The guy wanted me to sing on his record, and I wasn’t sure at first, but I did it to meet Bill because I was such a huge Kasey Chambers fan since the ‘90s. After that we kind of kept in touch and came to realize we had a lot in common; it’s funny how you tend to relate very quickly to other musicians who come from a musical family. Because it can be pretty tough, you know? It’s a curse and a blessing.”

Indeed, Ludwick admits that from day one, she’s made a concerted effort — “almost to the point of professional suicide” — to not lean or bank on the Robison family name in regards to her music. “I love where I’m from, and my brothers have always been encouraging and supportive, but I just went way beyond what probably anybody else would to make sure that, in my mind, nothing was ever handed to me when I got up onstage,” she says. “I was that way to the point of just completely neurotic behavior, but it was really important to me. So when people found out and would come up and say things like, ‘My gosh, I had no idea,’ it always made me so happy. And *then* I would start gushing with pride that I was part of this musical family, because I was able to sort of be independent and on the same playing field.”

The fact is, though, that for as long as she’s been writing songs, making records, and playing on stages as far from home as Australia and all over Europe, Ludwick’s not only proven she can keep up on that same playing field as her older brothers, but do it all while also juggling the responsibilities of a demanding day job. Not long after the lay off from her first engineering job that sparked her songwriting career, Ludwick found gainful employment with another engineering company.

“The nice thing about having my engineering career is, it has really allowed me the freedom and ability to say ‘no’ to a lot of things in the music business,” she says. “And sometimes that’s a powerful thing — to not have to fall into the habit of, you know, doing *every* gig. I think that’s actually helped me get to where I am now as fast as I have, because perception can really be a huge part of this business.

“But at the same time, though, sometimes I do find myself wondering, ‘God, what could I do if I actually had all that extra time to write? How far could I go then?’” she admits. “And it’s getting to the point where things are really starting to happen for me, and on the engineering side they’re starting to be like, ‘We’re not really cool with you leaving six times a year to go touring outside of the country.’ So, maybe it’s a sign: Do I give up opportunities and play it safe, or take a leap of faith?”

That’s the question Ludwick leaves on the table at the Devil’s Backbone. Two weeks later, on July 3, she reports back via email with her decision.

“Guess what? I quit last week — how’s that for a plot twist?” she writes with a smiley. “Brave or stupid? Only time will tell.”



reviews



WILLIE NELSON
BILLY JOE SHAVER
MIRANDA LAMBERT
SHOVELS AND ROPE
MICKY AND THE MOTORCARS
JOE ELY
STURGILL SIMPSON
JOHN HIATT
BETTYSOO
THE MASTERSONS
ROBYN LUDWICK
DALE WATSON
OLD CROW MEDICINE SHOW
KELLEY MICKWEE
THE FELICE BROTHERS
AARON STEPHENS
RICH OTOOLE
BRANDON JENKINS
MARK JUNGERS
MARY GAUTHIER
CORB LUND
JOHN EDWARD BAUMANN
COWBOY JACK CLEMENT
JANA POCHOP
MATT HARLAN
LEW CARD
CLAIRE DOMINGUE
LARS ATTERMANN
THE JAYHAWKS
TODD SNIDER



WILLIE NELSON
Band of Brothers
Legacy



BILLY JOE SHAVER
Long In the Tooth
Lightning Rod Records

When Willie Nelson and Billy Joe Shaver sing about it being “hard to be an outlaw who ain’t wanted anymore,” take it with a grain of salt. Sure, the days when the suits on Music Row couldn’t cash in on the likes of Waylon and Willie fast enough may be a long time gone, but Willie at 81 remains one of the most beloved figures in popular music. And although Shaver’s own fame has never been near as universal as the Red-Headed Stranger’s, the renowned songwriter’s still landing cuts on Willie Nelson albums halfway through his 70s, with two songs from Shaver’s new *Long In the Tooth* (“Hard To Be an Outlaw” and “The Git Go”) also appearing on Nelson’s latest, *Band of Brothers*. And lest anyone forget, there’s also the fact that Shaver’s still packing roadhouses seven years after (non fatally) shooting a man in the face during a bar argument. Post acquittal, Shaver even made light of the incident in a song, “Wacko From Waco,” and a whole lot of his fans — Willie included — laughed right along with him. Unwanted, *these* outlaws? Hardly.

That being said, though, it’s been an awful long time since either Willie or Shaver truly delivered *new* goods worthy of their legendary stature. Shaver’s last studio album, 2007’s Jesus-loving *Everybody’s Brother*, was overloaded with guests and too many re-recordings of old nuggets, and 2005’s better-than-you-might-remember *The Real Deal* was handicapped by an unforgivable desecration of “Live Forever” updated with Big & Rich. Willie, meanwhile, has knocked out enough albums — most of them forgettable — in the last two decades to fill an iPod Nano; but apart from 1996’s *Spirit*, you couldn’t cull enough new Willie originals off the lot of them to fill a mix tape. Sure, his album of Cindy Walker covers was golden, but whatever happened to the country poet who gave us “Crazy,” “Night Life” and “Hello Walls”?

Well, he’s back — in “spirit,” at least (pun intended). Collaborating with producer Buddy Cannon, Nelson co-wrote nine of the 14 songs on *Band of Brothers*, and at least one of those brand new Willie songs — “The Wall” — is right on the level of such other late-career knockouts as Guy Clark’s “The Guitar” and Johnny Cash’s “The Man Comes Around.” Over a simple yet glistening arrangement reminiscent of his mid-period recordings of “City of New Orleans” and “Pancho and Lefty,” a duly somber Nelson sings a paean to resilience that also acknowledges the collateral damage of a life lived at unstoppable force: “I went off like a Roman

candle, burning everyone I knew, I hit the wall ... And the wall came down, crashing down.” “Guitar In the Corner” and “Send Me a Picture” harken back to the classic sad-eyed country of his ’60s keepers, while the swinging “Wives and Girlfriends” and “Used to Her” sparkle with “Shotgun Willie”-style mischievous wit. The five songs he didn’t write are quality picks, too — especially Gordie Sampson and Bill Anderson’s uproarious “The Songwriters.” Had Willie and Waylon recorded that one back in the outlaw country heyday, we’d all know it by heart now better than the one about mamas and cowboys.

Where Nelson’s *Band of Brothers* plays from start to finish like a triumphant return to form, Shaver’s *Long In the Tooth* — true to his own more rough-around-the-edges form — is a tougher record to flat out love straight away. But it’s mighty easy to like a whole lot. Equal parts bouncy (“Sunbeam Special,” “Music City USA”) and broody (“The Git Go” and the aforementioned “Hard to Be an Outlaw,” with its get-off-my-lawn swipe at modern-day country stars “singing about the back roads they never have been down”), this is boot-stomping, heart-on-denim-sleeve honky-tonk that hits hard and true but doesn’t quite knock the wind out of you with the impact of Shaver’s best albums. Weighed against, say, 2001’s *The Earth Rolls On*, his devastating final album with his late guitar-hero son Eddy, this somewhat workmanlike, half-hour set barely tips the scales. He’s still in great voice, though, as best evidenced on the soaring but tender “I’m In Love,” and the funky-ass, groove-digging title track proves he can still throw down and swagger like an ornery, fire-bellied sumbitch with whiskey and bravado pumping through his veins. But on an album full of songs you reckon Shaver could have written in his sleep, it’s the tongue-in-cheek “Checkers and Chess” that stands out as the closest thing to a new classic. When Shaver sings “I’m still playing checkers while they’re playing chess,” it’s hard not to recall the hardscrabble ambition of “I’m Just an Old Chunk of Coal (But I’m Gonna Be a Diamond Someday).” All these years later, he’s still, by his own admission, far more coal than diamond — but what Shaver fan would want him any other way? — **RICHARD SKANSE**



MIRANDA LAMBERT
Platinum
RCA Nashville

In the middle of Miranda Lambert’s new album, after the big radio hit and the star wattage duet, sits the five moneymakers. These aren’t necessarily the songs that will get incessant airplay, but they are the ones that further Lambert’s artistic cause. They are the ones that prove even after the millions in record sales, the glamorized image, the tabloid-contagious marriage to country music bad boy Blake Shelton, and the slew of industry hosannas, Lambert remains a musical rebel with Texas attitude. She pours honest grit and gravitas into “Bathroom Sink,” a hard-knocks ballad about her explosive relationship with mama. She relishes the vintage in “Old Shit,” then swings it through a delicious kiss-off called “All That’s Left” featuring the fabulous Time Jumpers. Her girl-next-door wisdom goes barroom broad on the ode to aging “Gravity Is a Bitch,” and “Babies Makin’ Babies” beautifully takes a realistic look at young parenthood.

