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Shovels & Rope

By Blood DUALTONE



Over the last 11 years, **Shovels & Rope**, the duo of **Cary Ann Hearst** and **Michael Trent**, have carved a unique path through the Americana-roots music scene thanks to honest, rustic songwriting—as well as a willingness to experiment. *By Blood*, the band's fourth album as Shovels & Rope, finds the musical couple in a bit more aggressive state with the instrumentation, where the twang is often put aside for something heavier. And they pull it off, too. On the album opener "I'm Comin' Out," Hearst declares, "I got the taste of blood in my mouth" over a driving, dirgy beat. They channel a Bruce Springsteen vibe on "Mississippi Nuthin'," a nostalgic song about a starting quarterback wrestling with what his blue-collar life has become. And on the slow, swinging "Twisted Sisters," Trent's voice is raw and powerful as horns surround him and he sings about a devilish dance troupe of sorts. But even as they flirt with being a bit more abrasive this time around, the slow and soft moments are some of the best of their career, including the title track, which closes the album—a bookend of blood, if you will. The acoustic ballad finds Hearst and Trent singing in unison, a somber look back at hometowns, love and loss. "But I am yours, by blood, by the flood," they sing. It's a perfect sentiment that caps off one of the band's best albums to date. *Mike Ayers*
