

The best Americana songs are those that are subtly familiar, with melody lines and lyrical nods that hint at the deep roots bringing forth strange new flowers. On their latest album *Come a Reckoning*, The Stubborn Lovers demonstrate an intimate familiarity with the craggy contours of country music history, while managing to avoid the pitfalls of nostalgia or revivalism. The band's evocative lyrics are awash in both spirituality and sensuality, literate without feeling showy. Their music may be anchored in train beats and twang but is never beholden to tradition, as the group melds pop songcraft, E Street swagger, the gutsy bravado of heartland rock, and air-tight vocal harmonies, complementing plenty of big choruses and undeniable hooks.

From the rollicking kiss-off anthem "You Take Tacoma, I'll Take My Chances", to the loping waltz of "Gramercy," with its Clemons-esque saxophone and orchestral touches, to the Tanya Tucker-meets-Allman Brothers Southern rock of "Jamestown Highway/Get on Board", *Come a Reckoning* is a tour de force, as the group makes stylistic jumps with seeming ease. Yet throughout these sonic shifts, there's never a jarring moment—there's an undeniable alt-country cohesion across these nine tracks. It's a triumph of songwriting, musicianship, heart, and grit.

Portland, Oregon is home for the band, the core of which is bassist and songwriter Jenny Taylor, a New Jersey native whose love of Asbury Park's finest musical export (The Boss, if you had to ask) is unabashed and shows in her attention to detail and anthemic sensibilities; singer/guitarist Mandy Allan, whose Tennessee roots ground the band in an authentic Southern style; and drummer Michael "Pearl" Nelson, a Pacific Northwest lifer with a storied history in jazz and rock. The group's synergy is real, with Taylor's love of language and natural musicality filtered through Allan's old-school vocal prowess, anchored by the dynamism and experience of Nelson.

"We *are* an Americana band," Taylor notes of the group's genre leanings. "I've chosen to write in that genre because it's where I feel the best contemporary songwriters are working, but I don't let it limit me. I feel like I pushed my bandmates a bit with some of the newer songs, and I couldn't be more pleased with how they rose to the challenge ... I hope that we continue to push ourselves with each record we make."

"We're not your waltzing kind of country," Nelson notes with a wry grin. "We're the shit that's stuck to the bottom of your shoes."

That's not a put-down; rather, it's an earned badge of honor for a band that has spent years fully committed to honing their craft and surviving — thriving, even — amidst the trials, tribulations, and personal sacrifices that naturally present themselves in such a pursuit. The group has toured extensively up and down the west coast, playing everything from dive bars to festivals and sharing the stage with Lydia Loveless, Lindi Ortega, Brandy Clark, and Robert Earl Keen. They've paid their dues and put in the miles, and *Come a Reckoning* is the culmination of the band finding its footing over the years.

"It's one thing to learn the songs and play the music," Allan says. "I feel like with this album, the songs finally lived in me — they became a part of me." That authentic, lived-in feeling is a

hallmark of the band's latest output, and not something the group takes for granted. Blood is thicker than water, and the working level of camaraderie the band operates at is about as close to a familial unit as one can get without being the real thing.

"We've developed a really solid relationship as musicians," Taylor continues. "I know and trust both of these musicians so much. I know I can bring Mandy anything, I can bring Pearl anything, and they're going to slay it. It frees me up as a writer, so I don't feel like I'm having to write for any specific person or genre."

*Come a Reckoning* is a record that seamlessly bridges the gap between alt-country punkishness and razor-sharp songcraft. With it, The Stubborn Lovers have crafted an album that is both timeless and of its moment; one that will satisfy longtime fans while winning over plenty of new ones in the process. It's the sound of a band playing on their own terms at the height of their powers, not beholden to any particular genre stamps or tropes — and it's a sure sign of even better things to come down the road.