It’s no minor feat that Lambert infuses *Platinum* with such down-home heft as the mainstream genre she caters to revels in the insipid bro-country movement. Some may have dubbed her style “twangry,” no doubt stemming from the fiery frankness of her career-launching albums, 2005’s *Kerosene* and 2007’s *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, but Lambert needs no marketing catch phrases. She’s an original who can turn in duets with plastic princess Carrie Underwood (“Somethin’ Bad”) and mellifluous vocal quartet Little Big Town (“Smokin’ and Drinkin’”) and never lose her footing. Lambert is a bad ass, plain and simple. She fearlessly tows the line without letting it erase her personality. Name dropping Shenandoah and Restless Heart while alluding to Trace Adkins and the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band on “Another Sunday in the South” makes her cool, not star-crossed. Reminiscing about yesterday on “Automatic,” especially when she’s only 30 years old, sounds real, not contrived. Lambert is an old soul. She is that rare female country music superstar who arrived armed with a strong foundation of traditionalism and an arsenal of sizzling self-penned tunes. Half of *Platinum* comes from her songbook, the rest she readily makes her own. She’s all sass and heart and high-octane artistry. — MARIO TARRADELL



SHOVELS & ROPE
Swimmin’ Time
Dualtone

The cover image on *Swimmin’ Time*, a life preserver, serves as a perfect metaphor for the songs within — and the husband-and-wife duo behind them. Because they willingly go wherever a song takes them, Cary Ann Hearst and Michael Trent frequently enter deep musical territory full of seemingly rapid currents and risky undertows. But they always manage to rescue one other — while thrilling listeners with their daredevil bravery. Their mix of raw energy and restrained finesse as they entwine their voices into incredibly tight high and low harmonies while playing a busker’s orchestra of instruments, combined with their flair for vivid storytelling, creates an effect so dramatic, it almost leaves you drained. “After the Storm” gathers strength with every note, every pause — and just when it seems as if it couldn’t gain any more momentum, they break into an a cappella finish. Jesus, it’s powerful — even more so because they’re singing about survival and hope amid the ruins. And you can hear the fun they have with tracks such as “Coping Mechanism,” on which they conjure Fats Domino, and “Mary Ann & One-Eyed Dan,” a sweet melody on which Hearst again evokes Debbie Reynolds (as she did in *O’ Be Joyful’s* “Carnival”). Just like the couple who made it, this album oozes charm. If you don’t love it immediately, listen again. Like a sometimes boisterous Southern uncle, it could take a minute to grab you. But it will. — LYNNE MARGOLIS



MICKY & THE MOTORCARS
Hearts From Above
www.mickyandthemotorcars.com

It’s hard to call it a surprise when a band that’s been cranking out really good music for years manages to do themselves and their fans one better and put out a record one could fairly call *great*. But in a Texas country-rock scene where even the best artists run the risk of being mistaken for one another to the untrained ear, it’s heartening to see a semi-veteran band grab that extra gear and make an album without a skippable track or false-ringing line to be found. Check out the near-cinematic swoop of the title track to *Hearts From Above* if you ever wondered how to profess true love without getting your boots stuck in sap. It’s a trick that Micky & the Motorcars pull off again in “My Girl Now” and “Once in a Lifetime Girl,” breezier but no less sincere. There’s always been a bit of biker-bar edge to the Motorcars, but unlike too many artists in various modern genres, there’s also a respect for the women that populate their songs; a three-dimensional love interest has a way of turning a solid tune into an immensely relatable one, especially in the hands of a writer who’s coming into his own as well as Micky Braun. Even the ones that did him or brother Gary Braun wrong (“Hurt Again,” “You Led Me the Wrong Way”) and the propositions turned down (“Southbound Street”) still get at least a gentlemanly nod on the way out of the door — and a hell of a tune to be remembered by. There’s even some adept stabs at anthems both melancholy (“From Where the Sun No Longer Stands”) and uplifting (the indelibly building, Springsteenesque “Tonight We Ride”) that aim for something beyond the travails of one’s personal life and attain it. Gary brings the texture, as reliably as always, on harmonies, mandolin, harmonica etc., and new bandmates Joe Fladger, Bobby Paugh, and Dustin Schaefer never let on that they haven’t been in on this sound all along. If you weren’t already sold on Micky & the Motorcars by now, this would be a great time to get in on it, too. — MIKE ETHAN MESSICK

Read about something in **LoneStarMusic** you’re dying to hear?

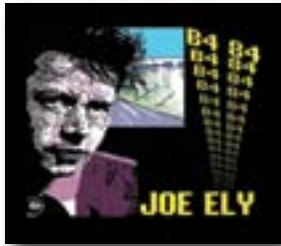
Find it at LoneStarMusic.com, the Great Americana Record Store — your source for Americana, Texas, & Red Dirt CDs, Vinyl, T-shirts and more.

Be sure to “Like” us on Facebook (www.facebook.com/LoneStarMusic) for special deals & ticket offers!



LONESTARMUSIC.COM

202-0 university drive | san marcos, tx 78666



JOE ELY
B4 84
Rack 'Em Records

File this between “ahead of its time” and “better late than never.” Way back in 1983, Joe Ely took advantage of a overdue break from the road to don his hobbyist hat and tinker around with his newly acquired Apple II computer, a primitive Roland 808 drum machine, and an even more primitive (but at the time revolutionary) Alpha Centari music sequencer. Together with guitarist/keyboard player Mitch Watkins and later a couple of other musician friends, he began painstakingly assembling one of the first albums ever recorded with the technology; “You’d have to load a floppy disc for each part of a song, like each 30 seconds,” he recalled in an interview in 2011. When he was finished, he took the tracks to his label at the time, MCA, thinking he had his next record in the can. But the label balked and insisted he start again from scratch with a full band in a proper studio environment, resulting in his 1984 album, *Hi Re’s*. Twenty years later, it remains the only one of Ely’s MCA-era albums that’s never been officially released (domestically, at least) on CD or even as a download. Fortunately, Ely held onto his “garage” tapes, and now, with the release of *B4 84* on his own Rack ‘Em Records label, we can finally hear the album he wanted to release in the first place.

So how does it sound? Pretty damn great, actually. One assumes that Ely, still a computer and home studio buff all these years later, did some degree of punch-up work using more modern hardware and software; the mastering, at the very least, packs a satisfying wallop. But the integrity of the original tracks shines through, and it’s little surprise that that old Roland holds up a lot better than the long-expired gated drums heard all over *Hi Res*. The track lists aren’t identical: missing are a few *Hi Res* songs including the pre-flamenco-era “Letter to Laredo,” replaced with tracks like the previously unreleased “You Got the Broken Heart” and an early crack at “My Baby Thinks She’s French.” But the original, superior versions of the three best songs from *Hi Res* are all here: “Imagine Houston,” a steamy, surrealist slice of New Wave noir; the twitchy, jumpy “What’s Shakin’ Tonight,” still one of the coolest singles of Ely’s career; and, of course, “Cool Rockin’ Loretta.” At a mere 4 minutes long, the song’s just a tease on *B4 84* compared to the epic statement it makes in a live setting, but still ... “My, my, my, ain’t she *fine*!” — **RICHARD SKANSE**



