LULA WILES WHAT WILL WE DO





LULA WILES / WHAT WILL WE DO

1. LOVE GONE WRONG 3:53

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ELEANOR BUCKLAND, MALI OBOMSAWIN, ISA BURKE, ABIGAIL BUCKLAND

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ARRANGEMENT AND ADDITIONAL LYRICS BY ELEANOR BUCKLAND, MALI OBOMSAWIN, ISA BURKE

PRODUCED BY DAN CARDINAL AND LULA WILES

ALL SONGS MILLENNIAL SCUM PUBLISHING, BMI EXCEPT "THE PAIN OF LOVING YOU" VELVET APPLE MUSIC, BMI



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ne could dip a jar into any stretch of the river of traditional music, hold it up to the light, and marvel for a lifetime at the richness of the captured moment of song and storytelling. We find Lula Wiles at a bend in this river, at the confluence of tradition and tomorrow.

What Will We Do is the outpouring of mindful and playful conversation and collaboration—among members of the band, and with the folk, country, and traditional music of North America. With careful attention to the immediate and the ordinary, this album subtly disarms and softens us through its magnetic melodies and strikingly familiar stories. On the band's first collection of works on Smithsonian Folkways, Lula Wiles infuses the folk discourse with song after song of bold and sensitive questions that navigate the contradictions of our time.

The vision of Moses Asch, founder of Folkways, was to record the "people's music." And what is the people's music? Of what do the people of the United States of America sing? Of what do the people of the world sing? Of achievement or atrocity? Of innovation or exploitation? Of progress or destruction? It may take a lifetime to learn how to listen

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compassionately to the sound of our dissonant inheritances. It may take a great deal of conversation and compassion to bear the pain of loving, and a greater deal of loving to favor a difficult question over a convenient answer.

This music may guide our hearts to unexpected places. We may peer through a new lens or look more deeply into an old mirror. We may hold a telescope to fear, a microscope to power, a stethoscope to nationhood. And we may be overwhelmed by the pain of love in all its forms—the pain of being asked to love a country founded on conquest, a hometown swept by hatred, a marriage visited by guilt, or a dream infected by greed.

But to stay alive, to stay soft and strong, we cannot refuse this pain. What we must refuse forever is the prison of becoming numb. And what we must reimagine forever is the possibility of turning towards each other, with humility and courage. The people's music will be our antidote, and our call to action. And in our solitude and in our circles, we will learn to feel the grace in every painful movement as we stretch our hearts even farther than we ever believed possible.

There's never going to be a right time. But when we are ready, that is what we will do. MAYA DE VITRY



1. LOVE GONE WRONG

Eleanor Buckland, lead vocal and acoustic guitar; Isa Burke, harmony vocal and electric guitar; Mali Obomsawin; harmony vocal and bass; Sean Trischka, drums

There's never going to be a right time to do the hard thing, to do the right thing.

Let me get a little thing off my chest I've been doing my best C'mon, baby, don't keep lying to yourself Don't try to tell me you haven't noticed I've been looking away

I'm doing everything wrong
All that was right is lost
Little red button on the sleeve of my dress
Good god, I'm making a mess
I've been doing you wrong
To let it go on so long
Whatcha got left when the flicker dies out
Tell me what we're gonna do now
That all of our love's gone
Love gone wrong

Last night we held a lie between our lips

Another dead-end kiss Woke up weighed down by the truth we don't wanna believe Baby, it ain't easy having nothing left to give

I'm doing everything wrong
All that was right is lost
Little red button on the sleeve of my dress
Good god, I'm making a mess
I've been doing you wrong
To let it go on so long
Whatcha got left when the flicker dies out
Tell me what we're gonna do now
That all of our love's gone
Now that all of our love's gone

There's never gonna be a right time There's never gonna be a right time There's never gonna be a right time

2. HOMETOWN

Eleanor Buckland, lead vocals and acoustic guitar; Isa Burke, harmony vocal and electric guitar; Mali Obomsawin, harmony vocal and bass; Sean Trischka, drums

"Hometown" is a love song to rural Maine. It is for the people and the place we come from, a place where the "American Dream" plays a crucial role in the culture at large. This song is a contemplation on that ideology, its merits, shortcomings, and the logic in which it is grounded. For whom does the American dream ring true? Whom does it exclude or neglect? Most significantly, this song means to communicate the complexity of rural America, where scarcity and isolation breed conservatism, and hope and solace are found in ideology itself.

