

## **DRIVE-BY TRUCKERS BRIGHTER THAN CREATION'S DARK An Attempted Song By Song by Patterson Hood**

**Two Daughters and a Beautiful Wife** was written as a result of trying to make some kind of peace with an unspeakable tragedy that affected so many people I know and love. I was hoping to help with the healing and closure by trying to provide a beautiful song that dwells on the positives of love and family. I knew it was the first song on the album the moment I wrote it.

**3 Dimes Down** is a Cooley song and he never really discusses any of his lyrics with me or anyone else so I'm not going to do him the disservice of doing so myself except to say Tom T. Hall's "Week in a Country Jail" is certainly worth checking out for a clue. He played me a 4-track demo he recorded of it one night while we were all working on the Bettye LaVette album and I doubled over in laughter. The second verse may be my all-time favorite on a Drive-By Truckers album.

We were almost through tracking this album when I wrote **The Righteous Path**. It was the missing piece of the puzzle and I knew it immediately. I played it through for everyone once and then we nailed it in one take. Some songs are just meant to be.

Shonna has been writing songs as long as I've known her. She always said that one day she'd bring one or two in for us to possibly perform. I kinda thought she was going to pull one out during the making of our last album but, alas, it wasn't meant to be. The week before we began recording the album, Shonna wrote **The Purgatory Line** and **I'm Sorry Huston**. She demoed them in her living room and played them for us when we convened. We were all blown away by what great and beautiful songs they were. A day or two later, she stayed behind while the rest of us went to supper and wrote **Home Field Advantage**.

Every time I hear **Perfect Timing**, I pick up on something new in it. It's really a grower and a really good performance. John Neff did a great job with the acoustic guitar solos.

**Daddy Needs A Drink** really showcases the chemistry we have with Spooner Oldham. His legendary playing has graced some of our favorite records in the world. He co-wrote "I'm Your Puppet" and played on "When A Man Loves A Woman" and Aretha Franklin's "I Never Loved A Man (The Way I Love You)" and "Do Right Woman". He is the single most creative soul I have ever met and his talent is only exceeded by his charm as he is one of the single sweetest men we have ever met. Every single day on the road and in the studio was brightened by his presence and his contribution to this album is monumental (thus its dedication to him).

Cooley seldom talks about what inspires specific songs, but I was there with him in 1991 and saw **Self Destructive Zones** play out in living color. I think the imagery about the pawnshops and pointy cheap guitars is priceless. I know **Bob** and you do too. Everyone knows him and he's probably about as good as they come. I probably know his mother too.

There are things you sometimes have to do in order to do what you got to do. The trick is to not let that thing kill you before you do what you got to do. Some folks don't learn that one in time. **The Opening Act** began as a song written on the back of a discarded setlist from the headlining band on a sticky table at the shithole bar described within it. The fake bull and faux cowboy were all too real, as was the trip to the hospital for the guy looking for his manhood in all the wrong places. I struggled with an ending for the thing for several years, leaving it behind only to be drawn to it again. It was only with the retrospect offered by a year or two of distance that revealed the song's true meaning to me, thus telling me exactly how to close it out. I like to think of it as a short film without the film. There is nothing like a Technicolor horizon to offer a centerpiece on an album so full of black and white and nighttime skies.

**Lisa's Birthday** was inspired by a story told to Cooley by our old guitar tech Mark Messner. I think it sounds like pure Country Gold circa 1967.

Two separate backstage visits by almost strangers, each touched in different ways by our American tragedy in Iraq, led to the writing of **The Home Front** and **That Man I Shot**. I was only a kid when we were over in Vietnam, but I somehow did learn a lesson or two from it. I never so much wanted to be proven wrong in my beliefs as with our current situation, but the evidence so far seems to support that it ain't working out too good for anybody. Now, we're just trying to save face, at the expense of many young lives that could be ordered to serve our country in more productive ways. Seems our band has some fans over there and we're always moved by the stories of really fine folks who are sacrificing so much for our privileged existence. The man in **That Man I Shot** probably doesn't agree with a lot of my viewpoints, but I tried to be true to what he said and how he said it. You don't have to agree with someone to respect them and that seemed to run both ways with us. As a writer, it's not my job to agree or disagree and certainly not to judge. It is my job to be as true to the character's voice as humanly possible and to tell the story accordingly. The extended family that inspired **The Home Front** absolutely broke my heart with their story. I changed the names and some details but again tried to be true to the spirit of what they told me.

Wanted to be true also to that guy riding to his destiny in the back of a rented car in the middle of the night to a destination that he thinks will be the answer to all his problems. It was an ageless story with a different twist. Insurance money for the family seemed like a better option than the kind of prison awaiting him. A thousand decisions had led him there and it wasn't my place to question them. There isn't an actual road called **Goode's Field Road** but if you grew up where I did you know exactly where it is. Some of the best stories aren't really for the telling and the best songs come from the details and spaces locked within.

I wrote this song in 2000 and planned it for *The Dirty South* album, but at the last minute decided we didn't have the magic take and swapped it for Lookout Mountain. The song has been on my mind ever since but its transition from the mannered country of its original version to the raging primal stomp we landed on here (one magic take) made all the difference and once again proved to me that all things happen for a reason, you just have to trust your instincts (if they seem to be good ones at least) and let things reveal themselves in their own due time.

**You And Your Crystal Meth** was recorded for *Blessing and A Curse* but voted off the album. I was quite unhappy about it until I realized how perfect it sits between **Checkout Time in Vegas** and **Goode's Field Road**. We used the old take exactly as it was. I think that take was when I knew that John Neff HAD to rejoin this band. Our beloved producer David Barbe played an extra big part in the creation of that song too.

**Checkout Time in Vegas** was inspired by the true-life story of our dear friend Scott Baxendale. He builds guitars for a living (he's currently working on a second one for me and a third one for Cooley). He is also a talented screenwriter and documentary director. The story this song alludes to is the basis for an excellent screenplay that he has been trying to get filmed. He became convinced that Johnny Depp should play his character (I want him to maybe play me too for that matter) and went to great lengths to get him a copy. He filmed these great lengths and made a documentary about it all, which recently was screened at The Hollywood Film Festival to rave reviews. He is currently negotiating a distribution deal for it. This guy is amazing and you should play one of his guitars. We meet the most unbelievable people out there on the road.

Cooley closes his set with **A Ghost to Most**, which I am firmly convinced is the best song he's ever written. We worked it up in practice for The Dirt Underneath Tour and it quickly became one of the standout tunes of each show. The chorus reveals an image so basic and simple yet each listen reveals another layer of story implied within. I overheard Cooley being asked by a friend what it all meant and his response was how "It's really hard for me to find a suit that fits me right."

The album closes with **The Monument Valley** and the classic imagery from John Ford's immortal masterpiece *The Searchers* as the door closes on John Wayne's walk off into the desolate beauty of a disappearing America. Ford may have been America's greatest ever filmmaker and repeated viewings of his work reveals insights into our psyche that have never been expressed better. For me it's an extremely personal song and it was a magical take that night in the studio. I knew that it would be the last song on the album the moment I wrote it.

I often write liner notes for our albums and worked most of the summer on a set juxtaposing the two backstage meetings last year. One with the three Green Berets soldiers who had returned home and the other with the family of the soldier who didn't. Those two events played a large part on the writing of this album and I plan to get around to writing about something else pertaining to all of it at a later time.

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