STURGILL SIMPSON
Metamodern Sounds in Country Music
High Top Mountain Records

“A picture is worth a thousand words,” sings Sturgill Simpson, “but a word ain’t worth a dime.” But what’s a song worth? In the case of “Voices” — and every other song on his *Metamodern Sounds in Country Music* — the answer is *every bit* of the heaps of praise that the Kentucky native has garnered since the album’s release in May. A modern-day Waylon Jennings, the next great outlaw country singer, a true breath of fresh air ... it ain’t really hyperbole if it’s true, and Simpson’s sophomore masterpiece backs it all up in spades. *Metamodern Sounds in Country Music* really does harken back the outlaw sound of Waylon, Willie, Billy Joe and others. Traditional country is the bedrock here from start to finish. But the way he colors his songs with striking psychedelic flourishes both sonically and lyrically prove Simpson is by no means just an imitator of his heroes; true to the promise of the album’s name, he isn’t afraid to boldly move the music forward. But the contrast between the way *he* blends the past and present into something new and the way the hip-hopping bro-country brigade ruling the airwaves attempts the same is profound. His lyrics and themes set him apart from that crowd as well. The trucks that show up in Simpson’s songs (“Long White Line”) are utilitarian 18-wheelers, as opposed to souped-up status symbols. Women are revered as inspirations of true love or genuine heartbreak rather than praised for their body parts or party game. When he sings about drugs or alcohol, he’s not bringing them to a tailgate or fraternity bash; he’s using them to soak up and hide the struggles of every day life and the weariness of living on the road (“Life of Sin.”) And when he calls on the Big Guy Upstairs, he’s not pandering to the market-tested right-wing of the mainstream-country-buying public, but rather sincerely aiming for spiritual understanding and forgiveness. Regardless of whether or not he wins the Americana Music Association’s Emerging Artist of the Year award he’s nominated for in September, he’s already made one of the best records of 2014 — and seems to have set himself up for a long career making gritty, emotional country songs for years to come. — **ADAM DAWSON**



JOHN HIATT
The Terms of My Surrender
New West Records

If all were right with the world, John Hiatt would one day sit in the Kennedy Center mezzanine with a medal dangling around his neck, flanked by a president and grinning like crazy as a parade of superstars honored him. The odds are ridiculously thin, but it’s not for lack of talent. It’s the measuring scales — units sold, statues collected — that keep him out of contention for such accolades. Regardless, he’s still one of the finest singer-songwriters of the last several decades — as *Terms of My Surrender* reaffirms. Full of down-home blues, its relaxed grooves sidle up to you — and stick. “Nothin’ I Love” drips with that snaky blooz he does so well; “Baby’s Gonna Kick” and the gutbucket “Face of God” show off his harmonica prowess; “Long Time Comin’” carries quiet power; “Old People” brings the laughs. And “Wind Don’t Have to Hurry” brings the gravity, via lynching imagery that suggests allegories to present-day issues. The title tune unspools at a leisurely pace, sweetly sketching the story of a man who’s weathered much, but he’s still got love — and he’ll fight off the reaper to hang onto it. Hiatt lets his expressive voice scrape more, but it’s still supple, and when he hits a high falsetto note, those self-deprecating claims about his aging bod and fading faculties sail out the window. His sterling wit, enormous chops and uncanny ability to make even the seemingly silliest or difficult lyric serve his purpose are as sharp as ever. — **LYNNE MARGOLIS**



BETTYSOO
When We’re Gone
www.bettysoo.com

In her nine years as a recording artist, Austin’s BettySoo has made albums more stylistically varied (2007’s delightful *Little Tiny Secrets*) and more self-consciously hard-edged (2009’s Gurf Morlix-produced *Heat Sin Water Skin*) — but she’s never made a record more unremittingly, deeply moving than *When We’re Gone*. Co-produced with Brian Standefer, whose haunting cello underpins and enhances nearly every track, it’s an album steeped in melancholia and somber reflection but illuminated throughout by the redemptive beauty of BettySoo’s voice — an instrument of striking purity and control arguably unrivaled by anything in the folk world this side of Judy Collins. Her melodies and lyrics throughout are equally arresting, painting vivid still lifes of quiet desperation (“100 Different Ways of Being Alone,” “The Things She Left Town With”), terms of endearment (“When We’re Gone”), and unfathomable sadness (the devastating “Nothing Heals a Broken Heart,” which opens with the Jesus-wept line, “We took your seat out of the car after a couple of weeks/But your room is still unchanged ...”). Most stirring of all though, is “Josephine,” an empathetic portrait of an aspiring (in more ways than one) songbird in which BettySoo sings the line “like an angel singing a lover’s prayer” exactly like, well, *that*. Absolutely guaranteed to take your breath away. — **RICHARD SKANSE**



THE MASTERSONS
Good Luck Charm
New West Records

The biggest compliment you could give the Mastersons in a review would be to not even mention their recent time in Steve Earle’s band. Oops! But now that that’s out of the way, put him out of your mind and consider the Mastersons’ second album on its own terms, as it definitely merits. To call the duo’s music “Americana” or “alt-country” is reductive, even if Eleanor Whitmore’s violin fiddles about and there’s a solid roots-music underpinning to all that she and Chris Masterson do. *Good Luck Charm* is above all a smart and imaginative pop record that seamlessly rocks, gets all country, and masterfully shows that what really counts in making distinctive music is less what you do and more what you do with it. And unlike way too many acts that draw from the country style and soil, the Mastersons handily dodge and defy the usual (and so overworked) cliches with, say, the oblique compositional angles and harmony singing on “It’s Not Like Me” that’s far more Buckingham and Nicks than Gram and Emmylou. Then they follow it with the kickin’ shuffle “Anywhere But Here,” which takes some nifty left turns outside the usual spins on the honky-tonk dancefloor. Every track here has those truly creative touches and sticks to your cerebral hit parade like Super Glue, making *Good Luck Charm* stand out as one of the most irresistibly fresh and, indeed, charming records of the year. — **ROB PATTERSON**



ROBYN LUDWICK
Little Rain
www.robynludwick.com

Robyn Ludwick does not trade in good times and sentimentality. She writes and sings hard songs about hardened souls (mostly women) gritting their teeth and guarding their hearts against the even harder realities of life, love, and circumstance. *Little Rain*, Ludwick’s fourth album and second produced by Gurf Morlix, finds her navigating through a rocky emotional landscape of estranged family relationships (“Mama”), strained — or at least sorely tested — love affairs and marriages (“She’ll Get the Roses,” “Heartache”), and even incest (“Longbow, OK”). But it’s resilience, not defeat, that defines her songs most — not because Ludwick or the characters she writes about are all tough-as-nails badasses, but because it’s just human instinct to survive. Usually in her songs, that means facing obstacles and fears head-on, but she’s not averse to a little escape now and then, either. In “Somethin’ Good,” the album’s most up-beat, defiantly exuberant track, she flips the bird to love and all its baggage (“Why do we always have to need someone?/Tell me somethin’ good about love”) and chooses carefree, guitar-powered abandon instead: “Give me rock ‘n’ roll, I want rock ‘n’ roll until I die.” It may only offer fleeting relief in the big picture, but what a rush. — **RICHARD SKANSE**



DALE WATSON
The Truckin’ Sessions Trilogy
Red River Entertainment

Lord knows there’s a lotta truckin’ songs in the classic country cannon, but it takes a true believer — some might say fanatic — of the genre to compile three discs’ worth of *original* classic truckin’ songs. Climb into the cab of Dale Watson’s *The Truckin’ Sessions Trilogy*, which hitches 1998’s *The Truckin’ Sessions* to 2009’s *Vol. 2* and throws in a brand new *Vol. 3* for good measure, and you can’t help but marvel at the self-styled “Ameripolitan” artist’s long-haul commitment to his diesel-fumed muse. Sure, the three discs are pretty much indistinguishable from one another, each a jukebox shuffle of tradition-grounded honky-tonkers about truckers, truck stops, trucks barreling down the highway and trucks broken down on the side of the road. Reinventing the proverbial wheel has never been Watson’s agenda. But the fact that the Telecaster licks are just as hot (especially on the Jerry Reed-worthy “Lugnut Larry”), the puns just as fun (“It’s Been a Long Truckin’ Day,” “Phillip at the Station”), and Watson’s enthusiasm just as caffeinated all the way through *Vol. 3* as on the first two volumes proves just how quailed to the proverbial “T” he is for the job. — **RICHARD SKANSE**