Bipartisanship, at face value, presents a set of competing explanations as to why things are the way they are. In my hometown, you can tell which families are struggling in the winter based on which classmates have the luxury of gloves or mittens at recess. Heartbreakingly often, my mother comes home from the hospital, where she works in labor and delivery, crying softly for the baby who is born already addicted to methamphetamine. This is the way things are, and neither local nor regional neighbors can agree on why. Whether it is our classmates, teachers, or families with whom we argue over explanations, it becomes clear that the complexities are done no justice by partisan disagreement, interpersonal blame, or regional judgements.

So, "Hometown" is a story of learning to see beyond individuals in our search for explanations—of recognizing brutal hardships and honoring those who endure them as we collectively and compassionately figure out why things are the way they are.

Your hometown's shining like a magazine ad Prom queen crown and a picket fence Everybody's chit-chatting on the main street drag They all know you from way back when But flip the page, it's a broke-down dream There's a truck in the yard and a bird in the cage



Tryna make the cash like their daddy done You're looking at the reason everybody stays

You and your brother, you don't get along
But trouble's got nothing on blood in the veins
You don't really recognize his face anymore
But neither does he, so you got nothing to say
Uncle Henry's selling everything
Back road dirt deals cranking away
Your sister shines bright with a crystal hue
Pumping through the blood of her newborn baby

Mama's always looking after everyone
Baking a pie and working overtime
She taught you all about making ends meet
And that nothing turns out like the nursery rhymes
Flip a coin and call it pride or shame
Red and white and the working blues
Welfare warfare, laying the blame
No matter who wins, someone's gonna lose
It's a heavy world on a rusted chain
Pulling hard to make the pendulum swing
But it doesn't swing back, and it never will
If we're putting our trust in a broke-down dream



3. NASHVILLE, MAN

Mali Obomsawin, lead vocal and bass; Eleanor Buckland, harmony vocal and acoustic guitar; Isa Burke, harmony vocal and fiddle; Sean Trischka, drums

"Nashville, Man" explores the timeless folk tradition of romantic rejection!

I'm pounding the pavement waiting on a stationery letter from a Nashville man It's the waiting that I'm running from as fast as I can

And when I'm breathing too hard to think, well that's how I like it
9 to 5 running from my thoughts before I take on the night shift
I'm getting ready for the bad news, looking good and hoping for some good luck
Praying for a waking hour where a package or a flower's gonna show up

And when the night falls, baby, I'll be drinking a glass feeling lonesome
The gentleman who bought it's real nice but I don't wanna hold him

'Cause I'm pounding the pavement waiting on a stationery letter from a Nashville man It's the waiting that I'm running from as fast as I can

I'm getting pictures in the mailbox, surfers, models, high-tops, and sweet deals No messages, no packages, no postcards telling me how he feels And what could be better than the Tennessee weather and a man alone How 'bout the two of us together, we can talk without a letter or a telephone

I'm pounding the pavement waiting on a stationery letter from a Nashville man It's the waiting that I'm running from as fast as I can I'm pounding the pavement waiting on a stationery letter from a Nashville man It's the waiting that I'm running from as fast as I can

I'm pounding the pavement waiting on a stationery letter from a Nashville man And I'm losing all hope in the US post and my Nashville man I'm losing all hope and I've waited as long as I can

4. INDEPENDENCE DAY

Isa Burke, lead vocal and acoustic guitar; Mali Obomsawin, harmony vocal and bass; Eleanor Buckland, harmony vocal and fiddle

This song began in the summer of 2015 and was finished the following spring. Sometimes it takes that long to get a song right. Its title refers both to an actual date and to the moment of realizing you're on your own in the wake of a heartbreak.

