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**Contact:** Katharine Torbett Chyna Brackeen

Dogwood Arts Attack Monkey Productions

[ktorbett@dogwoodarts.com](mailto:ktorbett@dogwoodarts.com) [chyna@attackmonkey.net](mailto:chyna@attackmonkey.net)

(865) 228-0410 (865) 223-4944

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Rhythm N’ Blooms Music Festival Announces Full 2017 Festival Lineup**

***Knoxville, Tennessee* [February 14, 2017]**

Dogwood Arts and Attack Monkey Productions are pleased to announce the full 2017 Rhythm N’ Blooms Music Festival lineup. Knoxville’s largest music festival returns to Downtown Knoxville’s Historic Old City along Jackson Ave. and other Old City venues April 7-9.

Fans of the festival will be pleased to learn the Silent Disco and the popular Secret Shows concept will return this year. Purchase weekend passes, get information about the Old City, Downtown Knoxville and the full festival experience at [rhythmnbloomsfest.com](http://www.rhythmnbloomsfest.com)

Here is information about the latest additions to the lineup:

**Lee Fields & The Expressions**“I feel that every human being’s purpose is to do what their inner voice says to do,” says Lee Fields. “And my inner voice, my driving force, wants me to put out music and keeping making better records.”

Apologies to the late, great James Brown, but you’d be hard pressed to find another singer who’s ever worked as hard as Fields, a man who’s been making soul and funk anthems since 1969.

Since that time, Fields has toured the world with musical legends like Kool and the Gang, Sammy Gordon and the Hip-Huggers, O.V Wright, Darrell Banks, and Little Royal. Recorded with French house DJ/producer Martin Solveig. And somehow found a newer, younger audience and become more prolific as the years transpire.

“In a curious case of musical evolution, the older Fields becomes, the closer he gets to perfecting the sound of soul that he grew up with as a young man,” noted NPR music writer Oliver Wang (and that was back in 2009).. Now Fields returns with his most triumphant and honest record yet, Special Night, recorded with The Expressions and released on Brooklyn’s Big Crown Records.

Special Night follows the critical success of his Truth & Soul recordings My World, Faithful Man and 2014’s Emma Jean — the last one American Songwriter hailing as “more than just a stroll down memory lane … it’s the sound of a man who understands his musical strengths and plays to them with class, authority and soul searching intensity.”

You’ll hear Fields flexing those strengths on Special Night. There’s some JB-style funk on there. And hints of Stax, Chess, Fame and Motown.

But this is not a throwback. Possessing a voice that’s equally raucous and tender, Fields crafts a truly honest, soulful work. “This is a record about what people do in real life,” says the singer. For one example, he cites the yearning “Work to Do,” which entails a “a guy going to counseling, drinking too much, apologizing to the old lady and trying to keep family together, doing the manly thing.”

Adds Fields: “When I record, I make every song like I actually mean it. I mean every word I say. On Special Night I’m talking to my lady — literally, expressing the way I feel. You can tell if a song is real or not. And every moment I’m recording, those moments are real.”

Meanwhile, album standout “Make This World” works both as militaristic funk and a cautionary tale about the health of the planet. “The world was designed to last indefinitely,” says Fields.

“And we’re the only living species on Earth who can alter that process. I’m hoping that song has a chain reaction, helps somebody put into action whatever contribution they can to change what the world is going through.”

Fields and his six-piece band will tour in the fall, where he notes the audiences seem tgrowing and changing. “I’m seeing a younger crowd,” he notes. “And that’s a blessing.”

As for his late success? Fields regrets nothing. “I was already talking to myself in the beginning of my career about the end of my career,” he says. “I was a little naive, so I told myself, ‘Think about the future in every song you make. Make things you can live with. Everything you do has consequences.’ And today, I live like I’ve always lived.”

A credo that continues with Special Night. “All the songs on that record have special meaning,” he says. “I hope people take a good listen to it and find the magic.”

**Nikki Lane**For her hotly anticipated sophomore album, Nashville songstress Nikki Lane teamed up with Dan Auerbach of The Black Keys for a record that turns the vulnerable singer-songwriter stereotype on its ears. With songs that crucify ex-boyfriends, celebrate one-night stands (as long as she can bolt town right after) and proclaim that it's "always the right time to do the wrong thing," Lane comes across like a modern-era Wanda Jackson, albeit with more oats to sow. "My songs always paint a pretty clear picture of what's been going on in my life, so this is one moody record," she says. "There's lots of talk of misbehaving and moving on."

"All or Nothin'" was released via New West Records in 2014

**Angeleena Presley**If there’s a pedigree for a modern country music star, then Angaleena Presley fits all of the criteria: a coal miner’s daughter; native of Beauty, Kentucky; a direct descendent of the original feuding McCoys; a one-time single mother; a graduate of both the school of hard knocks and college; a former cashier at both Wal-Mart and Winn-Dixie. Perhaps best of all the member of Platinum-selling Pistol Annies (with Miranda Lambert and Ashley Monroe) says she “doesn’t know how to not tell the truth.”

That truth shines through on her much-anticipated debut album, American Middle Class, which she co-produced with Jordan Powell. Yet this is not only the kind of truth that country music has always been known for—American Middle Class takes it a step further by not only being a revealing memoir of Presley’s colorful experiences but also a powerful look at contemporary rural American life. “I have lived every minute on this record. My mama ain’t none too happy about me spreading my business around but I have to do it,” Presley says. “It’s the experience of my life from birth to now.”

Yet the specificity of the album’s twelve gems only makes it more universal. While zooming in on the details of her own life, Presley exposes themes to which everyone can relate. The album explores everything from a terrible economy to unexpected pregnancies to drug abuse in tightly written songs that transcend the specific and become tales of our shared experiences. “I think a good song is one where people listen to a very personal story and think ‘That’s my story, too,’” Presley says.

Mission accomplished.

She has created a hugely resonant album, one that is simultaneously a completely new sound and also deeply entrenched in the beloved traditions of country music, much like Presley herself. Her early life in the mountains was one that taught her to respect her heritage while being invested in the future at the same time. Her parents made sure she knew Carole King and Janis Joplin as well as Ralph Stanley, Merle Haggard, and Bill Monroe. She studied the melodies and lyrics of Indigo Girls yet sometimes skipped school so she could drive over to Loretta Lynn’s home at Butcher Holler to seek inspiration.

Presley grew up in a place where the lush mountains and dignity of the people were juxtaposed against a spreading prescription pill problem and rampant unemployment. She doesn’t hold back from exploring these tough issues while also managing to have a rollicking time on the record, often combining the harder subjects with a more driving and joyous delivery but without ever sacrificing the seriousness of the topics she is cutting wide open.

Before creating this solo effort Presley meticulously crafted her own sound for years. “I have paid my dues. I’ve been through the grind, and so many people have told me no. But I kept on making music. I had to,” Presley says. “I never would compromise because I couldn’t. Part of the waiting has been my own unwillingness to follow the formula but now I feel like the formula has caught up with me. Maybe I was just ahead of my time.”