Old Crow Medicine Show
Remedy
ATO Records

Fans of Old Crow Medicine Show didn't have to hold their breath for too long when their string-band heroes went on hiatus back in 2011: The following year's *Carry Me Back* assured that the Show would go on, and the band has been working steady and firing on all their wonderfully rustic cylinders ever since. The revered outfit's latest, *Remedy*, holds up admirably when compared to anything they've done before, offering the perfect combination of barn-burners and genteel slow-pickers. The crew even bagged another co-write with Bob Dylan, as they did with their signature song, "Wagon Wheel" — though the country-gold of the new "Sweet Amarillo" wasn't an accidental collaboration as "Wagon Wheel" famously was. "Mean Enough World" might be the quintessential OCMS tune, as it's packed with a quick-tempo, train-whistle harmonica, quicker banjo, and old-timey lingo such as "quit your cussin' and carryin' on." The waltzing, pastoral roots compositions are all well-crafted, but the porch-stompers steal the show every time. "Brushy Mountain Conjugal Trailer" is a wild, right-to-the-dirty-point tune and the fiery fiddles and drunken call-and-response shouts of "8 Dogs 8 Banjos" beg for anyone to dosey-doe with the person nearest to them. Just don't call this a comeback: OCMS has been kicking grass for years. — **KELLY DEARMORE**



The Felice Brothers
Favorite Waitress
Dualtone

The Felice Brothers from Woodstock, N.Y., haven't ever — and likely will never — be accused of being an outfit overly concerned with crafting the tightest arrangements or sticking technically close to a precise style. While the Brothers' ramshackle 2008 self-titled album rightfully gained them initial notoriety, the group, led by vocalist and primary songwriter Ian Felice, has been recording and touring since 2005. Since becoming a favorite on the festival circuit, the Felice Brothers have been insanely unpredictable, producing some great and not-as-great moments over their past three releases. But the thoroughly enjoyable, jangly new record, *Favorite Waitress*, the follow-up to the oddball sonic pot-luck that was 2011's electro-tinged *Celebration, Florida*, is arguably their most cohesive album to date. It's a fun record, too, and one with a definite Springsteen-inspired smirk on its face. A somber piano washes over the delicate yet rough-hewn "No Trouble," carrying with it a distinctly "Thunder Road" earnestness; and the nod to New Jersey's favorite son is hammered home even more in "Saturday Night," with possibly the band's most whimsical lyrical turn ever. "I ain't the Boss, but I'm his illegitimate son," Ian's raspy croak groans, "'cuz baby, I was born to run." Indeed, this band was born to run around all expectations. — **KELLY DEARMORE**



AARON STEPHENS
Hard Times Straight Lines
www.aaronstephensmusic.com

The Hill Country has been abuzz over Aaron Stephens for a couple of years now, and his new *Hard Times Straight Lines* is a result of the outpouring of support for his Kickstarter campaign. The buzz is deserved, too. Stephens' instrumental chops are on fine display right from the start, with the opening "Yesterday's Favorite" jamming like Robert Randolph and Stevie Wonder, and the second track, "Shadow," haunting with licks akin to B.B. King. He's got playful pop instincts, too: "Zzzz" is a Maroon 5-esque bouncer, and the swaying and sunshine continues with "Do Something." But *Hard Times* is also a very heartfelt and personal album, and often times very dark, too, as shown in songs like the distant and ethereal "Hardest Battles" and "Sad Excuse." But then redemption comes with the swells of "Fighter," and the album's most poetic track, "Roses," finds a balance between despair and hope: "So much hurt out on these streets/soaked from rain and tears/kind of makes me wonder/has God been crying here?/I look down on the concrete and see something red/I see a pair of roses growing there." And in the closing "Curtain Call," he declares, "I am not afraid/That's how I was raised." This really is a cohesive album with a message to share, the kind you can just push play on and enjoy casually all the way through but that reveals more and more the deeper you listen. Between the influences and personal touches, Stephens captures a lot here, and altogether, it's a fantastically smooth pill to swallow. — **CODY OXLEY**



RICH O'TOOLE
Jaded
PTO Records

More so than any other young artist on the Texas country — sorry, "indy" country — scene, Rich O'Toole seems to have gone out of his way in recent years to make himself an easy target for critical (and even peer) potshots; between crashing stages, pimping songs about drunk girls in summer pearls, trolling for bootie on Twitter, and most egregiously of all, subtitling his last album "a Manifesto," he's practically begged for it. But give the guy due credit, because on his fifth album, *Jaded*, O'Toole takes a long overdue, giant stride forward in artistic maturity. His voice and way with an irresistible hook have always been his strongest suits, and this time around, he finally puts both to good use on songs that sound like he's got more on his mind (and heart) than just getting laid. Punchy, earnest country rock anthems like "Jaded," "Take My Heart," "Krenek Tap Road," and "Uncle Hank" prove that while he may still be a ways away from his beloved Springsteen (as most folks are), he's got the chops and confidence of classic John Cougar — or, for a more contemporary reference point, prime Keith Urban — down pat. Later, he gets a bit too earnest for his own good on the heartfelt but rather mawkish "I Thank God," but recovers nicely with "Missing Minnesota" and the terrific "Never Gonna Quit," by far the best ballad he's produced to date. And if his album-closing cover of Tim Hardin's "Reason to Believe" has nothing on Rod Stewart's definitive version from *Every Picture Tells a Story*, it's not for lack of trying. Another solid couple of albums in *this* direction down the line, and O'Toole could very well end up proving a lot of jaded naysayers wrong. Believe that. — **RICHARD SKANSE**



BRANDON JENKINS
I Stand Alone
Red River Entertainment

Brandon Jenkins is an artist unafraid. As impactful of a statement as last year's remarkably vulnerable *Through the Fire* was, it's clear he still had a lot more to open up about and wasn't about to leave his loyal fanbase waiting too long for another heart-to-scarred-heart chat. *I Stand Alone* is as organically beautiful an album as any artist from Texas or Oklahoma is likely to produce in 2014. That title's no lie, either: although he did co-write a couple of the album's 12 songs with others, every track here features nothing but Jenkins' own acoustic guitar, harmonica, and impeccably warm baritone. And truly, that's all they need. While Jenkins, a touring veteran of well over a decade, can burn a stage down with the best of them, the tunes where his challenging thoughts command center stage are the difference makers here. Songs such as the harmonica-enriched "Until December," the gut-wrenching "Perfect World," and the gorgeous, gently plucked "This Road I Travel" showcase Jenkins at his absolute best: sharing his hard-earned life lessons and tortured-soul reflections with intimate authority and absolute trust in both his own voice and his listeners. — **KELLY DEARMORE**



Photo by Joel Calvin



KELLEY MICKWEE
You Used to Live Here
www.kelleymickwee.com

Thrust onto some of the bigger stages in Americana music for a few years as a member of the Trishas, Kelley Mickwee has smartly opted to spiral off with her own momentum instead of waiting around to see if the band's post *High, Wide & Handsome* hiatus holds. Lovely as a four-part harmony can be, there's much to be said for putting a voice like Mickwee's front and center and amicably daring the supporting cast to keep up. She doesn't overplay her hand on *You Used to Live Here*, offering up a slim but satisfying seven-song sampler of what she does best. "I come from the cotton, I come from the mud/I know what that river can do when it floods," she asserts on the killer lead-off track, "River Girl," and it epitomizes that timeless blend of humility and wisdom that makes for great country music. She's not as faithful to the country sound as she is the spirit, though: the prominent R&B organs lean hard into Southern soul territory, and there's a strong, smoky whiff of low-key blues to darker tracks like "Hotel Jackson" and "Dark Side of Town." Mickwee's certainly got a soul-singer's pipes, but fortunately for the material she's also got a folk-singer's reverence for the words: it serves fantastically on numbers like the John Fullbright-penned waltz "Blameless" and the cheery Owen Temple co-write, "Beautiful Accidents," shedding some sunshine on great lyrics without blinding the listener with too much vocal pyrotech. Less is more, and Mickwee's solo debut is "less" where it counts and more than satisfying. — **MIKE ETHAN MESSICK**



MARK JUNGERS
I'll See You Again
American Rural Records



MARY GAUTHIER
Trouble & Love
In the Black Records



CORB LUND
Counterfeit Blues
New West Records



JOHN EDWARD BAUMANN
High Plains Alchemy
www.baumannsongs.com

A Minnesota native who drifted down to Austin and then a bit further south, Hill Country folk singer Mark Jungers has unassumingly built up a mighty catalog of original work since his still-stunning 2000 solo debut, *Black Limousine*. He’s working a niche within a niche, to be sure — folks who dig Robert Earl Keen and John Prine but want a deeper peek into literate, soulful modern folk would do well to start with Jungers — and seems to acknowledge it with his approach by shrinking things down to a spare-room studio vibe. It served him well on 2011’s appealingly swampy *More Like a Good Dog Than a Bad Cat*, and it strikes the right tone again on this relatively autumnal, even-more-laconic-than-usual set of songs. Thematically, *I’ll See You Again* play’s out like a veritable concept album, with the jilted lover of “I’ll Be Home” forsaking said house (“Don’t Want to Live Here Anymore”), ruminating over reconciliation (“Do You Still Care”) and the heartaches of history both local (“Johnson’s Farm”) and personal (“Plywood & Strings”) before giving in to a sort of stoic, resilient loneliness (the closing “Ran Out of Tears,” perhaps the record’s finest moment). And though Jungers’ drawl might be more *Fargo* than Fort Worth, it hits home just as surely as his better-known peers. — **MIKE ETHAN MESSICK**

