

JAKOB DYLAN

"I knew going into this record that I wanted to hear something full and vibrant," says singer-songwriter Jakob Dylan of *Women and Country*. "I wanted horns and fiddle, for it to be as big and beautiful sounding as it could with instrumentation. That changes the lyrics and tone of what you're writing."

Those instincts are evident across the album's tracks, a lush collection that blends country, blues and folk into a poignant aural evocation of rural landscapes. From the soft snare and forlorn strings of "Nothing But the Wide World For Us" and defiantly proud lyrics of "Down On Our Own Shield" ("It's a struggle, it's a strain / it's all give and no take / whatever it is now, it's up to our waists") to the dirgey country strains of "Smile When You Call Me That," which describes a love gone bad in deceptively minimal terms ("I'm drunk and you're insane / I can't quit and you won't change / Ain't no half-hearted Romeo / why do you treat me so?"), the artist's latest album displays an artful mastery of roots-rock language and musical phrasing. And where his previous record, 2008's *Seeing Things*, was a stripped back "exercise in limitations," *Women and Country* is the work of a mature performer vested in exploring the byways of the American songbook.

"I see myself as a traditionalist," he says. "I like traditional things. I like things of substance and value that have been proven. Conceptually, as the songs started to come together, I followed that lead, which is the language I work in."

Recorded in Los Angeles in May of 2009 and produced by the legendary T-Bone Burnett, *Women and Country* marks Dylan's second solo effort. He says he was pleased to enlist Burnett, both because the two have a longstanding friendship and because Dylan describes the producer as a musical "historian" with an unparalleled depth and breadth of knowledge when it comes to blues, folk and rock 'n' roll. "I knew that there wasn't going to be great amount of frustration making the record with him," Dylan says. "Believe it or not, this many years later, it still seems like you're trying to get around other people's ideas. I knew that wasn't going to be the issue here. That allowed me to bite off something fairly large."

It's that freedom that gave Dylan the room necessary to delve into wide-ranging themes—the women and country of the album's title—and marry them to a musical form appropriate to a universal experience. "Everything we care about is an extension of women and country. I don't see that as American. I think that's the way the world works all over. These things we believe in and strive for are the foundations of what we desire or care about and want to protect. It's materialism, it's economy, it's politics." He continues, "I do work within the parameters of what's considered American and rural images, but it's really women and country—those are the starting points. Those are the beginning and ends of all our efforts, either proactive or reactionary. I really think those matter more now than ever."

The album also features backup vocals by Neko Case and Kelly Hogan, whose help Dylan enlisted to enrich the album with a different personality on 8 of its 11 tracks. (For his upcoming tour, Dylan will be accompanied by Case's backing band; Case will appear on select dates as well.) Among their notable harmonies are those on "Everybody's Hurting," "Holy Rollers for Love" and the elegiac country of "We Don't Live Here Anymore," which Dylan begins with cinematic description ("Left turn off a county road / weathervane is to the north / in the shade of sycamore / is the house where you were born") before ratcheting up the anxiety ("We're off the script / we're off the lease / we can't catch any decent sleep / we don't live here anymore"). The female voices on the chorus provide an ethereal counterpart to Dylan's earthier tones.

Despite the collection's western tinge and dusty lyrics, the singer-songwriter stresses that his aim wasn't just to offer up country, but rather to create an album where the melody of the songs only add to their meaning. "I just find those references and sounds more interesting. I don't want to be a throwback, and I'm not holding a torch for anything. I just think that those sounds evoke something that's undeniable to everybody."