That particular sound is one that is equal parts tradition and originality on a concept album in the tradition of Willie Nelson’s Red Headed Stranger or Springsteen’s Tunnel of Love, albums that tell a succinct and powerful story through a signature sound and masterful songwriting of true artists. Presley knows how to have a big time but she is also fiercely dedicated to her music, keenly intelligent, and determined to tell her own truth.

Presley wrote five of the twelve songs by herself and her co-writers are a virtual Who’s-Who of the best songwriters in the business: Mark D. Sanders, Matraca Berg, Lori McKenna, Sarah Siskind, Bob Dipero, Barry Dean, and Luke Laird. She credits her co-producer, Jordan Powell, with assembling an enviable cast of pickers on a record that allows room for the instrumentalists to shine. Among them are Keith Gattis (who’s acoustic solo on “Life of the Party” offers a standout moment) and Audley Freed on guitars,mandolins, and dobros; Josh Grange on a beautifully grieving pedal steel; mandolins, and dobros; Fred Elrtingham keeps things rocking along on drums; Grammy winner Glenn Worff and Motown-influenced Aden Bubeck on bass (with both upright and electric bass adding sizzle to “Knocked Up”), David Henry on haunting cello and strings; and John Henry Trinko driving it all home with a wonderful job on organ and piano. To cap it all off, there are also amazing harmony vocals from standouts such as Patty Loveless, Chris Stapleton, Angie Primm, Keith Gattis, Kelly Archer, Sarah Siskind, Gale Mayes and Emily Saliers (Indigo Girls).

The honesty, the aching delivery, the picking, the beautifully crafted songs—they all come together to form an album that has been awaited with bated breath by fans and the industry alike and does not disappoint, announcing a bonafide country music star who doesn’t just have the pedigree, she also has the magic in her to transform and move her listeners.

“In this fast-paced day and age, it’s so hard for us to slow down and live in the moment,” Presley says. “I just hope my songs can be three minutes for a person to experience something in the moment, to connect, and to feel something, whether that be tragedy or joy or something in between. I want to tell the truth.”

That truth is something that listeners know when they hear it. It’s the solid truth of someone like Presley, who doesn’t just talk the talk but has walked the walk and knows what she’s talking about. That’s real country music and with American Middle Class Angaleena Presley emerges as the clear, fierce, and joyous voice of her generation.

**Midnight Merry-Go-Round: ‘90s Edition Hosted by Teen Spirit**

The Midnight Merry-Go-Round pays tribute to the Midday Merry-Go-Round, a Knoxville radio show that was a precursor to the Grand Ole Opry. Knoxville’s musical roots run deep, and what better way to shine a spotlight on them than by bringing together some of our most talented musicians to pay tribute to some of the highlights? As with last year's festival, the Midnight Merry-Go-Round will feature a number of festival performers (and maybe a few surprises). Stay tuned for more details!

A play off of the old Midday Merry-Go-Round, a Knoxville radio show that was a precursor to the Grand Ole Opry, the 2017 iteration will feature that decade we all knew and loved, the ‘90s! Trade in your skinny jeans and flannel for a slap bracelet and, well....flannel! From Nirvana to Spice Girls, Alanis to Sir-Mix-A-Lot, host band Teen Spirit will bring you back in time with all your favorite Grunge and R and B hits from 1990 to 1999. And as always, the Midnight Merry Go Round will be full of special guests from the festival and the Knoxville music scene.

**Nora Jane Struthers & The Party Line**

I am living in a dream when I wake

You are my bright shining star you guide the way . .

Wake. The evocative one-word title speaks volumes about what’s happening on Nora Jane Struthers’ latest album. For the thirty-year old singer-songwriter, it’s “wake” in several senses of the word. There’s the trail of a life and career behind her, the slipstream of lessons learned. There’s the quiet observance and letting go of who she has been up until now as both an artist and a person. And most of all, there’s the stirring of something new, an opening of a door and wide-eyed rush forward into a place of discovery and dizzying possibilities. And it’s all set to a soundtrack that resonates with the warm uplift of the first day of spring.

In short, Nora Jane Struthers has fallen in love.

“The whole album is about strength through vulnerability,” she says. “That’s what I’ve come to as an artist, and a human being, and I think it’s the most powerful force in my life. I feel so much more like my childhood self now than I did over the past five years, than I have in my whole adult life. In my twenties, I had a tendency to compartmentalize pieces of my musical identity. For instance, how could I reconcile my love of both bluegrass and Pearl Jam? I did the same thing in my personal life, where I had this sort of idea of who I wanted to be, and ignored all these other pieces of myself, because I didn’t think they fit into some imagined big picture.

“But this experience of falling in love blew that whole thing apart,” she continues. “Looking back, my previous two albums feel so safe. They had literary merit, contributing to the traditional canon in a way that I was proud of. But it all felt masked by these narratives that were not directly my own. These new songs are autobiographical. I’m looking inward, allowing that to be what my art is. To take away the narrative safety net and then the sonic safety net and just give myself over to my own story and my own feelings, was scary but exhilarating.”

That exhilaration courses through the whole album, with an unmoored feeling that reminds us that the gravitational direction of finding love is as much about rising as it is falling. Opener “The Same Road” percolates along with percussive banjo and side-stick then lifts into a panoramic chorus, while “Dreamin,’” soaked in classic Bakersfield good vibes, threads its infectious charm through with chugging train rhythms, twangy guitar and pedal steel. “When I Wake” is pure harmony bliss, with Struthers and Joe Overton echoing early ’70s Gram & Emmylou. “The Wire” shimmers with poetic reflection (“The truth is I didn’t see the wire until I saw the bird”) and the radio-ready “Lovin’ You” pulls off the three-and-a-half minute miracle, with Struthers’ warm, engaging alto finding fresh imagery like, “If I was a crocus lovin’ you would be the spring / If I was an eagle lovin’ you would be my wings . .” Other highlights include the fiery slide-guitar powered “I Ain’t Holdin’ Back,” the call-and-response, southern-fried “Don’t Care” and the hushed, split-rail tenderness of “The South.” The whole record, a 53-minute celebration of that heart-to-heart, flesh-to-flesh connection that reminds us we’re alive, also feels like a major artistic arrival.

Struthers’ ascent to this new plateau has been a steady one. Born in Virginia and raised in New Jersey, she began playing as a pre-teen. attending festivals and fiddlers’ conventions around the south with her banjo-playing father. “These were pretty much just a group of musicians camping in a muddy field for a week, playing tunes and singing songs,” she recalls. “But these traditional music communities greatly influenced me and informed my decision later to move to Nashville and try to become a professional musician.” After graduating from NYU with an education degree, she taught high school English in Brooklyn and put her music career on the back burner. But a visit to the Telluride Bluegrass Festival in the early 2000s changed that. Watching one of her heroes, Tim O’Brien, she stood in front of the stage, glanced back at the crowd and the mountains and thought, “This is what I want to do.” There followed that move to Nashville, much woodshedding as a writer and touring, with Bearfoot, and her first solo-fronted group, the Bootleggers (who won the 2008 Telluride band competition). Along the way, she worked with bluegrass stars like O’Brien, Stuart Duncan and Bryan Sutton, and released two critically-acclaimed albums. But it was in 2012, when Struthers formed the Party Line, that everything started to come into sharper focus.

