



**Luther Dickinson**  
***Magic Music For Family Folk***

With his 2023 full-length offering, *Magic Music For Family Folk* [Antone's /New West Records] Luther Dickinson delivers an album of songs from his community that run four generations deep. The 10-time GRAMMY® Award-nominated producer, solo artist, and North Mississippi Allstars Co-Founder creates a record worthy of its own traditions. Dickinson says, “Everyone is Welcome. This collection of my childhood favorites was recorded for fun, at home, with family and friends, in the spirit of sharing. As a father, I needed music that my family and friends could enjoy that’s also suited to my funky taste and organic, acoustic aesthetic,” he notes. “Having daughters altered my listening habits and it was hard to find records that we all liked, so I had to make one. I love music that appeals to all ages. My favorite concerts have three generations in attendance—people my age, with their kids on their hips, and their parents in lawn chairs.”

Luther traces the genesis of *Magic Music For Family Folk* back to his own childhood. He vividly recalls his mom fingerpicking her nylon string Martin guitar and his legendary musician father, Jim Dickinson, at the family turntable or piano.

“Growing up in Memphis during the fifties and sixties, my father Jim was exposed to jug band music as a small boy and the Memphis country blues greats as a young man,” he recalls. “When I was a boy, Dad would play and sing the songs of his friends and mentors Furry Lewis and Gus Cannon, explaining the songs meanings and telling stories about these cool older musicians who loved to pass their music down to my father and his bohemian friends. Now that I’m a father, I wanted to share these songs with my kids, and my friend’s kids. It’s a sweet sensation, reliving memories while making new ones, with a song as the connecting thread. Music is an act of communion to me. Experiencing songs learned from my parents’ and grandparents’ generations take root in my children felt magical to me and inspired the concept behind the title.”

In 2017, he tracked the bulk of the material “during dinner parties, sleepovers, and play dates either in a social setting or later, as the kids slept. The invitation was to bring your family over and let’s make some family style music.”

However, after burning CD's of rough mixes for friends and family, he figuratively stowed the project away. In the meantime, he composed film scores and continued to develop his production acumen. The final product undoubtedly benefited from the time and experience he had gained.

“When it comes to art or music, the perspective of time can't be bought or faked. Turning 50 inspired me to finish all the projects that were simmering on the back burner. This record definitely benefited from fresh ears, as well as techniques and sounds I had developed over the years doing production and film scores.”

Luther's daughters initially recorded vocals in 2017 and later overdubbed them in 2023. “I wanted to expose my daughters to the joy of learning, performing and recording music that my father taught me. Having my daughters sing along with their younger selves was a unique sensation and document of their youth,” he laughs. “After her first overdub party, my oldest daughter took me aside and asked, ‘Don't you get paid for singing on a record?’

He introduces this body of work with the title track and first single “Are You Sure.” Popularized by The Staple Singers, Luther translates the track into a breezy acoustic number accented by a soft beat, bluesy guitar lead, and hummable heavenly harmonies.

“Mavis Staples and The Staple Singers have been an influential force in our family,” he notes. “Mavis has been so kind to work with us many times over the years. The Staple Singers set an example of love and togetherness for all, inspiring three generations of my family. *Be Altitude* is a summertime staple on our turntable at home, and I fell in love with ‘Are You Sure.’ Its melody and message resonate with my intention behind recording *Magic Music For Family Folk*.”

Allison Russell's clarinet and banjo and Sharde Thomas' fife and drums enliven the sonic topography of *Magic Music for Family Folk*.

In addition to Russell and Thomas, “Beulah Land” features singer Yola as well. Luther's vocals practically melt into lightly strummed acoustic guitar as Yola's soulful intonation simmers. The interplay of many voices gives the track multiple dimensions. Luther's mother and daughters join as well. “Our version of Mississippi John Hurt's ‘Beulah Land’ is my favorite. Allison had just finished recording, when Yola arrived for the evening dinner party. But as soon as she walked in the door, I sat her down, handed her headphones, and hit record. Her spontaneous, first impression vocal performance, without ever hearing the track, instantly became my favorite moment of recording. These days, if I am going to sing a spiritual song, I gravitate towards a non-specific,

inclusive message and ‘Beulah Land’ speaks to the theme of the album and supports the *Magic Music For Family Folk* concept I wanted to share with my children.”

“Old Hen” stomps along on a hill country/hip hop beat in what Luther jokingly refers to as the “Barnyard Psychedelia Suite” along with the animals of “Ol Blue, Chicken, They All Asked for You” and “Turkey in the Straw.”

“In an effort to make old time music appealing to myself and younger folk, I reinterpret the music with funky danceable beats. Sharde Thomas’s drumming has the perfect feel and intention, always adding a primitive modernist hill country flavor. Sharde and I have been making music since we were kids at her Grandfather, Otha Turner’s picnics. She is my favorite singing partner and no one else blows the homemade bamboo cane like she does. Her grandfather, Otha Turner was a great Mississippi musician, an inspiration and mentor to us both, and I can feel his approval when we make music together.”

He breathes new life into the traditional “Old Blue,” channeling the love of a hound dog over a hill country acoustic hip hop groove.

Fittingly, he concludes the ride with the original “Whatever River.” The invitation, “Meet me by the river when you’re lonely,” represents a father’s eternal love for his childhood.

“I wrote ‘Whatever River’ for my daughters as a possible portal of companionship—in case they ever miss me in the future,” he goes on. “It’s my personal belief and practice that music is a realm in which one can commune with loved ones, transcending time and space. Therein lies *THE Magic OF Music for Family Folk*.”

In the end, Luther might just bring you and your loved ones close to the speaker and one another. Luther leaves off, “I hope folks of all ages can enjoy this early in the morning, late at night, in the car, at a dance party, or at bedtime.”