

Although Southern rock was standard fare at my high school in Decatur, GA, I didn't really grow up with the country music I love now. I was a big Allman Bros fan in my earliest years and thought a lot about what it would mean for music if Duane hadn't died. But for me, my love of honkytonk, mountain music, and traditional country came later in life. I was into punk in the 90's and through that discovered my love of the greats like Hank Williams, George Jones, Dolly Parton, and The Carter Family. The Southern punks I knew listened to and got their swagger from classic country as much as anything else. Simple country tunes, mountain songs and heart breaking honkytonk sounds held the same populism and rebellion that I loved about punk rock. Chicago label Bloodshot Records emerged in 1994 and became the standard bearer for the connections between punk, country, soul and bluegrass. Vocal icon Kelly Hogan had moved from the punk community in Atlanta to Chicago and signed with Bloodshot Records alongside musicians like the Mekons' Jon Langford (Waco Brothers) and the entourage that made up the Pine Valley Cosmonauts. Danielle Howle vacillated in a frenetic ragged way from punk bands to country bands carrying the Patsy Cline torch to the punk community. In its earliest days, SXSW brought the postpunk set to Austin to mix it up in the bars on 6th Street with the cowpunks and Texas Swing's best. Even Subpop Records released a quiet, dark country record from the Scud Mountain Boys. Neko Case and Loretta Lynn were cut from the same cloth. The Clash and Hank Williams were the heartbeat of populist songwriting. George Jones and Paul Westerberg had the same demons. There was hillbilly rock running through the veins of The Cramps.

All this was going on in the 90's...I went out and bought old country vinyl and fell in love with it. I pulled out the old field recording LP's my grandma gave me and listened to them with a whole different ear. The sounds of an old woman singing Appalachian murder ballads in her kitchen, the chain gangs working the fields, songs from the mountain to the coast reflecting a beauty that was rough and honest. Alan Lomax became a fixture in my life, and I realized a new perspective on singing and songwriting. I moved up to rural North Georgia in 1993, to a town I had gone to church camp in as a kid. The rich Appalachian culture and music started seeping into my life and songs. The first song I wrote that came out of all this was a little mountain ditty, a hanging song called "Johnny Rottentail." It went on my first solo record, *Stag* that I made in 2001 with my favorite musicians from the punk community. I kept writing country songs after that and just threw them in a pile and figured one day I'd make a country record. So for the next 10 years I put out a few more rock / punk records on my label, Daemon Records, and I mixed in a mountain or country gospel song here or there, but I always hoped to do a full record with a traditional country combo.

Goodnight Tender really started coming into fruition in 2010 after I heard Seattle multi-instrumentalist, Jeff Fielder playing with the dark genius of a songwriter, Lindsay Fuller. Later on, the three of us did some acoustic touring together, and whenever I broke out a new country tune, he played exactly what I wanted to hear. So, I asked him to be part of this project that was still mostly in my head and I just jumped in after that. I knew the drummer, Jim Brock from his country recordings and from his work with IG's. In 2012,

we ran across each other at a bar I was playing in Charlotte and it occurred to me he was the right drummer for this project, so I got in touch with him later. I just built the band from there. Asheville Pedal Steel player, Matt Smith came to me on a suggestion from banjoist Alison Brown; Matt helped me bring in another Asheville player, Jake Hopping for stand up Bass. I had watched Atlanta fiddler Adrian Carter grow up and walk the line between his high school punk band and Nashville fiddle workshops; I recruited him to come to the studio even though he was in the middle of his high school senior finals. That rounded out the first combo for the record.

In Feb 2013, I played a songwriting circle event in Durham with a few incredible songwriters-Heather McEntire (Mount Moriah), Phil Cook (Megafaun), and MC Taylor. I met Heather McEntire in the summer of 2009, I was touring with my solo band and her punk band at the time, Bellafea opened some shows. Her voice was both the call of the banshee and the siren, singing totally striking melodies over her loud thrashing band. A year later, she started the alt-country outfit Mount Moriah and brought forth yet another dimension of her voice that revealed her kinship to classic country and her upbringing in the Carolina Mountains. I caught her on tour, sharing a bill with Phil and Brad Cook's band Megafaun, another band that tipped their hats to roots music with their noise folk country sound. I heard MC Taylor (Hiss Golden Messenger) when he released an amazing roots, country gospel, folk record called *Poor Moon*. The musical focus of this songwriting event tended towards these more Americana styles, so it was a good time to try some of my newest country songs. Heather jumped in on some songs we had started singing together-a gospel song from my last record called "The Rock is My Foundation" and an old country tune of mine, slated for recording called "More Pills." Heather sang us a new country tune she'd just finished called "When You Come for Me," it was striking and classic sounding. We decided later that it'd be cool to feature Heather singing this song on the new record. Phil Cook played with his usual heart and style- like an old blues guy or a country player in the backroom of a bar just playing for the love of it.

