



The Deslondes *Ways & Means*

We shed old skin in order to evolve and move forward. We let go of who we were in the past and embrace who we're meant to be now. The Deslondes have taken such steps as not only bandmates, but as brothers. The New Orleans quintet—Dan Cutler, Sam Doores, Riley Downing, Cameron Snyder, and John James Tourville—have weathered ups, downs, and everything in between only to strengthen the bond between them.

Infusing everything from saxophone, flute, and synth to string arrangements and a full drum kit for the first time, the group naturally progress and evolve in real-time on their third full-length offering, *Ways & Means* [New West Records].

“The title reminds me of being young, getting into the music business, going through everything, and coming out of it,” Riley observes. “We’re taking a look right, left, and back at ourselves.”

“We were letting go of a bunch of old dynamics that left us burnt out,” adds John James. “However, we’re focused on being productive and on the other side.”

The “*other side*” might just be their brightest yet. The Deslondes revealed their self-titled debut to widespread tastemaker applause during 2015. However, they really hit their stride on *Hurry Home* in 2017. Right out of the gate, *Noisey* proclaimed, “*The Deslondes have found a comfortable sound to create art in, and it serves them well,*” while *Rolling Stone* noted, “*The Deslondes’ take on country relies on a gritty, grimy mix of early rock ‘n’ roll and lo-fi R&B.*” In addition to praise from *American Songwriter*, *Paste*, *The Boot*, and more, the record closed out the year on *Uncut’s* “*Favorite Albums of 2017.*”

Then, the musicians opted to quietly take a break. In the meantime, Sam shared his self-titled debut as Riley also served up his solo album, *Start It Over*. Maybe it was something in the air, but 2021 seemed like the perfect moment for the boys to pick up where they left off.

“I reached out to everybody individually,” recalls John James. “Dan’s got kids, and I’ve got kids. We’d been touring for a long time. Once I called, it seemed like everyone was really into it. We were excited about doing it again.”

“I was in Lawrence, KS visiting my folks at the height of the Pandemic,” Sam remembers. “I was walking down Massachusetts Avenue on a Sunday morning and wondering what I had left to give the world. Perhaps, I was experiencing a mild existential crisis from living off unemployment and facing the cancellation of my album release tours. Luckily, my phone rang. John James asked how I’d feel about making another Deslondes record with so much genuine enthusiasm it was contagious. We all owe it to him. Instinctually, a resounding ‘*Hell Yes*’ came out of my mouth.”

Missing the camaraderie, the guys congregated at old haunt The Tiger Den. Together, they worked out the songs before they entered the Bomb Shelter with longtime producer Andrija

Tokic. This time around, members brought in a host of ideas and agreed upon the process before recording.

“We came to some personal agreements about how everything was going to go down in advance,” Dan elaborates. “From experience, we realized what we liked and who was good at what. In terms of the studio, it was probably the easiest album we’ve ever made. Usually, we’re too busy touring to put a lot of thought into pre-production and ideas. This was definitely the most prepared we’ve ever been beforehand.”

The preparation shines on the likes of the first single “South Dakota Wild One.” On the track, harmonica wails over acoustic strumming. Simultaneously, Riley’s grizzled and gruff delivery simmers above a slow burning beat punctuated by a soulful lead.

“It’s a nostalgic song about getting into music, traveling, and running into the special people who were around then, but aren’t around now,” notes Riley.

Elsewhere, the opener “Good To Go” saunters on airy electric piano towards a heavenly and hummable saxophone solo.

“If ‘*South Dakota Wild One*’ was the beginning of traveling and playing music, ‘*Good To Go*’ is where we’re at now,” Riley continues. “We’re still out here. We’re still good to go. The songs bookend each other.”

Then, there’s “Dunes.” A twang-y riff underscores a fifties-style melody as guitar echoes. “It’s about the arc of a love affair—a relationship that went wrong eventually,” Dan says. “It explores the symmetry of a relationship and how things come full circle in our life.”

The dreamy “Five Year Plan” nods to Harry Nilsson with its dusty bliss, plinking keys, and cinematic orchestration. Album closer “Hero” takes flight on soaring slide guitar and wistful vocal delivery.

“I grew up in a real tight-knit family in the country,” Riley goes in. “We all pitched in to take care of my grandmother at the end of her life. We’re our own heroes to our families and friends. I needed to write the song to remind myself you can be your own hero. If it helps me, maybe it will help someone else.”

In the end, The Deslondes draw on their own familial union to forge a similar connection with listeners.

“To us, this is family,” John James leaves off. “It’s a part of our lives. When you hear our music, I hope you feel like you’re hanging out with us. The band’s back together now, and it just feels good.”

“Riley, JJ, Dan, and Cam are my brothers,” Sam concurs. “We’ve all been through so much together. I don’t think any of us will have that experience with another group of people again in our lives. Sometimes, we drive each other crazy of course, but we’re family. I’d take a bullet for any of those geezers.”