

In today's musical culture, the word "authenticity" has pretty much lost all meaning. What used to represent something bona fide and true is now just watered-down marketing speak, stamped onto press releases without a second thought. Born in Montgomery, Alabama in 1983, **JP Harris** doesn't fancy himself a musician as much as he does a carpenter who writes country songs. However, his stranger-than-fiction story begins after the eighth grade, when he left home on a Greyhound bus in the middle of a summer night. And he's never looked back.

For over a decade, Harris traveled the country, often alone, hitchhiking and hopping freight trains while making his living as a farm laborer, shepherd, woodsman, and carpenter, among many other titles. Still an in-demand carpenter to this day, Harris has been writing and performing country music for nearly ten years, releasing his debut album, ***I'll Keep Calling***, in 2012. He followed that release with ***Home Is Where the Hurt Is*** in 2014, which only saw his star rise both among country fans and critics at major outlets like *Rolling Stone*. Even Eagles frontman Don Henley referenced Harris in a 2015 interview with *Hey Reverb* saying that Harris made "thoughtful, authentic music."

With his forthcoming album ***Sometimes Dogs Bark at Nothing***, Harris is back after a four-year hiatus to remind folks what a lifetime dedicated to country music looks and sounds like. Sure to please fans of his hardscrabble earlier work, this new collection of songs finds the acclaimed songwriter and vocalist stretching himself both musically and personally.

It was one of the tougher albums Harris has put together, with a number of disappointing false starts that would eventually yield a unique situation from which he could work. "I feel like I was trying to make this record for two or three years before we actually got around to making it," Harris says. "I had written at least half of the songs a couple years before we got close to a plan of how to make it. A lot of things changed in my life between when I made my previous album and when we decided to go into the studio last year to make this one. It was really important to wait for the right situation to coalesce before I dove into making something new."

In addition to taking a little more time planning ***Sometimes Dogs Bark at Nothing***, Harris also drastically changed his approach to recording. Working with producer and **Old Crow Medicine Show** member, **Morgan Jahnig**, Harris tapped a handful of his favorite players, sent them acoustic demos, and gave some pretty unconventional instructions: "Take five days to think about these songs. Please write notes of whatever ideas come to mind. Please don't talk to each other about it. Let's all just get in the studio on day one and compare notes as we go."

The resulting sessions featured a palpable spontaneity and creative energy, both of which manifest in an album that's real, raw, and more akin to his live performance than anything Harris has put out thus far. "We took a counter-intuitive approach," he says. "We had no pre-production. There were no rehearsals. We basically had a whole studio full of multi-instrumentalists, a six-piece band total, for the whole recording session. Everybody played at

least two instruments. It was a really interesting way to do it and I think it helped us avoid anybody, including myself, overthinking the songs.”

Sometimes Dogs Bark at Nothing opens with “JP”s Florida Blues #1,” a hard driving country rock number that details some of Harris’ darker days touring Florida with his band, the Tough Choices. “This track is special to me in many ways,” he says. “Not only was it fun as hell to record, but for me, it’s a humorous way to process a very real and very dark stretch of time from my past. Once I was far enough away from it, the story became a little easier to recount in a near comical fashion.”

“Lady in the Spotlight,” an affecting song with layered strings, turns a critical eye to the stark gender imbalance and the seamy, predatory side of music industry. “It’s the story of a small town girl, who buys a one-way flight to California with a guitar, only to find that her body and not her talent is the only way she can leverage her dreams into being,” he says. “It’s a tale that many could imagine being true back in the 1960s or 70s, and I believe that many music fans assume that as an industry we are past that time without realizing it is a very cruel reality faced by many female artists even today.”

Another album highlight is “When I Quit Drinking,” which, as its title suggests, is a tender look at one of Harris’ most personal struggles. Gossamer strands of pedal steel complement the gentle quaver in his voice, underpinning some of his most personal lyrics to date. “As some of my songwriting becomes more introspective or true-to-life, I tried to offer something universally identifiable in this one,” he says. “Though almost all of my songs are from my own life, I also feel the right to keep some things my personal business. With this song I was able to vocalize one of my own struggles, with the hope that it helps someone else through theirs.”

And, after years of writing and playing, he’s more in love with country music than ever before. He sums up his hopes for the album simply: “I’m just hoping that me coming to the table without gimmicks or cool-looking costumes or fancy vintage jeans—just the grubby guy I am with a sleeveless shirt and a pair of boots on—is enough to get people into the music.”