



Cris Jacobs – *One Of These Days*

Cris Jacobs lost his way. Most of us do. Part of the story is in those lost days. But more of the story is in what we find again.

“As kids, we always had that feeling of, things are going to work out, the way I dream they’ll work out,” Jacobs says. “But then, the goal posts keep moving. And you wake up one day, and you’re 45 and still reaching.” Jacobs has gone for a walk in the hills outside Baltimore, which is still home. He takes a deep breath. “I think that’s human nature, and that’s what I’ve come to accept and embrace.”

For Jacobs, the last several years have been hard—and transformative. With a vote of confidence from a legend, a no. 2 pencil and scratchpad, and his acoustic guitar, he went into his barn to write. He emerged with his finest album to date.

Produced by Jerry Douglas, *One of These Days* is a stunning collection of storytelling and song, rooted in bluegrass, folk, and blues, but unencumbered by rules and expectations. The Infamous Stringdusters serve as the album’s rollicking house band, joined by friends including Billy Strings, Sam Bush, Lee Ann Womack, the McCrary Sisters, Lindsay Lou, and more. The result is unfettered, joyful virtuosity, swirling around Jacobs’ powerful voice, gut-check meditations, and close-up character sketches. “I’ve always found so much comfort in roots music—in string band music,” Jacobs says. “There’s just something about the sound of all those instruments together that resonates with me to my core and brings me grounding and peace.”

Jacobs needed some peace. As he confronted depression, he’d spent years trying to ignore, he faced artistic and personal doubts. He wanted to be a better husband and more present dad. He also wanted to figure out why he was still making music. “I was on the verge of giving it all up,” Jacobs says. “I didn’t really know what I wanted to do with music anymore, because it felt like I’d been scratching and clawing for years—just never quite getting there, even though, when I zoom out and look at the life and career I’ve had, well, 20 years ago I would have been ecstatic if you’d told me these things would happen.”

An acclaimed singer-songwriter with a long track record of smart, soulful rock-and-roll, Jacobs is beloved by fans and respected by peers, such as Sturgill Simpson and Steve Winwood, for whom he opened tours. A celebrated collaboration with Ivan Neville turned heads in 2017, while NPR, *Rolling Stone*, *Paste*, and others have encouraged music lovers to pay attention for years. But Jacobs still felt like he was hungry for something just out of reach.

“Amongst everything, I was having a musical identity crisis as well,” Jacobs said. “I thought, ‘You know, I’m just going to go back to the things that make me really inspired and happy. The simple things.’” He reached out to Jerry Douglas, whom he’d met while playing a festival, to ask if Douglas would be interested in producing his record. Douglas didn’t hesitate: Absolutely. Then, Jacobs asked the Infamous Stringdusters, longtime friends, to be his album’s band—and got the same enthusiastic response.

Around the same time, Jacobs sought professional medical help. He got medication and discovered transcendental meditation. He got back to the basics of practicing guitar. And then, in about four months,

with Douglas and the Infamous Stringdusters waiting, he wrote the 11 songs that make up *One of These Days*.

“Reminding myself to get out of my own way and keep it simple and soulful was the mantra that propelled the whole thing,” Jacobs says. “And having a guy like Jerry, a hero of mine who’s so connected to American roots music but has always been an innovator, patting me on the back and saying everything sounded good and that he liked my songs was one of the biggest boosts of encouragement I could have gotten.”

It’s listeners who are the luckiest ones: It turns out that for Jacobs, finding purpose and peace sounds like a jubilant front-porch jam. Album opener “Heavy Water” runs through a thunderstorm with a chorus of strings and Jacobs’ unmistakable vocals. Beautiful “Wild Roses and Dirt” unfolds in starkly visual vignettes like a dream. It holds a special place for Jacobs. “It was the first song that I completed for this record, and it came out in a very flowing way,” he says. “It’s also the one we started the sessions with. It just set the vibe for the magic that was to come.”

All of the tracks were recorded live—something Jacobs wasn’t expecting. When everyone got together, it was just too good—too spirited—not to.

The title track taps into that relatable restlessness that Jacobs battled and has accepted. It’s one of two tracks featuring Sam Bush and his mandolin. The second, “Queen of the Avenue,” is a feat of storytelling and musicianship with breathtaking backing vocals from the McCrary Sisters. Like many of the album’s tracks, the song creates a fictional character based on historical facts—this time in Jacobs’ old Baltimore neighborhood.

Baltimore itself is a gritty character on the album. “Poor Davey” is another deliciously haunting story song, featuring Billy Strings on guitar and vocals. Jacobs wrote the track in real time while following a harrowing news story that was unfolding in Baltimore. Rolling “Pimlico” weaves a tale set at the city’s iconic racetrack.

Featuring Lindsay Lou, vocal showcase “Work Song” explores the transcendent power of singing. “I was digging into the inspiration of what I wanted this record to be, reading a lot of stories about this area where I grew up,” Jacobs says. “I read about crab pickers down on the eastern shore. All they did all day long was pick crabs—tedious, boring work. The conditions were awful. But one of them said, ‘No matter what, I could still sing, and that was all I needed to get through to the next moment.’”

Mournful “Cold, Cold Walls” mulls over consequences with crying strings that sometimes roar to a shout, while “Lifetime to Go”—with Lee Ann Womack—asks a partner to find comfort in the time that’s left.

Featuring just Jacobs on cigar box guitar and vocals and Jerry Douglas on lap steel, “Daughter, Daughter” is a standout. As Jacobs worries about what awaits his little girls on any given school day, he reminds them, himself, and the rest of us not to forget to live. “That song came pretty easily once I started opening it up,” he says. “Writing it felt like a prayer. I don’t even know who I was talking to. Well, talking to them, but talking to the higher power at the same time. That one means a lot to me.”

Album closer “Everybody’s Lost” is a poignant last word, acknowledging sadness and striving alongside hope and shared experience. “I’m always trying to get better, and it never seems like things are where they’re supposed to be,” Jacobs says. “The realization that it’s normal to feel like you’re not where you want to be—that everybody else has this same sort of feeling they can’t explain—maybe it makes it easier. For all of us.”

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