[LONESTAR MUSIC](#)

For the last decade-and-a-half, Mary Gauthier has proven herself time and again to be a keen chronicler of the conundrums ginned up by love. But what distinguishes her latest, the very fine *Trouble & Love*, from her previous recordings is a shift from getting fired-up by the contradictions and frustrations that love creates into a sort of acceptance. On the opening track, she observes that “it’s out of your control when a woman goes cold,” then follows it with a meditation on how “I can’t tell false from true.” But as spelled out by the title of another song, “How You Learn to Live Alone,” the acceptance she sings of here ultimately suggests more strength than surrender or resignation. Bigger themes aside, though, it’s Gauthier’s mastery of the small, scene-setting lyrical moment pungent with meaning that really sets her apart as a writer; in the title track, she notes how “the desk clerk don’t look up when I walk by anymore,” and describes a blizzard with the vivid naturalism of “snow is falling on snow that fell on snow.” And although the tempos on all eight tracks of this slow-burning ember of an album never pace faster than a walk, she still rocks the listener with simple yet potent melodies, a voice electric with emotion, and the wisdom that comes from life’s lessons truly learned. — **ROB PATTERSON**

[LONESTAR MUSIC](#)

For a Canadian country act, Corb Lund and the Hurtin’ Albertans sure have a good grasp of cowboy poetry and talkin’ Delta blues spot-welded to a slightly unhinged take on Western swing crossed with Bakersfield country and — if it wasn’t obvious before they opted to record *Counterfeit Blues* at the revered Sun Studios — old Memphis rockabilly. Given the enviable task of sorting through the band’s back catalog for their most distinctive and urgent songs for a once-in-a-lifetime recording opportunity, Lund and the band come up aces all around with clever machismo tales like “Truck Got Stuck” and “Five Dollar Bill” that transcend the approach with engagingly specific wordplay and Lund’s likeably glib delivery. No one-trick pony, he can also shift to a darker, even prophetic gear for a minor-key growl like “Truth Comes Out” or a smart-assed Bob Dylan approximation on the title track. There’s elements of Robert Earl Keen’s dark, wordy wit and Fred Eaglesmith’s humbling authenticity in Lund’s arsenal, resulting in songs like “Good Copenhagen” and “Roughest Neck Around” that feel like the internal score of a downtrodden, wisecracking, tough-as-nails hero in a semi-modern Western flick. With a high rehash ratio, it’d be easy to argue this isn’t an essential record for the Hurtin’ Albertans. But the uninitiated would do well to start here, and more seasoned fans are bound to want it anyhow — and probably love it, too. — **MIKE ETHAN MESSICK**

[LONESTAR MUSIC](#)

Minimal hype can be a bonus — no expectations means no pressure — but it can also be a detriment when music as solid, original, and spirited as John Edward Baumann’s risks going unheard. Facing no more expectations than the average earnest Austin alt-country act, Baumann writes as if he had a Grammy in his back pocket and a rep to protect. Bringing to mind the homey, detailed wisdom of a Bruce Robison or Max Stalling, Baumann has a knack for plugging into a place or scenario (the boomtown optimism of “Eagle Ford,” the coastal humidity of “Gulf Moon”) and populating it with vivid notions that get a tossed-off lirie here, a whole verse there, perhaps a bridge if he opts to get that complicated. Produced with sympathetic grace by Corby Schaub, ruminative beauties like “Space & Light” get all the earthy gravity they deserve and relative goofs like “Dogs” get that whiff of sincerity that makes the joke funny more than once. Bonus points, of course, for using the word “unwieldy” properly in a song and appropriating “West Texas Alchemy” as a not-entirely-explained but entirely dig-worthy metaphor. In its own modest way, this is an unforgettable record. — **MIKE ETHAN MESSICK**

[LONESTAR MUSIC](#)



COWBOY JACK CLEMENT
For Once and For All
I.R.S. Nashville



JANA POCHOP
Throats Are Quarries
Patient Grasshopper Music



MATT HARLAN
Raven Hotel
Berkalin Records

For more than five decades Cowboy Jack Clement was Nashville’s Jesus of cool and Music City’s direct link to the magic of Sun Studios, where he served as right-hand man to Sam Phillips and discovered Jerry Lee Lewis. His Cowboy Arms Hotel and Recording Spa was a required stop — and serious hang — for anyone in country music and beyond who was interested in receiving tutelage in genuine C&W artistry and making music for its own sake. His passing in August 2013 at age 82 was truly the end of era. Given his revered and beloved stature, it’s no surprise that what was only his third album, recorded not long before his death, drew some 25 artists of various star levels (too numerous to list here, but let’s just say everyone from Bobby Bare to Emmylou Harris to Vince Gill to T Bone Burnett to Dan Auerbach to Del McCoury) and a good dozen or so master studio players to play and sing behind him. Of course, that many cooks in the kitchen is often a recipe for disaster, which makes the real surprise about *For Once and For All* the fact that it’s not a trainwreck. Instead, it’s a sweetly seamless and organically rolling collection of 12 of Cowboy Jack’s songs, including oft-recorded hits you may have heard before like “Miller’s Cave,” “Got Leaving on Her Mind,” and “Just a Girl I Used to Know.” Clement’s voice is dead center and well atop the subtly inspired instrumental mix, just as it should be, allowing his deceptively relaxed as well as warm and friendly vocals to reveal his ingenious and emotionally potent phrasing and delivery. The hardwood strength of his compositions and his keen aim for expressing the heart and soul of his lyrics in his singing attest to his wisdom about what makes country that’s classic. And the end result is, indeed, a classic country album — and one that bids fond and touching farewell to Nashville’s most soulful music maker from the day he arrived there in 1959. — **ROB PATTERSON**

[LONESTAR MUSIC](#)

In San Marcos-based singer-songwriter Jana Pochop’s inventive mind, throats are the quarries from which we mine the words that build solid relationships. While most of us cough up fragile and rather pedestrian sandstones, Pochop has rich veins of fine Carrara marble to draw upon, as the five robust and beautifully sculpted songs on her *Throats Are Quarries* EP demonstrate. Produced by Daniel Barrett, with whom she also worked on the first two legs of her impressive three-EP trilogy (*The Early Year* and *For & Against*), Pochop’s latest release serves as another solid foundational building block to her burgeoning career. “When Your Soul Leaves Your Body,” the heavenly anthemic, alleluia-graced opening track, finds Pochop pondering letting go and living on. Her sensuous, strong-suited vocals — both sweet and determined — are as captivating as her perceptive yet enigmatic ways on “Throw You Forward” (“My fist is small and mighty, same substance as my heart/one tries to open kindly, one always keeps its guard.”) There is much talk and confessional singing here of expressing worry and seeking sanctuary. “Deepest Fear,” with its juxtaposing of Pochop’s bouncy banjitar and Barrett’s slashing electric guitar work, expresses her concern that “my deepest fear is that my fears are not that deep, they are just simple things.” Susan Gibson lends backing vocals to “Middle of My Chest,” with its bridge that neatly sums up what seems a recurring theme throughout the EP: “I’ve got people I could love but the fear that I’ll get it wrong keeps coursing through my veins like a ticking time bomb.” Fortunately, Pochop doesn’t let that fear get in the way of making great music: quite the contrary, she sounds positively emboldened by it. — **D.C. BLOOM**

[LONESTAR MUSIC](#)

