

Mp3 Jonathan Byrd - The Law And The Lonesome



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Hank Williams and Townes Van Zandt meet on the high plains and tell ghost stories. Stark, gorgeous production by Chris Bartos in Toronto. Destined to be a classic. 10 MP3 Songs COUNTRY: Americana, COUNTRY: Outlaw Country Details: I'm a seventh generation Carolinian. My granddaddy's granddaddy's granddaddy was born in Caswell County in 1795. Maybe we go back further, I don't know. On Friday the 13th, November 1970, I was born at the Cape Fear Valley Hospital in Fayetteville, North Carolina, probably the biggest military town in the country. Fort Bragg alone covers 250 square miles, and the used car dealerships and titty bars are like stars in the sky, grains of sand on the beach. The ground is sandy and the woods are open and piney, with tall loblollies, jack oaks, and the longleaf pine. We left for Fort Worth, Texas when I was about 2 or 3, so that dad could attend Southwest Theological Seminary. My first memory is of crossing the Mississippi in a U-Haul. My dad was excited about the bridge and couldn't stop talking about how it was an engineering marvel and all. From there, the memories get thicker, catching tarantulas after a rainstorm, putting pennies on the railroad track, barefoot ooching across the Texas road, so hot the asphalt was soft. There was a snowstorm. We've got pictures. Dad got a commission to preach in an English-speaking church in what was then West Germany, in a little town called Vernheim. Our landlord worked for Mercedes, got a new one every year, and kept a weinkellar like a liquor store. Dad would give me the rent check, I'd walk it upstairs, and the hausfrau would pinch my cheeks and give me a chocolate bar as big as my head. In church, my father preached and my mother played piano for the services. I learned how to sing in that church and even did a solo of "Amazing Grace" for the congregation. We had a piano in the house and my mom gave me some lessons. I did really well, but I got bored with the workbook/lesson plan style. My brother had a guitar and that was cooler. We moved to Giessen a few years later and he got "The Wall" for a birthday present from a friend. Mom and Dad

almost didn't let him keep it, 'cause there were "disturbing images" on the inside. They relented and Gray taught me my first guitar piece, that cool acoustic guitar solo in A minor. I was 8. When I was about ten, we came back to the states, my daddy lost his mind, divorced my mom, and started drinking and managing Eckerd's drug stores. He went through another wife and found the construction industry, wherein he could stay drunk all day. That finally led him to recovery and he spent the rest of his life building houses for storm victims and Habitat whenever he could. He was a good man with a lot of demons, and he married a third time 'til death did he part in 1999. His favorite song was "Amazing Grace" and his vinyl bluegrass collection influenced me greatly, especially Flatt and Scruggs and the Stanley Brothers. He bought a banjo once and became so frustrated with it that he turned it into a clock. Mom was a rock through all of that, got a good job at UNC, paid a man to build her a log cabin in the country outside of Chapel Hill, and did her best to raise me. I was a real pain in the ass. Once I got my own guitar, I had a place to put all my teen angst, but it didn't help my schoolwork at all. I probably set records for non-attendance and spent a lot of time running around in the deep woods of western Orange County. Four years in the high school jazz big band program taught me the majority of what I still know about music theory. Along with an early enlistment in the Navy, music got me through and out into the real world, where I finally got my ass kicked. I spent the next four years touring the Mediterranean on a tank landing ship out of Little Creek Naval Base in Norfolk, VA. The open ocean is a powerful thing to behold. The stars at night are unlike anything you will see on this Earth anymore; it is the last great wilderness. Besides that, being tear-gassed was about the most fun I ever had in the Navy. I carried a guitar behind my bunk everywhere we went and made strange four-track recordings when we were in port and there was an empty berthing to use as a late-night studio. Of all the guys I knew on ship, I still remember the names of the ones I played music with- Robert Thomas, David Saylor, Hadji Henderson. After my time was up, I spent some days in Virginia Beach, playing in a heavy rock band called Coup d'Etat at first, and then Day 11, which was just a license plate we saw at a grocery store one day. We were sort of prog, like Bad Brains meets King Crimson and we rubbed Tiger Balm on our nads before we took the stage because Fishbone said that they did. They probably said that just to see if anyone would do it. A girlfriend gave me my first acoustic guitar, a Fender; I think she stole it. She stole enough money from me that I think I paid her for it. Virginia Beach outright sucked, so I came home to work at Weaver Street Market and started another band called Scalliwag. I knew there was something missing from my culinary life

