



FROM ITS STORYTELLING TRADITION IN THE 1920S RURAL SOUTH TO TODAY'S UNLIKELY CROSS-SECTION OF POP, AMERICANA, ROCK, FOLK, AND EVEN RAP, COUNTRY MUSIC DEFIES DEFINITION. AND NOW, LIKE NEVER BEFORE, THE GENRE'S BEEN UNBOXED. EVERYONE FROM HONKY-TONKING TROUBADOURS TO SONGWRITING SIRENS ARE CHALLENGING WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A COUNTRY ARTIST THESE DAYS. ON THE FOLLOWING PAGES, MEET

THE NEXT GENERATION OF COUNTRY MUSIC

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SHOVELS & ROPE

HOME BASE: CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA

Michael Trent and Cary Ann Hearst, the husband-and-wife team behind the rough-and-tumble duo Shovels & Rope, were both carving out solo careers when they met through Charleston, South Carolina's small but scrappy local music scene. In 2008 the couple finally joined musical forces—and, much like Johnny Cash and June Carter Cash, their onstage union resulted in something much greater than the sum of its parts. "We started playing in bars around town," Michael says, but soon enough they were on tour and playing to bigger crowds than either had seen as solo artists. "We didn't mean to take it on the road, but it just took off," Michael says. "We kinda Wonder Twins-ed it," adds Cary Ann, who thinks of the act as "a mom-and-pop traveling music show." They cowrote and recorded their 2012 debut LP, *O' Be Joyful*, in motel rooms, the backseat of their '55-passenger touring van, and at their Johns Island home between stints on the road. Powered by little more than two acoustic guitars, a kick drum, and the couple's scrappy harmonies, the record sounds like the product of (or the perfect soundtrack to) a freewheeling road trip—worn and dirty and slaphappy, two best friends singing loud with the windows rolled down.

MUSICAL HERO: Townes Van Zandt

THEIR NEW FAVE: Shaleigh Graves

