

Bryan Hayes crafts personal narratives with a novelist's eye ("Let's Ride") and a poet's elegance ("Small Town Amazing Grace"). Clear evidence: The Memphis area resident's seamless *Farther Down the Line*. Hayes' excellent new collection spotlights a rapidly rising songwriter growing exponentially (the title track). "This record was definitely written with more confidence," Hayes explains. "I was not afraid to touch on subject matter that I might have shied away from a few years ago. I now know what a gift this career is, so I feel like I owe it to my folks to be honest and open. I want the songs to come from my heart."

Hayes frequently delivers keen insight with earthy elegance. "We break out those old CDs and do our best to sing along," he sings on the buoyant opener "Let's Ride." "We fumble through the verses and shout the chorus loud and strong/With both those speakers blaring Guy Clark and John Prine/Baby, tonight let's ride." The song effectively serves as a blueprint for the Memphis songwriter's career: Free your mind. Loose inspiration within. Let music speak.

"While I was writing for this record, I was just trying to write the best songs that I could," Hayes explains. "I wasn't really thinking of a theme, but now that it's complete I guess the constant theme I see and hear is just real life. The songs are real. They're things that I've lived and experienced. Like Jimmy Buffett said in a song 'some of it's magic and some of it's tragic'. Some of the songs make me smile and some of them make me cry, but I felt like they all have a place on this record." They certainly do. *Farther Down the Line* effortlessly splits the delicate difference between moving ("Tangle Me Up in You") and grooving ("Everything'll Be Okay").

Folks notice. "Not only does Bryan craft a great song with melody and music, but more importantly he crafts a great story with his lyrics and he sings them the only way he knows how – from his heart," says Andy Hunt, the celebrated Grammy-winning, Nashville-based producer. Frequent Guy Clark collaborator Noel McKay echoes: "Bryan Hayes' songs always come from that sincere place that seems to effortlessly draw the listener in. He is among the rare songwriters truly capable of channeling life experience into great, listenable songs."

The excellent new album doubles down on past high watermarks (*Still Just a Man...10 Years Later*) with vivid vignettes throughout ("Southern Rain," "I Wanna Run"). Admittedly, Hayes' canvas for subject matter has expanded with greater breadth and depth. "I touch on God and politics a bit in this record," he says. "Sometimes that's a tough row to hoe when you're playing a lot of the smaller clubs like I do, but my songwriting heroes did the same thing. They were always open and honest, and I loved that about them. I have always admired the fact that Billy Joe Shaver has the courage to sing about Christ in bars and clubs. I actually got to open for him in late 2014 and I thanked him for that."

Spin that word and expand the notion: Thankful. You'll notice Hayes express the feeling around every twist and turn. Much has to do with returning from a side trip he took years ago: Fighting in the war in Iraq. Naturally, that mission pushed his songwriting toward the back burner. "There was a two-year window in 2009 and 2010 when I was deployed to Iraq and I had to put the guitar in the closet," he says. "I was either at Fort Benning Georgia training or in Iraq. As the military tour started winding down, I picked up the guitar again in Mosul, Iraq and started writing again and reconnecting with music and how much I love and missed songwriting."

Hayes looked toward songwriters like Clark and Prine for insight and inspiration when entering the studio for his triumphant return to the fold, *Still Just a Man...10 Years Later*, effectively modeling the recording process after the 2012 Americana Album of the Year *This One's for Him: A Tribute to Guy Clark*. "That record changed my life," he says. "The way those songs were presented was just so intimate. It sounded like you were in the room with those guys. Guy's ability to be brutally honest is what I take away. He gets right to the point. There's no fluff, no smoke and mirrors. Everything from the music to the lyrics to the production needs to be there. The first time you hear 'Stuff That Works,' you shake your head and smile and go, 'That's it. That's all it needs.' You instantly relate."

Still Just a Man...10 Years Later marked a reflective moment in a career built from the ground up. Hayes' debut *Just a Man* (2004) earned a loyal following in the Mid-South and boosted his touring schedule as well as earning two "Best Of" Memphis Songwriter Awards. His second album *Long Hard Road* (2006)

took Hayes and his band The Retrievers to the regional level with independent Internet radio play over the Southeast. His *Tangle Me Up In You* EP (2013) grew his audience even farther and earned opening slots for Randy Houser, Turnpike Troubadours, Billy Joe Shaver and several others. “Bryan Hayes and I both come from the Deep South,” says The Trishas singer-songwriter Kelley Mickwee. “That means he tells it like it is.”

His straightforward approach has paid off handsomely, and in addition to writing and performing, Bryan owns and operates Farmhouse Recording Studio (www.farmhouserecordingstudio.com) in Moscow, TN, where he also servers as an independent producer and engineer. He was recently hired as the Executive Director for the newly formed Americana Music Society (www.americanasociety.org) in Memphis, TN and is also the President of Americana Music Society Records (AMS Records). Bryan also serves an Adjunct Professor of Music Production at Visible Music College (www.visible.edu) in Memphis, TN. -

Brian T. Atkinson