She says, “With the Party Line, I found the people I want to be with. And what instruments they play are what my band became. So I didn’t find a fiddle player. I found a great electric guitar player who I love hanging around with, and who wants to commit to my music. What I love about our instrumentation is the balance between rock ‘n’ roll vibe and old time acoustic feeling. Those two specifically are the balance between my guitarist Josh Vana and Joe Overton. Josh plays with more of a rock feeling. Joe runs what I call the roots utility. He plays open backed banjo, resonator banjo, fiddle and pedal steel guitar. It’s a really interesting balance between roots and rock. I don’t know a lot of other female-fronted bands that are doing quite what we’re doing, so I feel like maybe we have something unique, which is always a good thing.”

Having the right band also led Struthers to realize that she wanted to change her approach to record-making. “My last album Carnival took a step away from certain aspects of the digital, highly-produced approach. There’s no auto-tuning. I made it with the band, not session players. But the songs weren’t road-tested, so we put the arrangements together in the studio. After touring that record and seeing how the songs evolved as a result of playing them for audiences, I just knew that I wanted to make the next record after road-testing the material and allowing it to grow.”

Inspired by what she calls the “grit and vibe” of recent favorite albums by Hayes Carll and Jason Isbell, she and the band hunkered down in the Bomb Shelter studio in Nashville, with Struthers taking on the daunting first-time challenge of self-producing.

“Oh my gosh, it was exhausting, and I’m never doing it again” she says with a laugh. “I’ve made several albums so I have a basic knowledge of how to work with people in the studio. I really wanted to capture performances. And the biggest challenge as producer was getting everybody, including myself, to step out from their individual parts and listen to the whole. And say, “Maybe you didn’t play that drum fill the way you wanted to play it. But listen to the whole song, and isn’t it great?” That’s what we kept coming back to. We could zoom in as much as we want, but when you really zoom out, isn’t this great?’ That being said, it ending up being harder than I imagined to be the artist and producer at the same time. If only because when you’re trying to save your voice for singing, talking to your band members can just be vocally taxing.”

The end result was worth it. And the Party Line comes across as a classic example of the model supporting band, a la the Heartbreakers or the Cardinals. Nobody overplays. The pieces always fit. Overton, Vana and bassist Brian Duncan Miller and drummer Drew Lawhorn all get their moments to shine, but their tasteful parts are first and foremost in service of the song.

Struthers affirms, “When I got the test pressing and listened to it, I just cried and laughed my way through the record. It was the most beautiful experience to see that black vinyl spinning and think, ‘Wow, so much went into the making of this record, and we did it!’ That’s a beautiful place to be living before a record comes out.”

As she looks ahead to a busy 2017 of touring and promoting Wake, Struthers says she’s “ready to go for it.” With a strong team around her, both business and street (she’s been very successful with Kickstarter fan-funding), she pauses to reflect on what she hopes this record might mean to her listeners. “I try to put myself out there and be vulnerable and trust that what people give me back is loving. I hope that people listen to these songs and are given some courage to take a risk, be vulnerable and brave, allow themselves to embrace imperfection. And I hope that that has a positive influence on the way that they are able to lead their lives and interact with people that they love.”

**Jon Stickley Trio**

Jon Stickley Trio has been making waves with the independent and fan-funded release of their 2nd album, Lost at Last, this past October. The originality and sheer energy of this genre-bending ensemble serves as a welcome wake up call for those who experience it. With roots in gypsy jazz, bluegrass, and hip-hop in an “exhilarating all-acoustic swirl” (Acoustic Guitar Magazine), Jon Stickley Trio combines Jon Stickley’s rapid-fire flatpicking guitar with the sultry and wild, yet refined, melodies of Lyndsay Pruett on violin set over the deep groove of Patrick Armitage on drums. The three have fused their collective styles into a repertoire of exciting and innovative original music along with some captivating covers. Lost at Last was recorded in the band’s hometown of Asheville, NC at the iconic Echo Mountain Studios under the watchful eye of producer Dave King (The Bad Plus).

The New York Times’ Nate Chinen writes “… there’s hardy cohesion among the players — no less on the Gypsy standard ‘Valse de Wasso’ than on ‘Darth Radar’ a turbocharged original with a ska upbeat and a shredding melody. And when Mr. Stickley and friends turn to bluegrass, as on ‘The High Road,’ by Tim O’Brien, they sound both respectful and free.” Premier Guitar Magazine also took note of “Darth Radar,” with Jason Shadrick calling it, “a rapid-fire take that moves from a serious ska beat to burning surf-style runs that would make Dick Dale proud.”

**Birds of Chicago**

“Real Midnight…finds Russell and Nero memorializing the intense, freewheeling, all-too-fleeting attachments of youth, eulogizing fellow dreamers and meditating on mortality…They show us a way to fully live with the awareness that nothing’s forever and everything’s at stake.”***– Jewly Hight, NPR First Listen***

“With Echoes of deep gospel in Russell’s voice as she sings over a mix of electric guitar, resonant piano, and percussion… at once uplifting and a little melancholy.” ***– Wall Street Journal***

In so many ways, we are a word weary culture, ever searching for ways to communicate in fewer and fewer words, letters, syllables…Our online, blogged out, you-tubed attention spans are truncated and fragmented like never before. Birds of Chicago, the collective centered around Allison Russell and JT Nero, reassert the simple notion – radical in these times – that beautiful words and music can still tap deep veins of emotion.

*real midnight’s gonna come / real midnight’s gonna come*  
*real wolves at your door / with blood on their tongues*  
*now what you gonna do / with your days left in the sun?*  
*ha da la ha*

Stark, elemental imagery that feels like scripture, or a lost folk song recovered; the Birds draw heavily on the gospel tradition and the music feels like a new, secular gospel of sorts. For Birds of Chicago, every word counts. Every note counts. No gold-dusting, no filler. Music is the good news and Real Midnight, the band’s poignant new Joe Henry produced album, throbs with an urgency that feels quietly seismic.

**The Royal Hounds**

The Royal Hounds first played together in an impromptu performance at a friend's Christmas Party in 2010. The music was magic, and the ideas exploded as original members Hinds, Lee, and Billingsley collaborated on songs, stage tricks, and other components of their unique live show. The Royal Hounds recently released their debut album, *I'm in Love with a Zombie* in 2013. Later that year, they relocated to Las Vegas when Hinds was asked to join the cast of Million Dollar Quartet. They still play shows on both the East and West Coast.

**Dave Eggar**

Dave Eggar’s body of work is consistently greeted with superlatives and rave reviews. It’s a luxury not often enjoyed by an artist who records in diverse genres and performs live in multiple musical categories, seamlessly moving between each, be it Pop, Rock, Jazz, R&B, New Age, World or Classical music. His ability to effortlessly blur the lines between any musical style is truly unique. That's the magic of Dave Eggar.

