



## **Briscoe, *West of It All***

*West of It All*, the debut album from Americana folk-rock band Briscoe, is a coming-of-age soundtrack set against the backdrop of the Texas Hill Country. Written in the Lone Star State and recorded in North Carolina, it's an album that charts its own musical geography, with production from Grammy nominee Brad Cook (Bon Iver, Waxahatchee, Nathaniel Rateliff & The Night Sweats) and adventurous songwriting that bridges the gap between classic American roots music and its modern-day incarnation.

From free backyard performances on the outskirts of UT Austin's campus to sold-out gigs at Antone's Nightclub and The Continental Club Gallery, Briscoe's growth — like the group's music itself — has been organic. Bandmates Truett Heintzelman and Philip Lupton built their grassroots following the old-school way: by carving out a sound that nodded to the golden era of folk, rock, and pop music, then getting onstage and building a genuine relationship with their audience. That authenticity led to opening slots for Caamp and Zach Bryan. Signed by ATO Records while still pursuing undergraduate degrees as college students, the Texas natives wrote *West of It All* as graduation loomed in the distance, funneling the stories of their college experience — from heartbreak to hard-won lessons to weekend trips into the rural countryside — into a raw, rugged blend of classic and contemporary influences.

"Will you be content with the stories told of your days of youth to your days of old?" the bandmates sing during "The Well," a song that finds Briscoe negotiating the transition from adolescence to adulthood. It was during adolescence that Heintzelman and Lupton first met as teenagers at a summer camp on the outskirts of Kerrville, Texas. "I walked into camp as a 14 year-old redheaded kid who didn't know anybody at all, so I just kept my eyes on the ground," Lupton remembers. "A couple feet away from me was another person wearing the exact same pair of Chacos as me, and when we both looked up, it felt like we were looking in the mirror." Lupton and Heintzelman didn't just look alike; they were both drawn to similar music, too, from golden-era folk duos like Simon & Garfunkel to 21st century torchbearers like the Avett Brothers. They hit it off immediately, and at a talent show later that week, the two campers performed John Prine's "Paradise," laying the brickwork for the collaborative sound they'd eventually make as Briscoe.

Initially formed as an outlet for Lupton's songwriting while still in high school, Briscoe blossomed into something bigger once the two friends reunited at UT Austin. Both were songwriters, vocalists, and multi-instrumentalists, and they formed a highly-capable duo, playing house shows and backyard parties as a two-piece act before selling out venue after venue after expanding their lineup into a proper band. They strummed acoustic guitars, plucked banjos, stacked their voices into harmony, and built each song around cinematic, cathartic hooks. Whenever writer's block threatened their progress, the two musicians would leave town for a few days and head west, finding new motivation in the wilderness of the Texas Hill Country. "We have an appreciation and an awe for that place," says Heintzelman. "To us, the Hill Country is one of the most beautiful places on this earth, and it became an inspiration when we were writing these songs." The Hill Country quickly became a pivotal part of Briscoe's music, influencing everything from the Wild West blues of "Hill Country Baby" to the fiddle-fueled stomp of "When the Desert."

Before long, the guys were also making regular trips to Brad Cook's studio in North Carolina, where they recorded *West of It All* during the homestretch of their college days. Cook, who played bass on the sessions, encouraged the band to explore unique territory throughout. "Brad was very adamant about highlighting the parts of our sound that are different from everything else out there," Lupton remembers. "He's very forward-thinking. He loves old music, but he wants to help make the next new sound. Truett and I would come into the studio and track something, and we'd think it sounded like a blend of several bands we love, and Brad would say, 'No, boys, it sounds like Briscoe.'"

It sounds like Briscoe, indeed. With contributions from drummer Matt McCaughan (Bon Iver) and multi-instrumentalist Phil Cook (Megafaun, Hiss Golden Messenger), *West of It All* offers a singular version of genre-fluid folk music. "The Well" is a rousing, rootsy rave-up — the kind of festival-friendly song that all but demands its listener sing along — with an unexpectedly brainy core, full of water metaphors inspired by Lupton's bachelor's degree in hydrogeology. "Sparrows" is a literary folk song, its chord progression driven forward by a loping banjo pattern and its lyrics inspired by the character of Cathy Ames from John Steinbeck's *East of Eden*. "Coyotes," one of the album's many tributes to West Texas, finds the two bandmates literally howling in harmony, and "Hill Country Baby" broadens the band's instrumental palette with alto sax and electric guitar. It's a broad, bold mix, captured by two young musicians who've distilled the rush of early adulthood into 10 sharply-written songs. Still in their infancy as a band, Briscoe sound fully grown on *West of It All*, a self-assured album that follows no directions but its very own.