Matt Harlan is a regular at the historic Anderson Fair venue in his native Houston, where quite often established acts spend time trying to figure out his guitar backstroke playing style. His voice is weathered but youthful, wizened yet playful, and he could narrate at a Morgan Freeman level. But songwriting is his greatest gift, dating back to his first album’s “You’re Just Drunk,” a ballad comparing late-night barfly love interests to “sleeping semi trailers and oil refinery lights.” On his third album, *Raven Hotel*, his lyrics again set sail on a sea of metaphors as he records the travelogue of a relationship. Fittingly, he’s joined on the record by his wife and fellow singer, Rachel Jones, who is featured on “Riding With the Wind” and also provides harmony vocals on “Slow Moving Train.” But on “We Never Met,” Harlan apologizes for his failures as a mate: “If you don’t offer no forgiveness/It’s a game nobody wins.” In the title track, he sings about running into an estranged friend, noting how “the second hand was twitching when I asked about his family” and “the guitar’s on the bed like some preacher at confession.” “Old Allen Road,” another standout, documents a lifetime affected by a tragic night — or an attempt at being unaffected by it. “Burgundy and Blue,” is a bit of a strange bird in the flock, what with its jazzy piano and saxophone, but the lyrics suggest a reflection on the previously noted interactions in the promise of a couple’s upcoming nuptials. Whether taken as a whole or digested song by song or even line by line, *Raven Hotel* offers further proof that Harlan may well be one of the most under-appreciated young songwriters in Texas. Hopefully that changes soon. — **CODY OXLEY**

[LONESTAR MUSIC](#)

superfly's

lone star music emporium

Records, CDs, Gifts, Artist Merchandise

Custom T-Shirt Printing (in-store)

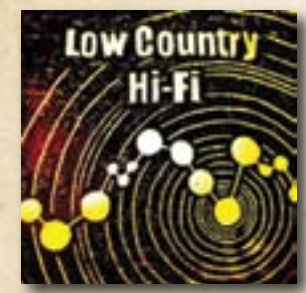
Live performances in-store
with free ZiegenBock samples!

www.lonestarmusic.com
facebook.com/SuperflysMusic
facebook.com/LoneStarMusic
512-392-8030

15% off any turntable instock



202C University Dr.
San Marcos,
Texas 78666
SUPERFLYS



LEW CARD
Low Country Hi-Fi
It's Hard to Be Lew Card

If you count Jason Eady and Sturgill Simpson amongst your favorite songwriters of the moment, go ahead and make room on that list for Austin's Lew Card. Card, originally from Tennessee, fits right in with the best of the neo-traditional country movement in Americana music; his style is all stroll, lemonade afternoons, and songs that cover Ulyssian distances in small steps. His first full-length release, *Low Country Hi-Fi*, is a brief venture of nine songs that play like a garage carpenter's project: rustic and simple, but brimming with personality and pride. His songwriting chops are admirable, even when traveling well-worn paths in songs like "Let's Tie One On" ("My hearts on fire and yours is blue," he sings, "so let's tie one on baby tonight, just me and you.") "Dreaming of Josephine" could've been penned or recorded by any of the legendary artists your parents recommended to you, with even Card's vocals evoking Bob Dylan as he catalogues his dreams: "I had the one about a winning streak/picking pedal steel with Sneaky Pete ... but tonight I'm dreaming of my Josephine." The album closer, "Nothing to Prove," channels The Band's "Ophelia," with twang worthy of Levon Helm himself. The instrumentation throughout is also top-notch, as is to be expected with players the caliber of Cindy Cashdollar on hand. And even if *Low Country Hi-Fi* could have used a little more "pick up the tempo" energy here or there — it's a bit slow overall and leaves you hanging in places for anthemic fiddle breakdowns that never come — it passes the river float/road trip play-the-whole-way-through test with flying colors. — **CODY OXLEY**



CLAIRE DOMINGUE
The Shape of Sounds
www.clairedomingue.com

Just a couple of albums into a presumably tough career trying to distinguish herself from the crowd of young Austin singer-songwriters, Claire Domingue has already made it clear that she has something more going for her than *just* talent: she has class. The benefit of the doubt is that she exemplifies it in real life, because her songs speak to kindness and dignity in a world that could use a little more of both. It's easy to gravitate to the well-drawn protagonists in songs like "In Her Way" and "After Everything" that endeavor to let go in love and make some compassionate sense of it all ("It might be easier to stay/But it's not better" is gonna hit a nerve or two out there, along with a lot of Domingue's lines). *The Shape of Sounds'* small budget is occasionally evident, but Domingue comes off like the creative inhabitant that makes a modest home into a culturally offbeat palace by covering some classical piano here, singing in French there ("Quelquefois"), and bringing in some chamber-music strings when the guitars aren't enough. It's offbeat and not for the cynical, but highly recommended for the rest. — **MIKE ETHAN MESSICK**



LARS ATTERMANN
Shanghaied Into the Lonely Sea
Nice Man Music

Even if you've never heard Lars Attermann before, you've heard the voice. Well, you'll think you have, anyway. Because the Danish native sounds so much like Leonard Cohen channeling Johnny Cash that you wouldn't be surprised to discover tracks called "Halleluah, I'll Walk the Line" or "Bird In a Ring of Wire" on Attermann's *Shanghaied Into the Lonely Sea*. What you actually will discover, however, is a unique Northern European poet and storyteller whose brief stints at the House of Songs in Austin helped create a collection of diverse and unique songs that should find him a home — and following — here in Texas and beyond because they're centered on the most universal of themes: reflection and dissolution. Produced by Will Sexton and recorded in Buda, Texas at Screen Door Music studio, *Shanghaied*, Attemann's second release and first in English, has that "larger-than-life" cinematic expansiveness and slightly off-kilter eeriness that one would expect to hear on a Quentin Tarantino soundtrack. On the opening "Into the Lonely Sea," Attermann issues indictments to those who manipulate both our personal and political affairs and offers — as well the hope of redemption for those who succumb to such ways. "Close to You," a haunting co-write with Sexton, features mournful guitar licks and Attermann's desperate vocals pleading with a receding memory in the wake of creeping dementia: "It feels like a funeral, where is the one I thought was watching over us?" And "Teardrop, Colorado," a co-write with Martin Jensen that features some top-shelf harp work from Ace Acevedo, warns the listener to stay far, far away from the places and people that will only bring anguish and pain ("She don't want your love, she only wants the brine.") That's a resonating message in any voice and for every language. — **D.C. BLOOM**



Photo Courtesy of the Jayhawks



THE JAYHAWKS
Sound of Lies (reissue), *Smile* (reissue), *Rainy Day Music* (reissue)
American Recordings

There's a breed of longtime alt-country fan — and more than a few latecomers who've played catch-up, sorting through the genre's *No Depression*-chronicled '90s boom period for the essentials — who maintain that the Jayhawks peaked in 1995. That was the year that the Minneapolis band released their acclaimed *Tomorrow the Green Grass*, just before co-founder Mark Olson flew away to make records in the desert with his then-wife, Victoria Williams — leaving co-frontman Gary Louris and the rest of the band to stumble around in search of a new sound for more than a decade until Olson's return for 2011's *Mockingbird Time*, a record hailed at the time as the Jayhawks' long overdue comeback.

Buy into that line of thinking if you want, but know that it's nonsense. Steeped in the inimitable sound of Olson and Louris' vocal harmonies, *Tomorrow the Green Grass* and its 1992 predecessor, *Hollywood Town Hall*, both certainly hold up as classics of the alt-country golden era, but it was Olson's departure that really spurred the Jayhawks to spread their wings. The band's three albums with Louris at the helm — 1997's *Sound of Lies*, 2000's *Smile*, and 2003's *Rainy Day Music* — have all just been re-mastered and reissued, and if you somehow missed or ignored them the first time around, revelations abound.

Sound of Lies is the biggest *Achtung Baby*-level shocker of the bunch, with Louris and Co. (most of whom were around for the Olson years) cutting almost all ties to the band's folksy roots and diving headlong into swirling psychedelic rock, with song after raw-nerved song about tortured souls backed against the wall emboldened with Big Star-sized choruses and kaleidoscoping guitars. The whole album plays out like the Beatles' "I

Am the Walrus" writ large, with the cathartic chaos coming to a head in the nearly six-minute "Dying on the Vine" before the quiet but equally powerful comedown of "Bottomless Cup" (written and sung by drummer Tim O'Reagan) and the achingly pretty but crushingly sad, world-weary sigh of the closing title track.

