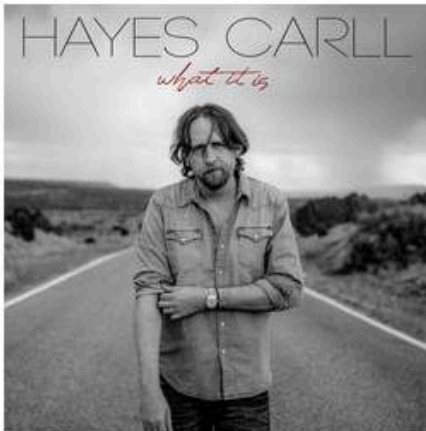


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The 20 Best Country & Americana Albums of 2019

December 13, 2019



13. Hayes Carll: *What It Is*

“In times like these, everybody could use a hand,” [Hayes Carll](#) sings on “Times Like These.” Ain’t that the truth. Carll, a writer of smart, funny, no-frills country songs, followed his commercial breakthrough *KMAG YOYO* and 2016’s *Lovers and Leavers* with this year’s excellent *What It Is*, a plainly stated take on the tomfoolery of today viewed through the eyes of one regular joe. There’s a surveying of stakes on *What It Is*, as well as a whole lot of heart. He continues, “I just wanna do my labor, love my girl, and help my neighbor / While I keep a little hope for my dreams / But it’s sure getting hard, brother, in times like these.” There’s also no shortage of side eye: Carll gets told off in the wry “None’ya” and gives “a damn” (or several) in “If I May be So Bold.” Then there’s the roadside benevolence of “Jesus and Elvis” and the “American Dream’s”

tendency to swallow us all. It is “*What It Is*,” but Carll would have us believe the worst modern maladies aren’t permanent. “There’s a whole world out there waitin’,” he sings. “Full of stories to be told / And I’ll heed the call and tell ‘em all / if I may be so bold.” —*Ellen Johnson*