Dave’s soon-to-be released CD project and companion DVD video, Kingston Morning, was recently recorded in Brooklyn, NY, Kingston, Jamaica, and Big Stone Gap, Virginia. Released by Domo Music Group (www.domo.com), favorite Eggar tracks on the release include Earth’s Paradise (vocals by Jamaican roots reggae legend Luciano); Follow Me to the Sun (vocals by Chuck Palmer); High Atmosphere (vocals by NPR’s Robin & Linda Williams -- Prairie Home Companion); Itsbynne Reel and Jacob’s Vision (vocals by Bluegrass legend Dr. Ralph Stanley -- O Brother Where Art Thou).

Eggar says this project was an especially moving and emotional recording for to make. He notes, “This is a project of ingenuity and improvisation which took many hours of dedicated perseverance to complete. With open minds and open hearts, our lives were forever changed as these unique Reggae and Appalachian collaborations took shape. As we immersed ourselves in these seemingly disparate cultures, amazing similarities in the history and storied cultures emerged. Their individual hopes, dreams and the power of the music eventually seemed to bring the music and people of Jamaica and Virginia ever closer together.”

Dave continues, “My imagination has always been captivated by the music and culture of Jamaica and Appalachia. These journeys to Kingston and Big Stone Gap were truly a life altering experience for me. I am especially proud of the music that has been produced as a result of our efforts.”

A musical prodigy as a child, Dave Eggar began playing the cello and piano at age three. By the age of seven, Dave had performed on Broadway and with the Metropolitan Opera. He debuted at Carnegie Hall at the age of 15. Dave is a graduate of Harvard University and the Julliard School's Doctoral Program.

Mr. Eggar has appeared worldwide as a solo cellist and pianist. A virtuoso of many musical styles, Dave has performed and recorded with artists in numerous genres including Evanescence, The Who, Michael Brecker, Josh Groban, Coldplay, Beyonce, Pearl Jam, Fall Out Boy, Dave Sanborn, Kathleen Battle, Ray Lamontagne, Roberta Flack, The Spin Doctors, Dianne Reeves, Brandy, Carly Simon, Phil Ramone, Hannah Montana, Duncan Sheik, Sinead O’Connor, Bon Jovi, Manhattan Transfer, Corinne Bailey Ray and many more.

His list of awards and accomplishments includes accolades from Time Magazine, ASCAP, the National Endowment for the Arts, Sony Records Elevated Standards Award in classical music, the Geraldine Dodge & Leonard Bernstein Foundations, and at 15 was the youngest winner in the history of the Artists International Competition.

Dave’s mission to “not just cross over, but to cross through” multiple genres of music is apparent in all of his releases. Whether it’s classical, reggae, bluegrass, jazz, pop, or world music, Eggar finds a common voice within his musical vocabulary and introduces it with his own unique imaginative vision.

**Wild Ponies**How does one describe those precious moments in life when we are able to transcend our small daily self-interests, and can somehow hold onto those rarified breaths of the deeper human experience? Radiant, the new Wild Ponies album, out May 13 on No Evil Records, explores those moments with alternating delicacy and raucous abandon. At times, it’s as though Telisha is sitting right beside you, fingers on your shoulder, whispering in your ear. Seconds later it’s hard to believe this full, confidently reckless sound is coming from only four players (Telisha Williams, Doug Williams, Megan Jane and Fats Kaplin).

When you lay every fear and foible, every hurt and healing out for the whole world to see as Wild Ponies did on 2013's Things That Used to Shine, the album's follow-up surely can't be faulted for cutting a little bit loose. That's certainly the case with Radiant, the rough and tumble new release from Wild Ponies duo of Doug and Telisha Williams. The set bucks and rumbles through 11 songs that pull from all manner of sources, poetic tweens, Catawba trees, homophobic politicians, dying small towns, and tarot cards. The tie that binds them all together is the thread of moments and memories, of cycles and seasons, that make up a life well-lived.

For Doug, Radiant is about stepping outside of the Wild Ponies bubble. It's about “trying to look at the world around us and how we relate to it, trying to find some empathy.” For Telisha, though, it's also about simply stepping outside of her own skin. “When I listen to Shine, I hear the struggle. I hear the transition of a victim pushing, pulling, letting go, standing up, and shouting. It’s intense for me, and it’s been intense for some of our fans,” she explains. “This record sounds more stable and secure in some ways, and fresh and exploratory in others. I don’t think I could’ve gone to these same places if I remained in child victim- and survivor-land. There’s an acceptance and love for myself that I didn’t have before and that allows me to reach deeper within myself, and to reach out and connect to my community in ways that I wasn’t able to in the past.”

On Radiant, the Wild Ponies community includes songwriters like Amy Speace (“Born with a Broken Heart”), Sally Barris (“The Night We Never Met”), Jeff Barbra (“Mom and Pop”), and Amelia White (“Big Blue Sun,” “Home Is Where the Road Goes”), along with the aforementioned tween, Mariah Moore, whom Doug and Telisha met through volunteering with the Country Music Hall of Fame's Words & Music program. The pair were so struck by the imagery of the then-12-year-old's lyrics that they finessed them a bit, until her co-write emerged as the centerpiece — and title track — of Radiant. Telisha says of the various, sometimes unusual collaborations, “I have to admit, there’s probably a little defiance in all of this. Bucking the way things 'should' be done: 'You can’t put a song you wrote with a 12-year-old on your REAL record!'”

She continues, “A good song is a good song, whether it’s written by a 12-year-old or an 80-year-old. We just want to make good art, and that usually means bending some rules.”

… which is where the catawba tree and tarot cards come in. The two songwriters had been working on what would become “Tower and the Wheel,” a tune that was partly inspired by an old tree on Doug's grandparents' farm. “I’ve known that tree my whole life,” he offers. “It knew my mom and my grandparents even way back before that. And, when my grandfather bought that farm, that tree was already really old. But she’s still there, strong as ever. That really is where we’d tie the horses, and where we’d pull the porch chairs around in the shade and the dirt and play songs, where Telisha and I cut our wedding cake. That’s a good place to look for perspective. It all turns, and it’ll all fall... but maybe not today.”

With the tree in mind, they had the song's main theme, but were having trouble with the B-sections, so they laid out an eight-card tarot spread and let the symbols write the rest. “Nothing we were trying was working,” Doug says, “so we laid out eight cards and pretty much wrote all those B parts right from the way they fell. They lined up perfectly between our verses and finished the story for us.”

That's just how it goes sometimes, and that's why Wild Ponies are always open to receiving inspirations for songs from anywhere and everywhere. “We’ll take them however they want to come,” Telisha says, adding, “whether that’s through a dream, through tears and snot, or wrestling it out with the help of some friends. Melody or lyrics first? It doesn’t matter. The song chooses how to reveal itself.”

Doug picks up the train of thought, “My favorite songwriters are people who are curious, who are always looking at words and connections and asking questions — people who pick things up in strangers' houses just to see what the bottom side of the ash tray looks like.”

Listeners who pick up the wonder of “Radiant” just to see what the bottom side of it might look like will find an answer in the over-the-whole-thing spirit of songs like "Unplug the Machine" and "Mom and Pop." Doug sees the opposing pieces as two sides of the same coin. “With 'Radiant,' I feel like we discovered a connection — a web — or maybe an acknowledgment that we’re all locked together tighter than we want to admit sometimes,” he says. “There’s this ethereal wonderment at those connections and how beautiful and fragile they are. We’re all just atoms molded together — even the air between us.

