



## Hayes Carll – *We're Only Human*

Hayes Carll isn't preaching or teaching. He's not interested in telling the rest of us what to do or think. But he is charting out a personal guide for his life, quieting the noise, and sitting with his real voice - the one that's candid, consistent, and often inconvenient.

*We're Only Human* is Carll's tenth album. Like his best lyrics, it is also an understated masterpiece, an honest snapshot of one man's confrontation and delight with humanity's biggest and most intimate questions. Where do we find forgiveness for ourselves and grace for others? How do we hold on to peace of mind and stay present? What can we—and *should* we—trust? And how can we moor ourselves to, well, ourselves, in the midst of confusing, trying times? *We're Only Human* offers audiences the chance to listen to Carll as he listens to himself.

"I've lived outside of myself for so long," Carll admits. "Distractions, fear, anxiety, insecurity, and the complexity of being human in this world have so often pulled me away from being present or at peace."

"I feel like there's been a voice riding shotgun all my life, pushing me to do better, but I've struggled to listen to it," Carll says. "The idea behind this record was to do the personal work I needed to do, then codify those lessons in song to serve as sort of breadcrumbs to get me back on the trail if, and inevitably when, I get lost again."

Carll is more than two decades into a celebrated career. Praise from places such as *Pitchfork* and the *New York Times*—the latter of which yoked Carll's ability to tackle tough issues with wry humor to Bob Dylan—punctuate a resume that includes Americana Music Awards and a Grammy nomination. His songs aren't safe, but many of Nashville's stars have recorded them, including Kenny Chesney, Lee Ann Womack, and Brothers Osborne. As a solo recording artist, Carll has long-since established himself as one of Americana's most-played—and most loved—voices. His warm but crackling vocals, wit, and heart dance through wordplay that's always clever, and never too precious. Through it all, whenever Carll points a finger, it's most often at himself.

As *We're Only Human* collects moments of Carll figuring out how to be with himself, the songs feel forthright, hopeful, and timely. In today's onslaught of instant gratification, rage-baiting headlines, glorified intolerance, and falling empathy, the record is a startling outlier: an artist's raw, real-life effort to live well—both with himself and others. Carll embraces private epiphanies, and shares them with the world, allowing them to unfold for all to see and share.

Of course, *We're Only Human* is also art. So while appreciating the motivation and compelling themes driving it will underpin the listener's experience, Carll's album also matters because of the sheer brilliance of its execution. These are songs composed by a writer's writer, wielding his considerable skill with precision and beauty.

The album's title track unfolds with plaintive piano and a mantle of grace. Carll sings, with a calming sincerity, "We'll do most anything to avoid the pain / Hiding our hearts and casting the blame / 6,000 tongues, but we're all the same / Ain't no need to carry that shame / 'Cause we're only human."

Hard-won minutes of quiet clarity inspired some of the record's most beautiful moments. Accented by bright mandolin and soft, simple percussion, "Stay Here a While" captures a peaceful reprieve from a racing mind. "I remember sitting on the couch, looking out the window, watching the birds do their thing," Carll says with a laugh. "I got lost in their lives for a moment, and it was such a wonderful feeling because my mind is always going in circles, seeking excitement, and frankly, just thinking about myself. I enjoyed the peace I felt in that moment and I thought, this is lovely and I'd like to stay in this place." Carll shared that takeaway with MC Taylor, aka Hiss Golden Messenger, who not only could relate, but helped finish the song.

"High" offers another invitation to stop and breathe. Opening with a solo horn, flute, and stripped down piano, the track is lovely and sincere, with Carll's signature humor hovering comfortably nearby. There are also times when Carll's sharp wit comes roaring to the foreground. "Progress of Man (Bitcoin and Cattle)" sends up society's disorienting—and conflicting—forces, while "Good People (Thank Me)" is a masterclass in comedic timing, stubborn humanism, and the untapped potential of gratitude.

A dogged insistence on acceptance, both of one's self and others, courses through the album—as does Carll's determination to hold himself accountable. "If I'm judging others, then I'm not having to look at myself," Carll says. "I'm flawed as hell, judgmental, and critical of myself and those around me. That's a loop that feeds itself. But I figure if I can look at myself clear-eyed and acknowledge my own shortcomings, it might help me have some grace and acceptance for myself and others."

It's that sort of harmonious duality—embracing one's self and confessing one's own mistakes—that solidifies the record's big-hearted honesty. "The creative process was in large part a self-therapy session. I don't think that would work if I was only looking at everyone else's issues," Carll says.

A moving series of grounding vignettes, realizations, and self-love roll through "What I Will Be," as Carll promises to not compromise himself to fit in. A slow-burning, blues-tinged standout, "I Got Away with It" is painful and gorgeous. Brimming with hope, "One Day" balances the work Carll sees as necessary with the certainty that satisfaction, contentment, and peace are reachable by trusting in yourself and the universe.

Featuring a parade of Carll's longtime friends, album closer "May I Never" is a plea to himself. As Ray Wylie Hubbard, Shovels & Rope, Darrell Scott, Nicole Atkins, and The Band of Heathens' Gordy Quist and Ed Jurdi each take verses, listeners are swept up in a resolute promise to keep after good. "It brings up a lot for me when I hear them singing those lines," Carll says. Each of those people - whether they know it or not - have played a part in my story, and it's gratifying and humbling to me to have them lend their voices to this song."

In the end, Carll's latest album is a lovingly and purposefully written collection of reminders. "I hope other people find something in it, too" Carll says. "Through it all, I am trying to stay appreciative, knowing that I did what I set out to do: write something that can help me navigate this journey with a little more grace and peace."

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