



The Way Down Wanderers – *illusions*

Austin Krause-Thompson: guitar/vocals
Collin Krause: mandolin, violin, guitar/vocals
John Williams: upright bass, guitar/vocals
John Merikoski: drums, percussion
Travis Kowalsky: banjo, guitar

“They say you grow and lose your illusions one day/Mine won’t fade away I will trade them in some day.” “illusions”

The Way Down Wanderers are from the very heartland of America – central Illinois, Peoria, to be exact – which is reflected in their distinctive sound, which draws on elements of bluegrass, but also touches on classic rock influences including the multi-part harmonies of the Beach Boys and The Band’s hybrid soul, as well as the roots qualities of The Avett Brothers and Jason Isbell and the 400 Unit, with surprising elements of jazz, classical music and even hip-hop.

The band’s self-released sophomore album, *illusions*, follows their self-titled 2016 debut, a pair of EPs and *Live at the Old Rock House*. Produced, engineered and mixed by Grammy winner David Schiffman, who has worked with an eclectic batch of artists from Johnny Cash and HAIM to System of a Down and Rage Against the Machine, at L.A.’s Sargent Studios and Chicago’s Shirk Studios, the new effort finds the band collaborating and exchanging ideas to further distinguish their unique sound.

The band’s two chief songwriters – Austin Krause-Thompson and Collin Krause – have known each other for six years now, starting when Austin was 19 and Collin 15, and while they each write separately, this time around there was much more working in tandem.

“We’re so much more used to working with each other now,” says Austin, who recently married Collin’s older sister, making them brothers-in-law. “Collin and I are really getting a feel for one another, the way we write together.”

The Way Down Wanderers may sound like some long-forgotten bluegrass band from the Coens’ *O Brother Where Art Thou* (like that film’s Soggy Bottom Boys), but they prove to be much more than that on *illusions*, which they describe as “about love, loss and personal evolution.” Indeed, the album explores the tug of memories and the passage of time, set against the eternal clock of Mother Nature, delivered in roots-influenced songs that are also rhythmically modern. And while *illusions* may be thematically steeped in past folklore, it is also present and alive in a way that jumps off these digital/vinyl tracks to penetrate heart, mind and body.

The track “All My Words” perfectly illustrates The Way Down Wanderers’ distinctive approach, combining a reggae/island beat, a mid-song rap and a closing Foggy Mountain Breakdown-style banjo deal to deliver a song that Austin describes as “trying to be creative when you just don’t feel it.” There are elements of “Cripple Creek” in “Heartland”, a love song written by Collin for his fiancée, Beach Boys vocals in the jazzy, dreamy title track and a Bo Diddley tribal stomp to “She’s Alright”, while “Crooked Pines” and “Moonglow Carolina” compare the magnificence of natural beauty to personal emotion.

“One of the things that inspires my songwriting is nature and natural things in a metaphorical way,” explains Austin. “We see the most amazing sites as we drive through America, like Niagara Falls, which was pretty cool.”

And while the pop dance groove of “Patient Pretender” reads like a love song from Austin to his now-wife, it’s actually about the couple adopting a stray puppy off the snowy streets of Chicago. “Old Ford” details how friendships evolve through the years, and how sometimes you just have to let go to move forward. The album opener, “Principles of Salt”, is the only non-original on the record, penned by their good friend, Indianapolis singer/songwriter Joshua Powell.

“I’d like to think we’re taking some risks,” says Collin about the new album, pointing out there is more electric guitar and keyboards (mostly from ex-Jellyfish/Imperial Drag member Roger Manning). “We love so many different types of music, but American roots and bluegrass will obviously continue to inspire us as writers.”

When the two main songwriters first met, the classically trained, high, lonesome crooner Collin was picking bluegrass mandolin and fiddle in a Dylan-esque folk band dubbed Something with Trees, while Austin was the drummer in a rock group. Jazz percussionist John Merikoski and classical upright bassist John Williams soon joined, with banjo player Travis Kowalsky the final piece to the puzzle.

“We tried to incorporate all the musical places we’ve come from as a band on this record,” says Austin.

The Way Down Wanderers have toured extensively across the U.S., Canada and the U.K., performing an official showcase at the Americana Fest in Nashville, earning honors from *American Roots UK* (Top Albums of the Year List 2017), *Songpickr’s* Best Songs Spotify Playlist (2016) and a finalist in the 2016 International Song Writing Competition.

Relix magazine raved, “The band actually emerged fully formed, possessing a certain savvy that assures their ability to stand apart in a crowded field of nu-grass contenders... [The band] may have only just begun their musical journey [but] they’ve come quite far already.”

The Way Down Wanderers are ready to take to the highway. “We have a loyal and loving fan base,” says Collin. “We make friends wherever we go. We’ll often end up staying overnight at fans’ houses. We really live off the generosity of strangers.”

“We want to get the music out to even more folks this time,” adds Austin. “That’s why this album is so eclectic. Bluegrass is just another tool in our box.”

Their live shows are truly unique, communal experiences, with acoustic encores taking place out in the audience and drummer Merikoski’s famous spoon solos.

“This is a pretty tight-knit group,” says Austin. “It’s a real family affair.”

On their sophomore album, The Way Down Wanderers turn those *illusions* into reality.

**For press information about The Way Down Wanderers, please contact
Michelle Steele michelle@alleyesmedia.com or Jim Flammia jim@alleyesmedia.com
at All Eyes Media (615) 227-2770**