



## **Shovels & Rope**

### ***Something Is Working Above My Head***

One night in the middle of the night, there were a series of noises coming from above, which led to a series of thoughts. It sounded like something was working. Building something... A nest for its family? A trap for its prey? This led to more thoughts about unseen things at work. A God? A voice in your head? It all feels kind of made up until someone responds to it.

Less *means* more. That's kind of always how it's been with us. This time the rules were simple: we can only use what we work with live and whatever we put down on tape must be accomplishable on a stage in a live setting. That's always seemed to be when we're at our best. Or most twitchy. Many times, we've made records that we loved and then, after figuring out how we'd perform it live, we end up falling in love with the live arrangement, because being a 2-piece band took some real risk and struggle, which led to innovation and gave it a whole new life (consider the tortured grape.) So, with this one we just started there and worked backwards. The result encapsulates, more than anything we've done before, the sound of our live performance. Resulting in what one might consider, by definition, a definitive album.

The summer and fall leading up to recording we spent writing songs, hanging out with family in Colorado and playing shows opening for The Wood Brothers and Gregory Alan Isakov, both of whom have large audiences. So, each night we were playing in front of a lot of people, many of whom had never heard of us. We decided to take those opportunities to rattle our comfort zone cage and try out a bunch of brand new, just written songs and basically learn how to play them in front a few thousand people. The songs would grow and change show to show, sometimes for the better and sometimes for the worse. Maybe we go down in flames? Maybe something beautiful happens while it's burning? We happily embraced the chaos. That's kind of always how it's been with us.

We had a new song that initially neither of us thought that much of called "Love Song From A Dog." During one of the first nights of the Isakov run, we decided on stage, mid set to try it out because the show was going well, and the audience was warm. To our surprise, it kind of killed and became a fan favorite moment of our set each night. And honestly in all the years of doing this we've never had so many people send us messages or reach out about any one specific song as they did this one... It just goes to show us that we don't know anything. When it came time to record it, we thought it'd be fitting and a nice touch to have Greg sing on it since it was his audience who basically fostered it into being by giving us the confidence and encouragement we needed to see it the way

they did. He generously obliged, and the song was instantly elevated by the sincerity and richness of mood that colors his voice.

The two of us can't help but be obsessed with duality. The song "Two Wolves" is a meditation about two conflicting energies competing for power. The first time we ever played it was on New Year's Eve at Rupp Arena opening for Tyler Childers in front of 15 thousand or so country music fans who surely were like "what the hell is this" but to us it seemed one hundred percent appropriate, because if we have a song made for an arena, this is probably it. A fuzzy, thick riffed stomper with a hypnotic head bob refrain. It was a big show on a big stage, and we were feeling our saltiest Rock 'n' Roll consummate professional selves in that moment, so we went wide open with it off the rip because well – we had to.

For those who are new here, we've spent the last decade or so bouncing around in the "Americana" realm quite a bit. Getting branded into that world was admittedly a bit of a shoulder shrug for us as we've always identified more as messy, misfit, folk songwriters and electric yarn spinners who's harmonies land somewhere between sweet and spit... But the people were paying attention, and we were building a fan base so we kind of felt like "who were we to tell them who we weren't?" But when you go all the way to Europe and are standing on a stage in front of a few hundred Scandinavians who are dressed in head-to-toe denim and cowboy hats expecting something a little more specific, we can't help but feel like we're about to confuse some people. We will often find ourselves playing an outdoor, "free in the park" type of concert series where a male and female with two guitars and beautiful harmonies will be booked as the opener and then we'll take the stage and proceed to be a little louder and maybe a little more brash than was anticipated... It's always kind of been this way with us. The joke in our camp when this happens goes something like: And for tonight's entertainment we have for you "The What We Thought They Were's" followed by the "Louder Than We Thoughts!" Recently we did a gig where the spokesperson said to us just before we went on "so maybe don't come out with your heaviest guitar stuff and your 808 bass bullshit right off the rip... there are kids and old people here and they'll leave" (he was trying to be helpful). We politely told him "Don't worry, we have a plan" ... and then again opened with Two Wolves, with its loud guitar stuff and its 808 bullshit, followed by a dynamic set where we touched on all the different things we do, and everyone proceeded to have a great time. That's kind of always how it's been with us.

*Something Is Working Up Above My Head* is a catalog of vulnerable characters with sweet and sordid narratives.

"Colorado River" is a song about a boy and his Dad disposing of bodies in various ways as the water level recedes and dark surprises surface. The hot dog bun line was initially supposed to be a place holder because it sounded funny and it rhymed, but then we sang it so many times over the summer that it built a little hot dog shack and moved in forever. I still think it's kind of dumb but it's also kind of great. For those who pay attention it's a pretty obvious John Prine nod. I'd like to think he handed us the hot dog bun like a relay baton on his way to the great mystery. Macabre pairs well with a side of humor.

“Piranhanana” is about a boy growing up in a house of sex workers and being fine with it with a little meditation, while his sister struggles to find her zen. “I’d be lying” is about navigating a crisis with a longtime friend. “Double Lines” follows the journey of a young woman through pregnancy tests, covid tests and various other forms of duality and twoness.

“Something is Working” and “Dass Hymn” (referring to Ram Dass) were the last 2 songs written and added to this collection of songs. They book end the record with questions about what, if anything, is pulling the strings? In the closing moments of the last song, 3 generations of our family all sing together about how nobody knows what happens at the end. And in all the not knowing, it’s comforting to sing with your family.

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