“'Unplug the Machine' and 'Mom and Pop' are extensions of that. Actions have consequences. None of this occurs in a vacuum. And it all just seems to repeat, over and over.”

“It’s the battle we’re all a part of,” Telisha adds. “Some days, you look up at the sky and can’t believe how beautiful things are, and that you get to be a part of it. Other days — or even later that same day — you’re caught in the swirl of people losing jobs, communities crumbling, and people spewing hate at each other through the anonymity of the Internet. We’re isolated and connected at the same time. It’s the 2016 version of glass half-full or empty. Which are you going to choose?”

One very full choice Wild Ponies made for Radiant comes in its sonic expression. Doug ditched his acoustic guitar in favor of plugging all the way in. Though it doesn't represent a seismic shift in their sound compared to Shine, it is some distance from the original “Doug & Telisha” acoustic duo that fans once knew. Fear not, though, fans of folk. “I think we’ll always be a folk duo,” Doug insists. “I joke from stage sometimes that all my favorite folk musicians played a Telecaster — Joe Strummer, Merle Haggard, Bruce Springsteen, Bob Dylan…”

Indeed, in addition to the full-band version of Radiant, Wild Ponies are also releasing a limited edition Acoustic Demo version of the record that a mere 500 loyal followers will get to enjoy — though even that one rocks, at least a little. “The edge is still there... without the electricity, tubes, and drums,” Telisha says. “The Acoustic Demo version of 'Unplug the Machine' is wild. It’s more mellow, for sure, but you still see the fist shaking, clenched jaw pushing back, refusing to get dragged down.”

Further still, plans are already in the works for the summer recording of an all-acoustic project. As Doug tells it, “We’re going to record it underneath that catawba tree with a bunch of guys my grandfather used to play with in Virginia and a bunch of our Nashville friends — throw ‘em all together and see what happens. Maybe that one will turn into a real rock and roll record.”

As independent artists in an uncertain world, Doug and Telisha know they are lucky to be in this Wild Ponies thing with all those friends and with each other. Sure, there are some trade-offs, but that's just the cost of doing business. “To be honest, for us, there aren’t a lot of cons,” Telisha muses. “It’s all an adventure, and we’re in it together — literally, every single mile. Since we’ve been traveling more as a band over the past couple of years, we’re even more aware of how fortunate we are to get to share this dream.”

But the dream is also a job. “It’s the craziest, most amazing, hardest, most enjoyable, fulfilling, and draining job I can imagine,” she says. And it requires the two to wear a lot of different hats: graphic designer, tour manager, merchandise coordinator, travel agent, and more. Though Telisha wouldn't trade it for any other job in the world, she does confess that, “I wish the answer was, 'We sleep until noon, write in our journals until 2, go for a run, then play our instruments for a couple of hours and write songs while we drink whiskey until 2 am.' Although the bedtime is pretty accurate, the rest of that story is, sadly, some B.S.”

Doug echoes her sentiment: “I wish I could say that this job is all just sitting around, getting high, writing songs, traveling the world, going to our favorite Thai restaurant in Amsterdam, but the truth is… okay... maybe that is the truth.”

No matter how little truth is in that particular job description, there's a lot more of it in the songs on Radiant.

**Three Star Revival**

When soul and blues from the west collide with the country and Americana of the middle to become inspired by the mountains and bluegrass of the East you get the sound of Three Star Revival. The music created, inspired, and nourished by the sounds of Tennessee.

**Shimmy & The Burns**

At 30 years old, despite a lifetime of dreaming about being a musician, Brian “Shimmy” Paddock couldn’t carry a tune or strum a single chord on the guitar. Many dark nights were spent pouring his innermost thoughts and heartaches into lyrics for songs he didn’t think would ever actually be played. After his wife discovered this secret exercise, she encouraged him to learn to play and put music to these words.

Seven years, countless hours of refining instrumental/vocal skills and many shows later, Paddock fronts Shimmy & Burns, a group the Knoxville Music Warehouse describes as, “Sporting that kind of rock n’ roll fused with folk perfect for these here parts.” Paddock delivers straightforward and brutally honest lines in a voice that sounds like it’s been stained with cigarette smoke and soaked in cheap whiskey. Drummer Gurnee Barrett leads a tight, driving rhythm section pushing the band’s tunes along while being complemented by the punk infused, understated and passionate lead guitar work of Wesley Harless. Currently, the low end duties are held down by Harless’ brother, Will.

Since forming in late 2014, these “damn fine purveyors of American rock n’ roll”(The Daily Times) have been performing increasingly successful shows, recorded two self-released, critically-acclaimed albums and continue to expand their tour schedule in support of their most recent record, “Letting Go” with plans to begin recording a third effort in Spring of 2017.

The Shimmy & the Burns experience is best summed up by a recent review of “Letting Go” in which Blank Newspaper says, “you’ll be more than pleased by their live sets. Catch them at one of their upcoming shows and raise a glass to this beautiful mess we call life.”

**Quartjar**

Quartjar originally formed in 2003 as the New Randall Brown Quartet, and evolved over time into the mighty rock trio that it is today. The band's sound transitioned from bluesy singer-songwriter material into a multi-layered rock power punch with the occasional jazz-prog-blues outer-space jam. The lyrics weave narrative and impressionist phrasing together to, you know, tell stories and give impressions.

**The Lawsuits**

For years, Philadelphia's The Lawsuits have been known for a sound that cannot be pigeonholed into one genre. There is something to be said about a band that has been creating music together as long as The Lawsuits have. With that longevity comes a sort of comfort and understanding for both themselves, and the listener. "Moon Son", the band's second full length release, and Randm Records debut, showcases years of blending each other's influences and sounds to create something wholly their own. They have spent their music careers up to this point dipping their toes in multiple sounds and styles to create this very identity. With a nostalgic nod to the greats of the past and a dash of modern productions and self-awareness, laced with sweeping harmonies: this is The Lawsuits.

Formed after songwriter Brian Dale Allen Strouse was introduced to vocalist Vanessa Winters & bassist Brendan Cunningham through a mutual friend, The Lawsuits then recruited fellow Temple alum, drummer Josh Friedman. Their 2013 release, 'Cool Cool Cool', was produced by Bill Moriarty (Dr. Dog, Man Man), and garnered attention from outlets such as Rolling Stone, Spin, Paste & Philadelphia’s WXPN. The album's first single, 'Onion', was chosen as #22 of Daytrotter's 300 Best Songs of 2013.

**Handsome & The Humbles**

When it comes to Handsome & The Humbles, appearances can be deceiving. Frontman Josh Smith is living proof.

On the surface, he's ruggedly handsome and athletically built, traits that come in handy for his day job as a physical therapist assistant. He's easygoing, quick with a grin and the seeming epitome of the young American man in 2016, with a good job and a pretty young wife and an Americana band that can knock the occasional Ryan Adams cover out of the park.

Like the collection of songs on his band's new album, however, you need only look (and listen) a little closer to discover not-so-obvious truths beneath the surface.

