

MAKING A SCENE

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Hayes Carll We're Only Human

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Hayes Carll

We're Only Human

Highway 87 Records / Thirty Tigers

Hayes Carll opens his tenth album on the country elegance of “We’re Only Human,” during which he takes stock in imperfections and chooses self-forgiveness and contentment. Of course, country elegance should always be delivered with grit pitting its message and its music and Carll has that formula nailed, injecting his truths with subtle candor and sardonic humor. The musicians assembled to play the songs do so with their hands and feet planted firmly in earth. Among them are singers and guitarists Gordy Quist and Ed Jurdi, and keyboardist Trevor Nealon, all from the Band of Heathens with whom Carll recently recorded and toured to high acclaim as Hayes & The Heathens.

“Stay Here Awhile,” written with MC Taylor of Hiss Golden Messenger, reveals a comfortable world of savoring a moment, the music front porch breezy, yet lush. “Progress of Man (Bitcoin and Cattle),” written with Aaron Raitiere, brings on some biting disapproval, but through welcome sarcasm. As the music builds into a sagebrush country hoedown, Carll does his best Billy Joe Shaver-like griping about greed taxing the American ideal, not to mention the world at large. No one could disagree with him when he sings “the world is being turned on by assholes.”

Gently swaying, “High” presents an in-the-clouds description in just a few words of the why, and the in-the-moment result of, doing a little escaping. The performance is beautiful, with the cascading piano by Nealon and Jeffries’ gorgeous fiddle soaring especially high. A previous favorite on the subject was “Nobody Dies from Weed,” Carll’s hilarious opener to the Hayes & The Heathens album last year. A pattern points to an ideal.

“What I Will Be,” written with the Brothers Osborne, does not directly celebrate diversity, but a listener could easily interpret it that way, which is one of the signs of extraordinary songwriting. And with the New Orleans-old-timey and bright “Good People (Thank Me),” also written with Raitiere, Carll gets all gushy about good people getting along. Very refreshing, and a blast of a tune to listen to repeatedly. The emotional, bluesy “I Got Away With it” has the same addicting effect from a different angle.

The album ends with “May I Never,” a reverent, patriotic gospel-tinged song featuring friends Ray Wylie Hubbard, Shovels & Rope, Darrell Scott, Nicole Atkins, Quist, and Jurdi singing in glorious harmony.

Hayes Carll presents an important album here. He opens his own heart, and without pointing fingers, makes concepts that should be so simple, simple. There is a way to look at the world with positivity in these rough, divided times. Carll lays out the plan through wonderful, real Texas country songs.

