



Turnpike Troubadours Blaze a Red Dirt Trail

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The Turnpike Troubadours' *Goodbye Normal Street* doubles down on the band's buoyant sophomore effort *Diamonds & Gasoline* with welterweight fury. Listen: The rapidly rising Oklahoma band's new collection packs unwavering instrumental and lyrical punch.

Now, wait until you see the show. The young Red Dirt outfit's fiery concerts spotlight its fearless heart and the band effectively bottled its live magic in the studio on *Goodbye Normal Street*. The album simply pulls and pulsates with singular focus.

"We wanted it to sound as much like a real (live) band as we could on the record," frontman Evan Felker tells CMT Edge. "The mission statement was to not have things sounding too produced or processed or perfect. We made a real effort to sound like ourselves. Or at least a better version of ourselves."

CMT Edge: Tell the story behind writing "Every Girl."

Felker: The story on that is that my buddy old John Fullbright had written the first half of the song or maybe two full verses, and he was gonna get rid of it. I said, "Man, that's too good a song to throw away." He said, "Well, just finish it." So, I finished it. You know, John was dating my sister at the time, so we wrote it all about the same person.

Real-life experience seems essential to your songwriting.

It's pretty essential. You know, you don't want to completely write exposés, but I know a hell of a lot about what I write about. I don't try to step out of my bounds as far as my own field of knowledge and experience in life.

How have you evolved as a songwriter since the band's 2007 debut, *Bossier City*?

Just by being exposed to music and being a decent musician. The process of spending four or five years making something your primary function is the only way I think about it. I don't think there's any magic way to do it other than just getting your hands dirty.

How collaborative is the Troubadours' writing process?

It's usually [we] finish songs and then bring them in front of everybody and see if it's something that we as a band can use. There are tons of songs that don't get used that maybe are great songs, but it takes a certain kind of thing for our band to really shine. It's gotta be something that we can play live effectively. We did some slower tunes, but we can't be mopey all the time.

The process is generally like ... I'll write the song, or [bassist R.C. Edwards] and I will write the song, and we'll all sit down and visit and cook and drink beer at the house and play songs for everybody. If somebody takes a real liking to it, we'll pursue it further. Eventually, we think, "If we're gonna make a fiddle tune, what are we gonna do with it?" The music's definitely not an afterthought. We change the song to make the right pieces fit. It's very integral, but it just happens after the lyrics are written.

What's your approach in the studio — scripted or let it fly?

You know, we really let a lot of stuff fly on the first record. On this last one, the parts were a lot more musical and more difficult to improvise on, so we spent time to get familiar with the song. I told everybody, "Have a really good idea of what you're gonna do before we get in there. If you vary that up a little bit, we can still get things done." If you go in there unprepared, it's like anything else. Unless you're the greatest studio musician in the world, you're not gonna be able to deliver something that you'll be happy with. And you're gonna have to play these songs later, so you're gonna have to be really happy with them.

You guys grew up in Oklahoma and still live there, right?

Yeah. I grew up in Okemah, Okla. It's impacted me a great deal. Most of us grew up in really rural parts of Oklahoma. There's just a lot of room to breathe up here and a lot of time to be really bored. That's what got most of us into playing guitar and hanging out. It was something to do to entertain you.

Me and R.C. and John Fullbright would get together on Friday nights, and all of us would sing songs and drink beer and mess around, and eventually we decided we liked each other enough to try to be a band. That's about the time [fiddler Kyle Nix] came along. It's all based around there not being too much to do. I don't know if that's good for anyone, but it made us want to do this. (laughs)

Fullbright used to be in the band?

Yeah. He was, way early on. He still helps us out with studio stuff, and we're all buddies. He had his own things to take care of. (laughs) He didn't want to just play slide guitar in a band.

He really seems to be taking off.

Yeah, that's awesome, man.

Is there any sense of competition with you guys or do you cheer each other on?

Oh, no, absolutely not. It's always been a cheer-each-other-on kind of deal. We've always tried to help each other out and keep everybody in the loop and keep everybody going. Everybody falls on rougher times and needs somebody to help them out and egg them on.

Is [Okemah native] Woody Guthrie's presence as strong in your hometown as most folks outside imagine?

Oh, yeah, absolutely. There's a sign when you pull into town. The only one bar here has Woody Guthrie stuff everywhere. They have the Woody Guthrie festival here. Absolutely. It's a point of pride for the town. People come here for that reason and almost that reason only. (laughs)