There's a weariness of the spirit etched into the lines around his eyes, the marks of a man who's spent long nights staring out a window at the dark landscape with a guitar in hand, ruminating on his own past and those of friends. They're the eyes of a songwriter who's seen trouble and strife but still believes in the better angels of humanity's nature.

He sees a darkness, as the Bonnie "Prince" Billy song goes, but he also sees the light of the coming dawn, and he tries awful damn hard to chronicle both as the songwriter for Handsome & The Humbles.

"The darker stuff, I've always related pretty well," he says. "Music, movies — the ones I like are always sadder or darker."

Raised in Clinton, Tenn. — a small Southern town just north of Knoxville — Smith was active in church and school activities and got involved in playing music as a teen, first as a bass player for a Christian group. Faith, incidentally, led him first toward the ministry: He started attending church to meet girls, he says with a laugh, but over time, he began to find solace and comfort in religious dogma, and after high school he attended a religious-based college, where his political and social opinions began to skew conservative. When he realized just how much he had changed — after college, working for a small-town church that sought to exile his co-worker and former college roommate, who happened to be gay — his eyes were opened.

"It just occurred to me that everything I'd been taught, everything I was repeating without thinking about it, wasn't really what I believed," he says. "Deep down, I knew that these certain things weren't right. I knew this wasn't the way to treat people. I started to wake up, I guess you could say."

Faced with such a life-changing revelation — that all he knew to be true perhaps was not, that the career path on which he was walking might be the wrong one, that the values he held dear were a thin veneer layered over his true self — he turned to the only thing in his life that seemed without pretense: music.

He began to write, drawing on the North Carolina alt-country sadness that passes for currency in the music of Ryan Adams, combining it with the sweet melancholy of The Jayhawks. He began to see his hometown, his home region, for what it really is — a placed of rugged and breathtaking natural beauty, populated by men and women who have been defined by hard times and difficult circumstances, and he began to find a purpose in the telling of their stories.

“When I started writing songs, I thought, ‘I’d like to tell some stories, too. I’d like to be a part of the culture in this area.’ And that’s what started this all,” he says.

It was serendipity that two other East Tennessee musicians — Tyler Huff, and Jason Chambers of fellow Clinton-based Americana ensemble The Hotshot Freight Train — were looking to start a Ryan Adams cover band around the same time; Smith ended up calling Huff for help fleshing out some of his original music, and soon Smith was invited into the fold. The cover band idea was ditched in favor of Smith's songs, and the band's name came out of a brainstorming session to find an appropriate moniker.

“We did this thing where we just spouted off rather idiotic band names, and some were quite filthy to be honest,” Smith says with a chuckle. “I think one day, I made a joke and said something like, ‘Well, I am handsome, and I’m humble,’ and one of the guys shouted, ‘Handsome and The Humbles!’ That’s the one we kept coming back to, even though I thought some of the filthy names were better.”

As serious as the music might be, there's a lighter side to the ensemble as well, a charm that's won them fans ever since they began gigging around Knoxville and released an EP in the fall of 2014, a beautifully ragged collection of Americana that earned them local radio airplay. It was an ideal primer for "Have Mercy," the band's first official full-length.

"I feel like this new album is darker than the EP was," Smith says of the band's forthcoming full-length, due out April 16. "I've written about stories I've heard and people I know, and it feels like a lot of this record came from a song called 'Have Mercy,' which is about trying to do good, but realizing that maybe you're going about it the wrong way."

"Have Mercy" is a well-worn road map of familiar territory, creased and folded and marked up with places of special significance. The loping country of the album opener, "Hard Times … "Knoxville Lights," a powerful, swaggering dirge of longing, the sound of a man behind the wheel of a car pointed west and carrying him over Carolina mountains, not sure of what he’s going to find when he gets there but feeling the undeniable pull of the place he knows as home … the title track, an acoustic gospel number that's the soundtrack to man's metaphysical contemplations on the sun-dappled banks of a river — there's a warmth and beauty to these 13 songs that speaks of a desperation for understanding, a soul-deep ache to belong, that can only come from the hearts of musicians who believe that hope is something worth championing.

Because, in the darkest of times, it's often the only thing left to cling to. There's plenty of those on "Have Mercy" — the song "Burn" tells the story of a ne'er-do-well who's shot in the back after robbing a liquor store, and the haunting banjo intro to "The Ballad of Rose Thompson" marks it as an ancestor of Appalachian murder ballads from days gone by. And then there's the elegy of "True Believer," in which the recently deceased speaks from beyond the

**Sally & George**

In the town where country music was born--where two states come together on one street--a spark lit and a duo was ignited. At the 2012 Bristol Rhythm and Roots Reunion, on the way to take the stage with his band, Sol Driven Train, guitarist/singer Joel Timmons found himself sidetracked by Della Mae, an all-female, GRAMMY-nominated bluegrass band. It was that group's bass player, Shelby Means, who most captivated his attention. After a conversation at the merchandise table about their shared love of travel and music, two-years passed before Means and Timmons would reconnect. A bold love song led the way, and eventually a growing romance turned into the Nashville-based duo Sally & George and their debut album tip my heart.

With tip my heart, Sally & George have made an engaging, eclectic debut album. It’s a thoughtful meditation on Means’ and Timmons’ courtship and love (the duo got engaged in July 2016 on a mountain in North Carolina after work on tip my heart was completed). The album deftly moves from rollicking, electrified rockers to stripped down, gauzy reflections on love and faith, to walking bass-led country-indebted duets. All of it is done tastefully, with an earnestness that does not shy away from humor or the occasional cuss word.

tip my heart came together over the course of two-years, in three chapters. The first chapter began in Laramie, Wyoming at Thanksgiving 2014. Timmons and Means were visiting Means’ parents for the holiday. They had four original songs and since the snow was coming down sideways, they enlisted the engineering of a mutual friend and decided to go into the studio. Their intention was to have some fun and experiment recording together. After a day and a half in Thunderground Sound Studio, the duo had five rough mixes and newfound confidence that they could make a great record together. When they were driving to Denver to catch their flight home, they were so excited listening to their roughs that they missed a turn and ended up in Nebraska.

Chapter two was over a year later in Charleston, SC, at the home studio of Shovels & Rope on Wadmalaw Island. After a busy year, Means and Timmons had gathered enough songs to go back into the studio. Shovels & Rope’s Cary Ann Hearst and Michael Trent were old friends of Timmons’ in the Charleston music scene. Since Hearst and Trent were taking some time off the road with their new baby, they invited Sally & George to spend a few days recording at Studio Bees. The family atmosphere and the rock and roll edge of Shovels & Rope both found their way into the music that was recorded there.

Chapter three happened six months later. Sally & George finished things off at Tim Carter’s studio just outside of Music City. The casual atmosphere at Tim’s cabin studio made Sally & George feel at home and they were able to dig into the final production of tip my heart, they brought in Nashville friends like 10 String Symphony, Langhorne Slim, The Danberrys and more for overdubs and finished the record.

The title track, "Tip My Heart," is a great example of what makes Sally & George such a potent musical duo. Written by Means when she was still in Della Mae, the song didn't fit into that band's framework. The playful lyrics (with references to Jack and Jill and Humpty Dumpty) are enhanced by Shelby and Joel's glittering harmonies and a fiery electric guitar.

