

Paste

The 20 Best Country & Americana Albums of 2019

December 13, 2019



9. Allison Moorer: *Blood*

Allison Moorer's album *Blood* is a dark deep-dive into a traumatic and very often unsettling past. Moorer was 14 when her father killed her mother and then himself in a murder-suicide, leaving Moorer and her sister to live with extended family. Now, nearly 30 years and nine albums later, the Alabama-raised singer/songwriter is approaching the incident in a bold way, both on the album and throughout its companion memoir of the same name. On the song "Cold Cold Earth," which originally and secretly appeared on her 2000 album *The Hardest Part*, Moorer describes the night when it happened. But instead of projecting the gory details or berating her abusive, alcoholic father, she molds a simple folk story. It's not simple at all, of course, but when she opens the soft tune with the line, "The night was hot and steamy / And crickets played their

tune / Everyone was sleeping / Under an August moon," you'd never know you're about to hear the story of a family falling apart. It's one of the most brave and fascinating songs released this year, or in any year, for that matter.

Elsewhere on *Blood*, Moorer stitches memories together using natural details. A churning, stormy sky is the backdrop in a song about the struggle to communicate ("Bad Weather"). She likens mental and emotional exhaustion to a heavy slab of stone on the rootsy country number "The Rock and the Hill." She's dragging a weight around again on "The Ties That Bind," a beautiful, twangy ballad in which Moorer ponders a universal question, especially for those who've experienced trauma: "Why do I carry what isn't mine? / Can I take the good and leave the rest behind?" She closes the record with a piano prayer, the very appropriately titled "Heal." "Help me lay my weapons down / Help me give the love I feel," she sings. "Help me hold myself with kindness / And help me heal." It's a simple but effective plea. *Blood* is ultimately a story of loss, healing and redemption, but Moorer casts the trauma in such a way that the music sounds soft and welcoming. —Ellen Johnson