



ANDREW COMBS
Canyons of my Mind (New West)

“Ever heard of a happy song?”

That question is posed to Andrew Combs in “Rainy Day Song”, the lead track on his acclaimed 2014 album *All These Dreams*, during a barstool chat with a sarcastic friend. The singer – offended but gracious – smiles and allows the moment to pass, eschewing confrontation for the sake of a gem he polishes as an afterthought for the listener: “Tab’s on me if you think I’m lying / Laughing ain’t a pleasure till you know about crying.” The moment, full of the understated charm and pulsing honesty that defines his music, and is as good a metaphor as any for the songcraft of Andrew Combs.

A Dallas native now living near the same Nashville airport immortalized in the opening sequence of Robert Altman’s country music odyssey, Andrew Combs is a singer, songwriter, guitarist, and heir to that 1975 film’s idea of the Nashville troubadour as a kind of musical monk. Here in the twenty-first century whorl of digital narcissism, where identity can feel like a 24/7 social media soft-shoe performance, Combs makes music that does battle with the unsubtle. Like the pioneering color photographer William Eggleston, he sees the everyday and the commonplace as the surest paths to transcendence, and he understands intuitively that what is most obvious is often studded with the sacred. As a songwriter, Combs relies on meditative restraint rather than showy insistence to paint his canvases, a technique commensurate with his idea of nature as an overflowing spiritual wellspring. NPR music critic Ann Powers noted as much in a 2014 review: “His song-pictures are gorgeous, but he recognizes their impermanence as he sings.” This deeply felt sense of ecology, of the transient beauty within nature’s chaotic churn, lies at the heart of Combs’s approach to his art.

After touring behind *All These Dreams*, a record that earned him international accolades and comparisons to everyone from Leonard Cohen to Mickey Newbury to Harry Nilsson, Combs has returned with a new album that puts down stakes in fresh sonic terrain. *Canyons of My Mind*, out in March on New West, is — as its title suggests — a landscape where the personal and the pastoral converge. Drawing inspiration from the biographies of literary figures like Charles Wright and Jim Harrison, Combs has created an album that explores the notion of “sustainability” in its many facets — artistic, economic, spiritual, environmental.

"When I set out to record *All These Dreams*, I had a distinct vision of what I wanted the record to sound like. It was a cocktail of the Roy Orbison, Glen Campbell, Nilsson vibes that you can hear right there on the surface," Combs says. "*Canyons of My Mind* is much more personal. It's a testament to my acceptance of who I am as a man, and who I am becoming." The record's sonic adventurousness bears witness to that evolution, as well as to some big changes in his personal life. Between *All These Dreams* and *Canyons*, Combs married his longtime girlfriend Kristin, with whom he honeymooned for six weeks in the Minnesota wilderness. "She walks through her life exuding such open-mindedness and kindness," Combs says. "I can't help but watch in awe. She lets me be whoever I want to be, and that's new to me. And quite refreshing, and freeing."

The quiet struggles and satisfactions of carving out an identity in a world gone wrong are palpable throughout the album. Whether questing through the labyrinth of his own spiritual yearning ("Heart of Wonder"), recreating a rail rider's full-body sensation of freedom beneath an azure Montana sky ("Rose Colored Blues"), imagining a near-future dystopia where the very idea of green spaces has been annihilated ("Dirty Rain"), or channeling the desire of a peeping Tom who has fallen in love with his sylvan quarry ("Hazel"), Combs refines the vulnerable

vagabond persona he mastered on *All These Dreams* while pushing it beyond those boundaries, into a more pastoral realm aligned with artists like Nick Drake and Tim Buckley. The idea of the artist's creative life as an ecosystem — one just as in need of cultivation and care as our own imperiled world — informs much of *Canyons*. For Combs, the quest to sustain his own capacity to create on a daily basis is what drives him. “I want to create for the rest of my life — writing, singing, painting,” he says. “I also want my life to include a family, a house, and kids. Seeking out other artists who've been able to keep the lights on without compromising their art – that keeps me inspired.”