After their initial meeting at Bristol Rhythm and Roots, Timmons was inspired to write “Pipedream,” vividly imagining what it would be like to spend the rest of their lives together. He emailed Means the song and waited an excruciating two weeks for her reply. She finally wrote back, thanking him for the flattery and commenting that it took big balls to send something like that. She also informed him that she already had a boyfriend. When that boyfriend exited the picture a few months later, their romance began.

“Wild Tiger Style” and “Love Electric” both reflect the duos rock and roll side, with electric guitars and seductive, impassioned vocals. A gauzy, questioning track, “Baby” was inspired by a quote Means heard in yoga class and her time spent rocking a newborn baby to sleep at a plant nursery job. The track came together at Shovels & Rope’s studio, with Trent and Hearst’s baby blessing the space before tapes were rolling.

A longtime surfer in Charleston, Timmons’ love for Means meant uprooting himself and moving to Nashville. “Nashville Beach” is Timmons’ attempt to assuage his ocean heart by imagining life in Nashville as a different kind of wave. “Hey Wow” was Sally & George’s first appointment co-write. The duo scheduled a time and met in their living room, channeling the sometimes bawdy duets of John Prine and Iris Dement and the back and forth conversational style of Johnny and June Carter Cash.

Means and Timmons took on the name Sally & George as a tribute to Means’ dapper grandparents. In 2014 Means’ grandfather George passed away, leaving an entire ranch house full of vintage clothes, furniture, dishes, and cobwebs for Means’ mother to clean out. Knowing her daughter’s love of vintage clothes Sherri Means saved Sally and George’s hip threads and gifted them to Means and Timmons on Thanksgiving in 2014. This was also the time Means and Timmons began recording Tip my heart, They arrived at the initial sessions at Thunderground Sound Studio wearing Sally & George’s clothes.

After the holiday and back in Nashville, the duo struggled to find a band name that would stick. One night after donning Sally & George’s outfits to go out in Nashville, Joel said, “We’re stepping out like Sally & George”. Shelby’s eyes lit up and she said, “That’s it! That’s our band name!” Sally & George felt like a natural fit, like slipping into an old pair of your grandpa’s jeans.

Prior to forming Sally & George, Means and Timmons spent time in Della Mae and Sol Driven Train, respectively. Means was nominated for a GRAMMY for Della Mae’s this world oft can be, and the band won IBMA’s Emerging Artist of the Year. They performed at Bonnaroo, Hardly Strictly Bluegrass, Merlefest, Pickathon and twice at the Grand Ole Opry and were U.S. cultural ambassadors, performing in 20 countries around the world including Brazil, Saudi Arabia, U.A.E., Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Friends since childhood, the members of Sol Driven Train toured the U.S. for a decade, building a dedicated grassroots following. They independently released 10 albums, including two albums for children.

**Zoë Nutt**

Zoë Nutt is a storyteller. She likes to tell stories with music and poignant and meaningful lyrics, but it’s perhaps her vocal interpretation of those words that brings her musical tales to life. Simply put, Zoë Nutt is a voice you will not soon forget.

Raised in Knoxville, and a graduate of Belmont University’s songwriting school in Nashville, Tennessee, Zoë has a way of quieting a room and hushing those voices in our heads that make it hard to sit and listen, so that all you want to do is hear the next thing she is going to sing.

**Shayla McDaniel**

Shayla McDaniel creates a seamless blend of jazz and alternative pop. The singer-songwriter began to pursue music in her hometown of Knoxville, Tennessee.

Having dabbled in music for several years, McDaniel began to take her music more seriously after a friend challenged her to step out of her comfort zone and onto a bigger stage. She rose to the challenge and released the singles “Coffee” and “I'll Leave the Light On,” and performed in the Cre865 Showcase, the official Startup Day afterparty, and live on-air at WUTK 90.3 FM The Rock. McDaniel also caught the attention of the Knoxville Music Warehouse, who chose her song “I’ll Leave the Light On” as one of the top 16 songs from Knoxville Artists in 2016.

McDaniel’s newest release “26 Letters” continues with the jazz-flavored vocals and mellow acoustic guitar stylings of her 2016 releases, but she adds a few new flavors to the mix while wrestling with change, regret and the permanent effects of words and actions.

The track “Silence,” which houses the line containing the EP’s title, explores the polarizing tension of opposing words and wills as McDaniel sings with resolve, “All you’re going to hear from me is silence,” over a soundscape of an echoing, atmospheric electric guitar, subtle drum hits and a pensive bass line.

McDaniel's latest release “26 Letters” is now available, and she will continue to play local and regional shows for growing audiences.

**Haley Cole**

The truly transcendent figures in American Music all share a common instrument, and a great number of them have had that instrument shaped and consecrated in the most venerated wellspring in all of song. That instrument, that source, is the human voice lifted in praise in the gospel tradition. No other musical tool has the capacity to bring every nuance of human experience and emotion to bear on the ribbon of sound as does the voice. Down thru time it’s been the foundation of all music, and it’s how Haley Cole will build a kingdom in your heart.

And with wisdom and humility far outweighing her years Haley realizes that her voice is a divine gift, that it has a purpose and a promise to fulfill and fortunately for us she has decided to let it shine. With the same glowing intensity found in her singing she softly but insistently pounded the top of a picnic table outside Gruene Hall on an autumn afternoon and said “I was given a voice, I was given this voice, and I have to sing… I know deep down that is the reason for my being, to try to relate to people in song. It’s what I’ve been called to do and I’m not going to deny it.”

Moments later the conviction, passion, and honesty in that voice thoroughly captivated the typically polite yet casually passive weekend tourist crowd of Gruene Hall. Each of her songs were received with the kind of rapturous applause that even celebrated headliners of that hallowed dancehall can find a bit challenging to summon. But Haley’s gentle command of that space subtly reveals a history of channeling the secret forces that lay hidden within music.

Her magnetism on stage and her ability to hold an audience spellbound is the natural harvest of years spent singing spirituals with her family at church gatherings and small revivals surrounding her tiny hometown of Birch Creek, Texas. There she witnessed the magic that moves in music and felt its healing power for the first time.

She reflects on that formative period saying “Early on when I started playing in church that was where I really felt it, when I saw what a song could do to people, how it touched people” and the impact of that struck a lasting chord “I was only….I don’t know thirteen of fourteen years old but there was never a time I didn’t feel moved. It was always a very emotional thing for me, singing, but it came from someplace else – I can’t explain it exactly. It wasn’t just the song, the melody, the lyrics, the chords, it was something bigger… it was an experience I’ll never forget.”

But just as every chord resonates and stirs the notes that surround it, sometimes somber tones are shaken from their slumber. When her utopian adolescence was unexpectedly shattered by dissonance she discovered a sanctuary and solace in songwriting.

She explains “We were in a bubble until my parents divorced, and that was when I started playing guitar and writing my own songs… songs for me were a way to work through a really, really tough time. It was a way of figuring things out on my own… and learning from that experience.”

And though her song-craft was met with praise and found expression in diverse forms that revealed Haley’s broadening musical palette, her departure from home for independence in Bryan-College Station quickly found her immersed in a plodding existence that was depleting her creative energies and leading her away from her inspiration.

