

**ALBUM REVIEW**

**LUCINDA  
WILLIAMS  
DELIVERS A  
POLITICAL  
MESSAGE FOR  
BRUTAL TIMES  
ON 'WORLD'S  
GONE WRONG'**

One of America's best singer-songwriters balances resilience, joy, and hope on her intense 16th album

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**I**f you're paying attention to politics in 2026, it's not that hard to see where the trend line is heading. The big buzzword this election year is "affordability," with the vast majority of Americans telling pollsters that the basic staples of life are becoming painfully beyond reach. Meanwhile, a president who got elected by stirring up working-class resentment is focused on gutting Medicaid while he hands tax cuts to his rich friends and knocks down the White House in order to build himself a ballroom.

In other words, it's the perfect time for a statement like *World's Gone Wrong*, the politically charged 16th album from roots-rock icon **Lucinda Williams**. "There's division in these days/Bonds being broken/Such a heavy price to pay," she sings on "Something's Gotta Give," a hard-hitting distress call that gives classic blues imagery (rising tides, heavy rains, a levee ready to break) clear sociopolitical overtones. Williams mixes country, blues, folk music, and rock into an album that channels today's angst as well as resentments as old as class struggle itself. This certainly isn't the first time she's weighed in on the news (the lead single from her 2020 LP, *Good Souls Better Angels*, came with the anti-Trump heat-rock "Man Without a Soul"), but this is the most focused social commentary she's ever delivered.

The album-opening title track is a prime example of the kind of detailed storytelling that's been Williams' hallmark throughout her career, most famously on classic albums like her 1988 breakthrough, *Lucinda Williams*, and her 1998 masterpiece, *Car Wheels on a Gravel Road*. She sings about a couple trying to grind out a life (she's a nurse, he sells cars); they're stressed to the breaking point by financial strain, battered by the polarized craziness of the news, and searching for fleeting moments of solace and togetherness. The tune's slow, sturdy anthemic rise (aided by Black country artist Brittney Spencer on backing vocals) might bring to mind Bruce Springsteen's blue-collar benedictions, but the deep ache in the Louisiana-bred, 73-year-old singer-songwriter's burdened, bareknuckled drawl makes the sentiment all her own and drives it home.

That sympathy for the stretched-thin everyday American is sharply contrasted with the searing sense of rage at the selfishness of the oligarchy that comes through in the soulful Southern-rock haymaker “How Much Did You Get for Your Soul.” On the mordant, slow boil “Punchline,” her rage at the reality of “people beyond the blues/Too many dying in their shoes” lapses into metaphysical incredulousness: “Did God forget the punch line?” she asks. The scorching Delta blues “Black Tears” reminds us of the racism that often undergirds American oppression, with references to churches burning, voices not heard, and a dream deferred. She hues that point to her own eclectic sense of rock & roll tradition with a version of the Bob Marley song “So Much Trouble in the World,” joined by 86-year-old Chicago soul legend Mavis Staples.

*World's Gone Wrong* is a bleak assessment of the road we're on as a country — at times suggesting the doom-haunted foretellings of Robert Johnson or Hank Williams by way of Bernie Sanders, AOC, and Zohran Mamdani. But there's resilience, joy, and hope here, too. Williams finds release in “Low Life,” co-written with indie-folk heroes Big Thief; it's a sweet ode to a local bar where you can escape the crush of life, take off your shoes, knock back \$1.25 highballs, and listen to Slim Harpo. She closes the album with two songs that demand we maintain a sense of optimism. On the upbeat “Freedom Speaks,” she embodies the voice of freedom itself: “Don't take me for granted/Stand up and fight,” she implores. She ends the album on acoustic guitar, joined by Norah Jones on vocals and piano, playing a beautiful country waltz called “We've Come Too Far to Turn Around.” Williams turns the title phrase into a chant you can imagine hearing at Civil Rights protests or labor rallies, her way of tapping into the long, often frustrated but ultimately enduring march toward a better, fairer world. This album glimpses that tomorrow, just over the horizon. 📀

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