

RONNIE FAUSS *LAST OF THE TRUE (2017)*

"I didn't want to leave anything on the table when I was recording this album," songwriter Ronnie Fauss says of his third album, *Last of the True*. "I wanted to empty my notebook."

The strongest, widest-reaching album of his career, *Last of the True* finds Fauss looking to his own record collection for inspiration. He's a genuine fan of the Americana catalog, and he nods to those influences here, duetting with Ben Kweller one minute and tackling a handful of cover songs — including tunes popularized by Uncle Tupelo and Okkervil River, as well as an updated, piano-fueled version of Bob Dylan's "Don't Think Twice (It's All Right)" — the next. With nearly a dozen original songs adding heft and variety to the tracklist, *Last of the True* is something rare: a modern-day Americana gem, as well as a celebration of the older sounds that influenced the genre.

Recorded with members of Jason Isbell, Justin Townes Earle, Rodney Crowell and Emmylou Harris' touring bands, *Last of the True* continues Fauss' evolution as an acclaimed singer/songwriter and multi-instrumentalist. He even produced the album himself, working alongside engineer and former Centro-Matic drummer Matt Pence (Jason Isbell, Sarah Jaffe, Nikki Lane), who hosted most of the recording sessions at his own Echo Lab studio in Argyle, Texas.

"When I first recorded *I Am the Man You Know I'm Not*," Fauss says of his debut, "I wanted to make a country record. Then, when I wrote *Built to Break*, I put more focus on the rock & roll side of Americana. With *Last of the True*, I tried to expand things even wider. I stretched myself in new ways. I sat down and played piano on a Bob Dylan cover. I wrote a polka song and a back-porch bluegrass number. I explored the Laurel Canyon sound, and I tried to shine a light on some of the artists who've influenced me, too. I cast a wider net this time because I wanted to capture more sounds I like."

On *Last of the True*, Fauss fills his net with electric guitar, organ, pedal steel, fiddle, piano, accordion and layers of co-ed harmonies. He began recording *Last of the True* over Memorial Day weekend in 2016, arriving at Pence's studio with 18 songs and slowly whittling the list down to 13 finalists. There, surrounded by forest and cut off from the distractions of the outside world, the two began piecing together arrangements that nodded to Steve Earle's late-Eighties country-rock, Jackson Browne's breezy folk, John Prine's storytelling, and the rough-and-tumble charm of Nineties alt-country titans like Whiskeytown and the Old 97's. Months later, Fauss headed to Nashville, where he worked with some of the city's top players — including guitarist Sadler Vaden and keyboardist Derry Deborja, both longtime members of Jason Isbell & the 400 Unit — to add texture to his songs. Finally, he named the album after a memorable passage in *Blood Meridian* by Cormac McCarthy, another southwestern storyteller with one foot planted in the work of his influences and the other inching toward something new.

The result is an album that fires twin barrels of Texas twang and Nashville nuance. There are no borders here. No rules or restrictions. Instead, Fauss has made a cross-country Americana record for bars, listening rooms, pool halls, and car stereos. From the dobro arpeggios and bluegrass-worthy stomp of "No One To Blame But Yourself" to the guitar-based heartland rock of "Twenty Two Years," *Last of the True* is everything its title promises: a blast of something real and authentic, delivered right when we need it most.