She recalls that time saying “I knew really early on in life [what I wanted to do] but I didn’t listen to it until I was in a really rough spot where I was completely unhappy. I was in school for something that I didn’t love; I was in a nine to five job that I didn’t love. I was just doing what other people told me to do but I realized it was not where I was meant to be.”

With a new found sense of urgency Haley’s focus was reignited. She laughs thinking back on the whirlwind events that followed “I got away from there and went to Steamboat [Music Fest at Steamboat Springs, CO] and played everywhere I could play, every open-mic, and it was amazing. I got all this wonderful feedback from other writers and the people I met and it lifted me up.” It lifted her right out of College Station in fact and landed her in the San Marcos musical community that she finds so loving and supportive.

“That was a big turning point in my life. I didn’t know a lot of people here but I took this huge leap of faith because I wanted to pursue music full time and I believed and I just did it.”

And seemingly the universe rewarded her decision with a sudden rush of material, she explains “When I moved to San Marcos that’s when I felt in tune with everything, and that’s when I wrote all the songs that are on the new album.”

Her new record Illusions, set for release in January 2015 and produced by former Sons of Fathers fireball David Beck, is a panorama of tonal color every bit as lush and beguiling as the Texas Hill Country that she now calls home and illustrates Haley’s fearless approach to composition. “The thread running through all of these songs is me. I listen to everything and when I sit down to write I don’t limit myself in any way.”

Haley’s trust for the organic nature of the creative process is on display throughout Illusions; from sequencing the album in the order the songs were written to allowing the tracks to take their own shape in production to recording them live, often in a single take.

She says “I think that’s what’s so liberating about the album and why I’m most proud of it. We didn’t restrict ourselves or worry about a right or wrong way of doing things. What mattered was what the songs meant to me and what was the most natural way of playing them.”

In that philosophy she discovered a collaborator remarkably in sync with her vision. “Watching the songs develop was amazing. David listened to them and just knew where they were going. We didn’t spend a lot of time talking about it… that would have taken the natural essence out it. It all just came together and that’s what you can feel.” That spontaneity and immediacy can be felt throughout the record.

The album opener “Existing” is a commentary on the stifling shuffle she experienced slogging through the 40 hour a week mediocrity that distracted her from her musical aspirations. The track builds beautifully toward the joyful liberation of escaping that life in its closing lines.

“Roses” she calls a song of ‘overwhelmed joy’ and it’s full of the sublime feminine observation at work in the first fleeting moments of a new love and every bit as exhilarating. Listeners will catch themselves singing along with its blissful chorus before they know it.

“Time to Go” leaps from the speakers like a golden era Fleetwood Mac studio outtake that Haley has added her own vibrant vocals to, and with all the same commanding authority as the female voices of that famed band.

“Runaway” has a pulsating rhythmic gallop that perfectly mirrors the lyrical motif in the chorus. The fiddle and Haley’s voice pursue each other across its lovely scenery in a thrilling chase that leaves the listener longing for more.

“Ghosts” and “Illusions” are enormous texturally rich cinematic explorations that resemble soundtrack music awaiting moving images of equal beauty to partner with.

And then there’s “Jaded”, the album’s breathtaking centerpiece and a deeply personal glimpse at the lingering emotional scars caused by heartbreak and regret. It is at once an impassioned lament to lost love and a testimony to Haley’s ascension as a songwriter and vocalist. Her voice soars like a firebird from the ashes of sorrow, hardened against further harm, as David Beck’s thundering piano evokes every painful moment it takes to heal a broken heart. It’s a hauntingly beautiful invitation inside the intimate architecture of loss and resurrection. Like the finest songs borne of very private experiences it has a spellbinding authenticity.

But then authenticity and honesty are core elements of Haley’s approach to music. Even with the excitement of an album of this magnitude on the cusp of release Haley’s hopes are remarkably humble and perfectly illuminate her gratitude and her spiritual connection with her muse.

With her eyes seemingly set upon some faraway place she says “The reason I’m excited about these songs is because I feel like I was able to touch upon everything I wanted to and they’re all intertwined. They all have their own life and their own reason for being. I hope they move people the way they’ve moved me, that’s my ultimate goal with this album and everything I play.”

**Dustin Schaefer**

Former member of Texas band Mickey and the Motorcars, Dustin is a skilled guitarist who is currently playing lead guitar for the Knoxville-based Americana and Grammy nominated band The Black Lillies.

**Nightcap Cabaret**

Come one, come all to the Nightcap Cabaret which is a neo-vaudeville and burlesque variety showcase curated by Moxie Easton from the Ooh Ooh Revue featuring performance artists from Knoxville's Fringe Arts community. A celebration of song, dance, burlesque, comedy and more will be on display to end your day at Rhythm N' Blooms with something a lil' bit different. This is an 18+ up showcase.

**Matthew McNeal**

Following a grassroots release in July 2013, McNeal went into the studio alongside Grammy award-winning McKenzie Smith (Midlake/Sarah Jaffe/St. Vincent) and Joey McClellan (Israel Nash/The Fieros), compiling ten songs for his studio debut 'Compadre'.

"This is a collection of songs for the over-thinkers, the people that get in their own heads. I like writing about the feelings that often go unnoticed in music- I feel like those painful or strange emotions are beautiful in their own right. We try not to be too genre specific, we just want the music itself to be dynamic and tell a story."

The 24-year old songwriter brings a notably unorthodox feel to Americana music. Straying away from traditional country arrangements, McNeal brings his songwriting together with unique accompaniment- all without losing southern grit. The latest album 'Compadre' was independently released in 2015.

McNeal is currently finishing up his latest project at Israel Nash's Plum Creek Sound studio in Dripping Springs, Texas. The band will spend the majority of the fall season on the road.

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**About Yee-Haw Brewing Co.:** Founded in July 2015, [**Yee-Haw Brewing Co.**](http://yeehawbrewing.com/)is a production brewery and taproom located in a historic railroad depot in downtown Johnson City, TN. Yee-Haw focuses on brewing approachable and drinkable ales and lagers that celebrate good times and good company. With their passion for using only top-quality ingredients, and their impeccable approach to quality control, Yee-Haw Brewing Co. is growing quickly throughout the Southeast.

**About Dogwood Arts:** Dogwood Arts, presented by ORNL Federal Credit Union, is a 501(c)3 organization with a mission to promote and celebrate our region’s art, culture, and natural beauty. For more information on Dogwood Arts, visit [www.dogwoodarts.com](file:///\\DOGSERV\Users\2016%20Festival\Rhythm%20N'%20Blooms\Creative\Press%20Releases\www.dogwoodarts.com) or call (865) 637-4561.

**About Attack Monkey Productions:** Founded in 2009, Attack Monkey Productions is a full-service entertainment company specializing in event production and artist management. Attack Monkey Productions seeks out the things that are cool and brings them straight to you. From music to moonshine, the traditional to the avant-garde, AMP specializes in the development and promotion of unique, high quality brands and experiences. For more information, visit [www.attackmonkey.net](http://www.attackmonkey.net/).

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