True to its title, *Smile* offered a very literal "Break in the Clouds" — but not in sonic ambition. If anything, the choruses were even bigger, the wall-of-sound arrangements even grander, and the hooks ... well, they're merciless, and *everywhere*. The explosively catchy, carpe diem-charged "I'm Gonna Make You Love Me" was the single, but there's not a song on the album incapable of sticking in the head for days (and not in the bad kind of way, either.) Lyrically and thematically it doesn't quite go for the kill like its far darker predecessor, but the music alone on *Smile* will sweep you away; it's the most gorgeous record the Jayhawks have ever made.

Three years later, they returned with *Rainy Day Music*, scaling back on the soaring power-pop for a more stripped-down sensibility closer in spirit to their early-90s work. It's a good record, with a fistful of very fine songs (most notably "Stumbling Through the Dark," "Save It For a Rainy Day," and another stunner from O'Reagan, the John Lennon-esque "Don't Let the World Get in Your Way"); but in the wake of the far more adventurous and ultimately rewarding two albums that came before it, it still feels anticlimactic. In hindsight, the Jayhawks' eventual full retreat to the greener grass of yesterday with the return of prodigal son Olson a few years later was inevitable; having soared so high and far afield with *Sound of Lies* and as close to the sun as they could with *Smile*, there was no place left to go but back home again. — RICHARD SKANSE



TODD SNIDER
I Never Met a Story I Didn't Like: Mostly True Tall Tales
Da Capo Press

Anyone who's ever listened to a Todd Snider recording or witnessed him standing barefoot onstage knows his storytelling genius cannot be disputed. His gonzo-hip stream-of-consciousness stage patter and impeccable timing no doubt inspired more than a few *Moth Radio Hour* participants, and his wordplay-filled, simultaneously clever and moving tunes have set a high bar for singer-songwriters who aspire to entwine heart and humor into their work.

But no one could have guessed just how brilliantly it also translates into print. Snider's book, *I Never Met A Story I Didn't Like: Mostly True Tall Tales*, is not only one of the most charmingly witty memoirs to come down the literary pike in quite some time, it's also a really good read — as in actual page-turning prose. As a series of headshaking, laugh-out-loud tales from the trenches, it's the stuff of legend.

Snider claims he dictated all 90,000 words to his friend Peter Cooper, a journalist and fellow singer-songwriter. But no matter how it got on the page, Snider poured more than a little of his folk-country-rock soul into every drop of ink. He's always had the ability to see himself and his foibles with extraordinary clarity, despite his alleged stoner haze, and process it all with so much self-deprecating humor, it's practically a trademark.

Snider tells of having to follow songwriter Aaron Allen, who penned Willie Nelson's "Truth No. 1," during his first open-mic night at Cheatham Street Warehouse, then asking for the secret to becoming a better songwriter. Told he should live a life precarious enough to be able to pack up and move everything he owns in 15 minutes, Snider writes, "I tell you, it has taken a lot of discipline to keep my life as fucked up as it is. Not bragging, just saying." But the true confessions within these pages — the self-doubts, perceived failures, disappointments, people he's hurt, opportunities he sneezed on, the mistakes made, the drugs ... and the recoveries, reparations, kindnesses, the hard-won wisdom — add up to a deeply touching look at a man willing to stand naked and bravely own up to his shortcomings, while promising to do better.

Snider's love and appreciation for his mentors and people he admires — from Kent Finlay of Cheatham Street Warehouse and the late Bob Mercer to Jerry Jeff Walker, Jimmy Buffett, Garth Brooks, Darius Rucker, and Pamela Des Barres, some of whom have earned scorn despite (or because of) their success — is equally eye-opening. Snider's a fabulous defender of underdogs and the misperceived, immediately willing to offer the benefit of the doubt when others might not. And he still recognizes how special it is to get to hang around his heroes, like Kris Kristofferson, whom he writes about with such reverence, it makes us wish we could share these relationships. In a way, within these pages, we do. That's another aspect of Snider's gift for storytelling: He draws us in so completely, we feel like we're right there with him, hanging on every sage word. He's the fascinating friend we wish we had, regaling us with his exploits while delivering the most important lesson of all: honesty and humility matter far more than money or fame. And if you stick with the first two, you might even earn the rest. — LYNNE MARGOLIS



The Mastersons Cont. from page 42

committing to the living while you're in the process of doing it.

"The whole thing here is not about working a song to death," Masterson explains. "There's a line in the sand, a definite time and place you want to capture. Not the idea of a year and studios in three cities. It's the experience (of the music being made) that matters."

Experience is something they have aplenty. Prior to coming together as a musical duo (they married in 2009), Masterson and Whitmore were both seasoned veterans of the Americana and Texas music scenes. Masterson spent his teens playing the blues in Houston clubs before landing hired-gun gigs with acts as varied as Jack Ingram and Son Volt, while the Denton-born Whitmore grew up performing in a family band with her folk-singer dad, Alex, and sister Bonnie (now a solo singer-songwriter) before playing fiddle and violin on dozens of album sessions for the likes of Bruce Robison, Slaid Cleaves, and Shooter Jennings.

After their current run with Earle ends, the Mastersons will continue on the road with Del Amitri's Justin Currie, as well with dates on their own supporting *Good Luck Charm*. They keep busy even when they're not playing, too; although they're signed to New West Records and have what they call "a great team in place" helping them out, they can't quit their DIY roots. In addition to staying on top of an endless stream of promotional duties and consciously tending to all sorts of loose-ends tying, they recently spent part of a day off in Boulder, Colo., to go to the home of *E-Town* producer Nick Foster in order to listen to a vinyl test pressing of their record. Between the two of them, no detail is too small to go overlooked.

"I don't know if Eleanor and I would've been solo artists on our own," Masterson says, "but we're in this together. Putting a record out is kinda like being in labor. It just goes on and on, and you have to keep pushing."

Photo by Joseph Llanes

100.1 AUSTIN - 103.1 DRIPPING SPRINGS - 99.1 FREDERICKSBURG - WWW.KDRP.ORG - ALL SMARTPHONE APPS

100.1 AUSTIN - 103.1 DRIPPING SPRINGS - 99.1 FREDERICKSBURG - WWW.KDRP.ORG - ALL SMARTPHONE APPS

KDRP

Solar Powered Americana Radio

THE HOME OF

RECKLESS KELLY | THE TRISHAS | GARY CLARK JR | TOWNES VAN ZANDT
SHOVELS AND ROPE | WILLIE NELSON | JASON ISBELL | SONS OF FATHERS
GUY CLARK | JOHNNY CASH | STATESBORO REVIEW | BAND OF HEATHENS
HAYES CARLL | SLAID CLEAVES | SHINYRIBS | COURT YARD HOUNDS | TOM PETTY

TEXAS RADIO LIVE:
2/26: BETH LEE AND THE DRAKES
3/5: JOE ELY AND THE WARREN HOOD BAND
3/12: SKSIW
3/19: DAVE SCHER AND TBA
3/26: WRENFORD AND WILL CALLERY
4/2: CHIP DOLAN AND RAINA ROSE BAND
4/9: OWEN TEMPLE BAND AND ADAM CARROLL
4/16: BASTARD SONS OF JOHNNY CASH AND MICHAEL MCCREARY
BLUE MONDAY LIVE MARCH 10, 2014
AT
TRUDYS FOUR STAR - RAY BONNEVILLE, BOBBY RUSH, CAROLYN WONDERLAND

