



THE DEVIL MAKES THREE

CHAINS ARE BROKEN

The power of words isn't lost on longstanding Americana triumvirate The Devil Makes Three—Pete Bernhard, Lucia Turino, and Cooper McBean. For as much as they remain rooted in troubadour traditions of wandering folk, Delta blues, whiskey-soaked ragtime, and reckless rock 'n' roll, the band nods to the revolutionary unrest of author James Baldwin, the no-holds barred disillusionment of Ernest Hemingway, and Southern Gothic malaise of Flannery O'Connor.

In that respect, their sixth full-length and first of original material since 2013, *Chains Are Broken* [New West], resembles a dusty leather bound book of short stories from some bygone era.

"I always want our songs to unfold like short stories," affirms Bernhard. "You could think of them like the chapters of a book. Of course, they're shorter and maybe more poetic. This was a much more personal album about what it takes to be an artist or writer of any kind—and what you have to do to make your dream possible. It was really the headspace I was in. It might have something to do with getting older. You start reflecting on life and the people around you. I was doing that in these songs. That's what makes the record more personal. I'm pulling from these things. Some of it is about drug addiction. Some of it is about the things you sacrifice. Some of it is about the detrimental things we do for inspiration. Nevertheless, they all have some sort of narrative."

The Devil Makes Three's journey up to this point could be deemed worthy of a novel. Their self-titled 2002 debut yielded the now-classic "Old Number Seven," "Graveyard," "The Plank," and more as they organically attracted a diehard following through constant touring. *Longjohns, Boots and a Belt* arrived in 2003 followed by 2009's *Do Wrong Write* between a pair of live recordings, namely *A Little Bit Faster and a Little Bit Worse* and *Stomp and Smash*.

2014's *I'm a Stranger Here* marked their first debut on the Billboard Top 200 as the 2016 "hero worship homage" *Redemption & Ruin* heralded the group's second #1 bow on the Billboard Top Bluegrass Albums Chart and fourth consecutive top five debut on the respective chart. The latter garnered widespread acclaim from the likes of *Entertainment Weekly*, *American Songwriter*, *The Boston Globe*, and more. Over the years, they casted an unbreakable spell on audiences everywhere from Lollapalooza and Bonnaroo to Hardly Strictly Bluegrass, Hangout Fest, and Shaky Knees.

As the band began writing ideas for *Chains Are Broken*, they veered off the proverbial path creatively. Instead of their typical revolving cast of collaborators, The Devil Makes Three stuck

to its signature power trio—with one addition. This time, they invited touring drummer Stefan Amidon to power the bulk of the percussion. The presence of a drummer remains most amplified as the band seamlessly translated the spirit of the live show into a studio recording and busted the rules even more. And for the first time, they retreated to Sonic Ranch Studios in El Paso, TX a stone's throw from the Mexican border to record with producer Ted Hutt [Gaslight Anthem, Dropkick Murphys].

“We broke a lot of rules in making this record,” smiles Bernhard. “We’ve always done whatever we wanted to, but there were still some things we wouldn’t try. Those fears went out the window. Ted was a big part of that. He stayed with us throughout the whole process from pre-production until the final moment of recording. He pushed us outside of our comfort zone. We’ve never had this experience. So, we got really creative under pressure, which ended up being super fun.”

These songs harness a spirit of freedom. “Pray For Rain” gallops along on a propulsive beat punctuated by a bluesy twang, before a chorus that’s akin to a spiritual uprising singing “I’m praying for some rain tonight.”

“It’s a song about the state of the world now,” says the frontman. “It hopes for some sort of positive change, which I think is totally possible. At the same time, it considers the past and how we got here. You want to wash away what’s there.”

Elsewhere, “Deep In My Heart” hinges on a menacingly melodic admission, “Deep in my heart, I know I’m a terrible man.”

“We see it in the news all the time,” he continues. “People’s public personae fall apart, and everybody sees who they really are. We have an ability to choose to be good and evil at any time.”

The simmering groove and hummable hook of “Bad Idea” recounts how “sometimes we know we’re doing something stupid, but we just can’t control ourselves.” Elsewhere, “I Can’t Stop” offers up an elegiac memorial to a handful of friends who left too soon.

Nodding to a favorite author James Baldwin, “I Can’t Stop” represents an emotional climax for the album. The author’s quote—“Ultimately, the artist and the revolutionary function as they function, and pay whatever dues they must pay behind it because they are both possessed by a vision, and they do not so much follow this vision as find themselves driven by it. Otherwise, they could never endure, much less embrace, the lives they are compelled to lead”—hangs heavy over it.

The tune itself centers on a heart-wrenching plea to an old buddy, “I don’t know why you would do what you were doing...”

“It’s mostly about a friend of mine who overdosed and died,” sighs Bernhard. “When we were teenagers, we’d get together, get high, and play guitar. I learned so much from him, because he was naturally talented, but he got so deep into doing all kinds of drugs and died. In some ways,

it's what he ultimately wanted, but I miss him so much. He was the primary motivation. It's also dedicated to our friend Dave from Brown Bird who died of cancer. He and his wife were among our closest touring companions. It's strange how we all don't make it or survive to meet up in old age. People die. We keep going. There's nothing else to do."

Fitting snug like a ceremonial death mask, the cinematic expanse of "Paint My Face" underscores an oddly uplifting message—there may be something after all of *this*.

"'Paint My Face' talks reincarnation and un-lived lives," he states. "It partially discusses being a musician or an artist. It's like a letter written to a child I don't know saying death is not the end, as I believe, it's the beginning of another life."

In the end, the words and music on the album leave a long-lasting imprint.

"I'd love for people to feel inspired," Bernard leaves off. "Some of the songs might be sad, down, or depressing, but they inspire me. I feel better through the process. I hope you do too."