

JD CLAYTON FORT SMITH, ARK.

Real Songs For Real Life

JD Clayton draws inspiration from his own experience, specifically those that relate to life in his hometown of Fort Smith, Ark.—a rural community where pretense has no place and blue-collar values serve a practical purpose. With his debut album, *Long Way From Home*, he infuses that backstory into a set of songs gleaned primarily from those rugged roots. It's both earnest and engaging, yet always on point. "I had lost my job when the pandemic hit, but luckily, my landlord owned a landscape company and was kind enough to offer me a job," Clayton recalls. "I worked for a year and a half in middle Tennessee, just going to different commercial landscaping jobs. The manual labor was hard and all of the emotions and pain just poured out. I would sit in the back of the truck and write songs all day in between swinging a shovel." The perseverance paid off, courtesy of an album that suggests Clayton's taken those life lessons to heart. "My goal is to create an



'Arkansas sound,'" he suggests. "I want to create something that combines a folky, songwriter style with Southern rock-and-roll." He admits he's still learning how best to pursue his muse, although he says the new album marks a notable progression from his initial EP. "When I put that out, I was 23 years old," he reflects. "Life

hadn't shown its true colors to me just yet. It took going through some real struggles to be able to write *Long Way From Home*." Nevertheless, he says that he's thinking about himself less and, instead, trying to create music for others. "I just wanted to make an album that was honest," he maintains. "This album is not just for Southern people because country music is not just for Southern people. Country music is American music. This music is for everyone going through real life."