(mac'n'cheese, ramen, pizza) and the job at Weaver Street was a cry for help. It turned out to be the social hub of Carrboro, NC and I met a lot of people who are still my close friends today. The rock band thing wasn't working out, so I started playing the acoustic more and met a lot of other acoustic musicians. My friends Leo Lorenzoni and Michael Kovich told me about an Old-time fiddler's convention up in Buena Vista, VA and it sounded like just a laid-back, weekend-long party. I cruised up there and hung out with them; I can't even remember if I had a tent. It changed my life and it changed my music, just banging away on an A chord for hours at a time and sippin' that corn liquor. I didn't know the songs and I didn't care. Whatever these people had a hold of, I wanted some of it. It shot straight down into my veins like lightning and made my hair stand up on end. The music was intense, lyrically cut down to the bone, no bullshit. They didn't have bridges; bridges were for pussies. People got killed, died or fell in love and then got killed or maybe drank themselves to death. They weren't gonna be treated this way and they'd trade their shoes for a little bottle of booze. They were big, like John Henry and Wild Bill Jones, all fists and whiskey, heartbroken and angry as I was, ready to kill somebody. I started going to Clifftop and Mt. Airy and finding Old-time jams at home and on the road, anywhere my new friends lived. I got to thinking that I could write songs like that, or maybe one just fell out of me and I thought, "Wow, there it is." Either way, I figured nobody was writing songs like that anymore, at least nobody I'd heard, and I knew that style was just technique. In other words, those songs didn't sound old because they were old; they sounded old because they were written in an old style. There wasn't a reason in the world why somebody couldn't write a song like that, if he wanted to. "Ashe County Fair" was probably the first song I wrote like that. Another one was "Velma," a song I wrote about the woman who killed my grandfather. I think somebody dies in most of the songs on my first album. Three of them die in "Velma." I was also playing Irish music by the time I recorded, so I played the guitar parts in an alternate tuning, DADGAD. In retrospect, it gives the whole album a dark, open sound that takes the themes over the edge and out into the dripping woods. I started touring full-time in 2000, realizing that I could do it as a solo performer and actually make a living. Of course, that's what every other singer/songwriter in America was doing, too, but I didn't even know what a singer/songwriter was, so that didn't bother me. I thought I was a folk musician. Over time, I realized that folk got cross-dressed and don't mean what it used to mean anymore. I think my friend Aengus Finnan said it better than anybody I've heard yet, "It's a style of presentation." So that's just it, as long as you don't put on the razzle-dazzle and shake your ass in a sequin skirt, you can be a folk

musician. Sit there on a stool and play your tuba, tell a story once in a while and wear some Birckenstocks. Everybody will think you're a folk musician. In 2002, I went to the Kerrville Folk Festival in Texas, where there are lots of these folk musicians, only mostly songwriters. I wandered around for a week looking for the dance tent and the fiddle bands before I realized what I've already said about the word "folk." It ended up being an amazing and inspiring experience and I've been for all 18 days every year since. At the 2003 festival, I won the New Folk competition and got hired on as a performer for the next three years. I never took to Birckenstocks and my friend Anais Mitchell helped me find a great pair of boots in Austin. They're Fryes. The newest record is "The Law and the Lonesome." The ghost of Townes Van Zandt meets Hank Williams on the high plains. Chris Bartos produced and recorded it in Toronto. Several early listeners have told me that if "No Country For Old Men" had a soundtrack, it would be The Law and the Lonesome. Keeping with the trend established by "Radio Soul," it was recorded in four days. "What a treat to hear someone so deeply rooted in tradition, yet growing in his own beautiful way." -Tom Paxton Out on Waterbug Records- Wildflowers (2001), The Waitress (2003), and The Sea and the Sky (2005, with Dromedary, dromedarymusic.com), This is the New That (2006) Jonathan is a Kerrville New Folk winner, 2003. Previous Kerrville competitors include Nanci Griffith, Lyle Lovett and Steve Earle. "This rootsy North Carolinian may be the most buzzed-about new songwriter in folkdom. He displays John Prine's gift for stark little songs that tell big, complex stories, Guy Clark's lean melodicism, Lyle Lovett's wry mischief, and Bill Morrissey's knack for the revealing image." - Scott Alarik, Boston Globe People who are interested in Hank Williams Gillian Welch Townes Van Zandt should consider this download.

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