FEATURING
JESSIE SCOTT | BO CHASE | BILL PRICE
ABBEY ROAD | DAVID ARNSBERGER | PAULA NELSON | JOHN DROMGOOLE

SKSIW DETAILS AT WWW.KDRP.ORG

GOOD MUSIC LIVES HERE

WE PLAY THIS

KDRP iPhone App

KDRP ANDROID APP

100.1 AUSTIN - 103.1 DRIPPING SPRINGS - 99.1 FREDERICKSBURG - WWW.KDRP.ORG - ALL SMARTPHONE APPS

100.1 AUSTIN - 103.1 DRIPPING SPRINGS - 99.1 FREDERICKSBURG - WWW.KDRP.ORG - ALL SMARTPHONE APPS

LONESTARMUSIC

TOP 40

THIS CHART IS SPONSORED BY

FREEB!RDS

WORLD BURRITO

- 
1. Sturgill Simpson, *Metamodern Sounds in Country Music*
2. John Fullbright, *Songs*
3. Bruce Robison & Kelly Willis, *Our Year*
4. Radney Foster, *Everything I Should Have Said*
5. Rich O'Toole, *Jaded*
6. Chris Gougler, *Chris Gougler EP*
7. Texas Renegade, *Surviving the Flood*
8. Willie Nelson, *Band of Brothers*
9. Adam Carroll, *Let It Choose You*
10. Turnpike Troubadours, *Goodbye Normal Street*
11. Randy Rogers Band, *Homemade Tamales: Live at Floore's*
12. Aaron Stephens, *Hard Times, Straight Lines*
13. Midnight River Choir, *Fresh Air*
14. Cody Canada, *Some Old, Some New, Maybe a Cover or Two*
15. Matt Hillyer, *If These Old Bones Could Talk*
16. Sturgill Simpson, *High Top Mountain*
17. Sean McConnell, *The B Side Session EP*
18. Whiskey Myers, *Early Morning Shakes*
19. Corb Lund, *Counterfeit Blues*
20. Fire in the Pines, *Heart of the Machine*
21. Jason Isbell, *Southeastern*
22. William Clark Green, *Rose Queen*
23. Mark McKinney, *Standing My Ground*
24. Miranda Lambert, *Platinum*
25. Turnpike Troubadours, *Diamonds & Gasoline*
26. Joe Ely, *B4 84*
27. Parker Millsap, *Parker Millsap*
28. Aaron Einhouse, *Blue Collar Troubadour*
29. Jackson Taylor & the Sinners, *Live at Billy Bob's (CD/DVD combo)*
30. Charlie Robison, *High Life*
31. Mark Jones & Twenty Paces, *Breaking Even*
32. Cody Johnson Band, *Cowboy Like Me*
33. Jason Boland & the Stragglers, *Dark & Dirty Mile*
34. Rodney Crowell, *Tarpaper Sky*
35. Robyn Ludwick, *Little Rain*
36. Eli Young Band, *10,000 Towns*
37. Robert Ellis, *Lights From the Chemical Plant*
38. Sam Riggs & the Night People, *Outrun the Sun*
39. Old 97's, *Most Messed Up*
40. Damn Quails, *Down the Hatch*

- LoneStarMusic
Staff Picks
- Zach Jennings: Lucero, *Live from Atlanta*
- Richard Skanse: Joe Ely, *B4 84*
- Melissa Webb: Nikki Lane, *All or Nothin'*
- Kristen Townsend: Mike Ryan, *Bad Reputation*
- Kris Franks: Levon Helm, *The Midnight Ramble Sessions, Vol. 3*
- Kallie Townsend: Green River Ordinance, *Green River Ordinance*
- Travis Russom: John Fullbright, *Songs*
- Jesse Garza: Trampled By Turtles, *Wild Animals*
- Kelsi Laningham: Aaron Stephens, *Hard Times, Straight Lines*
- Promise Udo: Fire in the Pines, *Heart of the Machine*
- Lance Garza: Aaron Stephens, *Hard Times, Straight Lines*

WE ROLL ONE ROCKIN' BURRITO!



VENUE SPOTLIGHT

John T. Floore Country Store | Helotes, Texas

By Jim Beal Jr.



From Willie Nelson to Robert Earl Keen to Randy Rogers and beyond, a hell of a lot of Texas music history has been made (and is still being made today) at the John T. Floore Country Store in Helotes. And the cold beer and tamales ain't bad, either. (Outdoor photos by Mike Barger; inside photo by Sarah Bork Hamilton.)

A name-check in a song is no guarantee of immortality — unless, perhaps, it's Willie Nelson doing the name checking.

By the time Nelson gave his 1973 “Shotgun Willie” shout-out to John T. Floore, Floore’s establishment had been, for 31 years, a honky-tonk/dancehall fixture in the (formerly) tiny community of Helotes, northwest of San Antonio. And Willie had been playing there for about 20 of those years. At one point in his career, Nelson made music at Floore’s every Saturday night.

Though Floore died not long after the release of *Shotgun Willie*, his “store” kept going. And four decades on, Willie Nelson and his family continue to work Floore’s. They’ll be back in the place for a two-night stand on Oct. 17 and 18.

Through the years, Floore’s has hosted a mind-boggling array of legendary musicians: Ray Price, Patsy Cline, Hank Williams, George Jones, Little Richard, Bob Wills, Buck Owens & the Buckaroos, B.B. King, Merle Haggard. It’s also been a regular tour spot (and regional home base) for a who’s who of Texas, Red Dirt and Americana all stars, including Robert Earl Keen (who recorded most of his *No. 2 Live Dinner* album there), Lyle Lovett, Lucinda Williams, Kevin Fowler, Pat Green, Reckless Kelly, James McMurtry, Paul Thorn, Randy Rogers, Wade Bowen and dozens of others.

Johnny Bush, 79, first worked Floore’s in the ’50s when he played drums with Easy Adams & the Texas Top Hands. On Aug. 9, he’ll front his Bandoleros at Floore’s. “There’s a lot of nostalgic value there,” says Bush. “The Green Room is John T.’s old apartment. The bandstand has been enlarged, but the old part of the stage is still there. It’s become an events center. The improvements to the place are

phenomenal, but it still has that great feel. Of course, that massive outdoor patio, the fence and all the improvements out there are new. It’s really come into its own. Spud Goodall and Curly Williams used to work there on Sunday afternoons for the tip jar. Now kids like Randy Rogers can pack ’em in on a Tuesday night.”

Among the improvements: unobtrusive air conditioning in the old bar; a greatly expanded Honky-Tonk Café menu (which still includes Floore’s linchpin offering, tamales); mixed beverages to augment beer; and a massive outdoor patio with the requisite amenities (bars, portable toilets and sturdy picnic tables).

Helotes-bred, Helotes-based guitar ace Rick “Casper” Rawls, 59, the favorite guitarist of a whole lot of great guitarists, played his first professional gig at Floore’s. He was 11. Rawls and his wife, Nancy, had their wedding reception at Floore’s. And yes, Casper sat in with the band that night. “John T. sponsored our Little League baseball team until some Christian lady objected to her son having the name of a bar on the back of his uniform,” Rawls recalls. “We could hear the bands playing there at night. I’d go up there during the day and musicians were just hanging out. Being a kid, I didn’t know who they were, but I sure figured out later who they were. The inside is almost exactly the same, with some of the same tables and chairs.”

In 2014, the balance of community service and all-out honky-tonk remains. Floore’s books benefits, high school reunions and a monthly good-cause gospel brunch along with a full calendar, which includes a traditional Sunday afternoon family dance.

Bush and Rawls say they feel a sense of responsibility, and feel the history, when they take the stage at Floore’s. That feeling extends to the current stewards.

“I know how much history is there,” says talent buyer Mark McKinney. “It’s like the layers of an onion.” McKinney, his family, and Steve Baker have owned and operated Floore’s for the past 12 years. “I’m part of only the fourth ownership group since Floore’s inception. I appreciate its history and I know someday we’ll pass it along, knowing it’s a place that will be here long after we’re gone. We’ve updated Floore’s without losing the vibe. We’re still doing it.”

Keeping the honky-tonk vibe includes the booking. “We need to respect and honor and do as many of the dancehall shows as we can,” McKinney says. “Then there’s this whole other chapter of the dancehall that started with Robert Keen and the people he’s influenced.”

Count Randy Rogers, 35, in the new chapter number. “I love Floore’s so much I recorded my latest album (*Homemade Tamales: Live at Floore’s*) there,” Rogers says. “The first time I played there, in 2004 or 2005, we opened for Kevin Fowler. There were 48 people in the audience. The first time we played there I never thought we could put people in the place. Now we do. Floore’s is not just another venue or just another gig. I feel like it’s my job to help keep the place going because it’s important.”

John T. Floore Country Store, 14492 Old Bandera Road, Helotes, Texas, 78023; (210) 695-8827; www.liveatfloores.com

Disclosure: Jim Beal Jr. plays bass in Miss Neesie & the Ear Food Orchestra, the band that works Floore’s monthly First Sunday Gospel Brunch.

CASH LOVED KOKE



KOKE-FM IS BACK IN AUSTIN!

Listen live at kokefm.com

BILLY JOE SHAYER



NEW ALBUM
LONG IN THE TOOTH
AVAILABLE NOW



lightningrodrecords.com