After the show, I asked Phil to put together a band, come to the studio and produce a few of the songs for this record. He put together a combo of players, starting with his brother and collaborator, bassist Brad Cook. Then he brought in the Durham drummer, Terry Lonergan who had done some great work on MC Taylor's recent release. Heather McEntire agreed to come down and sing the harmonies with Brad and Phil. Everything was set and then at the last minute, I got an email from Phil that his musical brother, Justin Vernon was coming down for a Ry Cooder tribute show he was music directing, and could Justin please come to the studio and be part of the band...

So, I had two different bands put together, each with their own vibe and take on traditional country, gospel and mountain music. We convened at Echo Mountain studio in Asheville. I recruited Brian Speiser, ex-IG soundman, and now FOH engineer for TedeschiTrucks, to do the recording and jump in on some harmonies. The first 5 days would be with Jeff, Jim, Jake, Adrian and Matt; the last 2 days would be with Phil, Brad,

Justin, Terry and Heather, for a total of seven full days of recording. We recorded 12 songs—all live to 2-inch tape, trying to put any harmonies and instrument overdubs to tape as well. We transferred the keeper takes to Pro-Tools for the mix. We tried to stay true to old recording styles—using old mics, old reverb plates and sometimes all gathering around one microphone if the song called for it.

The musicians that played on *Goodnight Tender* made the record what it is; I picked them because I knew that what they played would be right. So, everyday we just rolled into the studio together, and worked on a song at a time, set the arrangement and then went straight to recording the song live. We played around a bit with tempo and feel, added a chord here or there, but we stayed pretty true to the original writing and didn't go for anything tricky or overproduced. Jeff doubled up on instruments, and often cut the track with what would be considered the anchor and then went back and played his other instruments as overdubs. All the players offered up cool production ideas and it was a truly collaborative experience. This first set of songs combined drums, pedal steel, Telecaster, fiddle, bass (stand-up and electric), banjo, dobro and piano. We started off the week by recording "More Pills" and as soon as I heard them launch into the song, I knew the week was gonna be good.

On the last two days of the week, the first band left and Phil's combo loaded in. I had 3 of my songs left to record and Heather's song. Phil covered banjo, slide guitar, vocals and organ; Brad played electric bass and sang; Terry drummed; Justin played slide steel mandolin, electric guitar, vocals and banjo; Heather sang harmonies. When Phil, Brad and Justin sang the backing vocals together, it was the best of brother harmonies, with intervals shared by gospel and old time music. When they passed around the instruments and switched off on leads and parts, it was like making music on an old the front porch. They brought the Americana roots to the recording.

I wrote the songs for *Goodnight Tender* from 2001-2013, they range in style from Southern Rock to Mountain Gospel to Americana to Honkytonk. They come from my travels and from where I make my home in the North Georgia Mountains. They draw from my life and from the lives of my neighbors and friends. I wrote "Broken Record" in early 2000 while playing a few shows in Montana for Honor the Earth, imagining being a bartender, missing his/her traveling lover. "My Dog" was a little song I wrote on the Bouzouki before I played much Mandolin. "More Pills" was one of my earliest tunes, a contrite love song about trying to rescue lost potential. The song "Anyhow" came to me when I was standing in the woods watching one of my dogs get a deadly hold on a Copperhead; I was thinking about half a life left. "Time Zone" and "Goodnight Tender" are both recently finished lonesome, traveling songs. As soon as we started recording them, I had it in my mind that Kelly Hogan's voice would give these songs the beautiful ache they needed; we recorded her vocals at Wilco's Loft in Chicago. I wrote a couple of gospel tunes for this record. "Let the Spirit" came to me backstage at an IG show, just came straight out of the heavens. Justin Vernon went home after our sessions together and recorded the harmonious choir of voices that you hear on the song. "The Gig That

Matters” came out of playing a particularly bad IG gig and just thinking about the most important gig of my life- playing for St. Peter at the gates to heaven. I got the idea for “Duane Allman” from my love for his guitar playing and his legacy, but also from hanging out at a bar with a friend one night, thinking about the “god-size hole.” I guess pretty fittingly, Susan Tedeschi recorded the harmonies down in Jacksonville at her and Derek Truck’s studio. “Hunter’s Prayer” and “Oyster and Pearl” both came from my neck of the woods and the philosophy of life I aspire to. I brought a new young singer, Hannah Thomas in for harmonies on “Hunter’s Prayer” cause she understands honkytonk songs and could bring in just the right twang. *Goodnight Tender* was finished up in Fairhope Alabama, mixed by my favorite engineer Trina Shoemaker.

This is just a run down of logistics, what went into creating this project, where it came from... It sure is easier to describe what went down then how I feel about it. I do know I feel blessed. The bloodlines and kinships in music feel pretty powerful and infinite to me these days. I’ve heard some folks say that country is where punks go to die, I don’t know about all that, but I imagine the last mile is the most lonesome, and there’s nothing like the sound of a pedal steel to keep you company.