It's Independence Day and I'm alone Trying not to pick up the phone And call you just to ask how you've been sleeping I know it's hard on the road

There's fireworks in the field outside of town

All our friends are cheering at the sound But I'm back by the car keeping my eyes shut As the flames crash all around

Hey there, honey, would you write me a letter I don't need it but I might feel better I knew we wouldn't last forever

I rode the train up north for a day or two I watched the gulls fly, crying to the blue And now I'm drowning in all these things that never used to make me think of you

Hey there, honey, would you write me a letter I don't need it but I might feel better I knew we wouldn't last forever

The road will sweep me in its undertow I'll lean into the wind and let it blow And letting myself miss you still feels better than somehow letting go

So tell my mama that I'm coming on home With a suitcase full of dirty clothes To forget for a while what I've always known Hey there, honey, would you write me a letter I don't need it but I might feel better I knew we wouldn't last forever

5. IF I DON'T GO

Eleanor Buckland, lead vocal and acoustic guitar; Isa Burke, harmony vocal and lead acoustic guitar; Mali Obomsawin, bass; Dan Cardinal, Moog bass

It takes courage to live for ourselves. It takes courage to transcend the shackles that tradition has forced upon women: the necessity of validation from men, the fear of being alone, and the hostility that independent women are met with. This song recognizes the cultural pressure to make ourselves into the shape of something desired and palatable, and the discomfort of stepping beyond it. It is okay to love being alone, and it is okay to fear it, but perhaps it is most important that we try it. In other words, "Dump Him!"

There's a burnt-out streetlight down at the end of the road Sometimes I go out there when I wanna be alone It's only in the middle of the night so you won't hear the door close I can tell that lately when you've been looking at me The woman you see there, she's who you want me to be It's only in the middle of the night that I start thinking 'bout leaving

What if I just keep on walking What'll I do when the road runs out What if it turns out that I don't need you What do I know about freedom anyhow If I don't go, how will I know

Nobody's told how it's supposed to be Love is a crooked line, I'm learning that the truth ain't free If I'd known better I'd have run away but I've been tethered by a rope that I couldn't see

What if I just keep on walking What'll I do when the road runs out What if it turns out that I don't need you What do I know about freedom anyhow If I don't go, how will I know

And what about the bird up there on the telephone wire If she doesn't want for freedom, how will she know to go higher It's just a lesson that I haven't learned as I've been walking the life of a liar

6. BAD GUY

Eleanor Buckland, lead vocal and acoustic guitar; Isa Burke, fiddle; Mali Obomsawin, bass

We have grown tired of the scores of traditional murder ballads in which a man kills a woman for rejecting him, or because he's made her pregnant. There is too much of that in the real



world already. There is something darkly compelling, though, about these old ballads that tell the stories of ordinary people committing intimately violent crimes— a very real part of life, rendered almost like a fairy tale. We wanted to draw upon this tradition in a way that made sense to us, so we reframed the murder ballad from a different perspective: a woman who grapples with having made a difficult decision in defense of her sister.

The song began when Ellie had written some lyrics about fleeing from a crime, and Isa had a concept for a new kind of murder ballad. These ideas eventually became the same song, and the three of us finished writing it in the studio, penning those last few lines minutes before tracking the song live.

Darling Willie, run away with me Take my hand now but hold your breath For if I'm followed I'll never more be free Oh, what've I done If I was the bad guy, would you love me less?

Lookin' over my shoulder, there's trouble in town Undone in shadows, a crime of flesh Cops and robbers gonna chase me down I'm yearning to run If I was the bad guy, would you love me less?



Late last evening, to me my sister ran With a weight of darkness upon her breast And it tells the story of her husband's hand She reads it all alone If I was the bad guy, would you love me less?

I followed her husband down into the glade I drew my dagger across his chest And the wound I dug as deeply as his grave How black his blood did flow If I was the bad guy, would you love me less?

Now I've known death by his first name Tears at my mind but I won't repent For sisters know, our hearts are but the same They break and grieve as one If I was the bad guy, would you love me less?

So, darling Willie, run away with me Take my hand now, I'll hold my breath For if you follow we'll ever more be free You know what I've done Baby, I'm the bad guy, do you love me less?

7. THE PAIN OF LOVING YOU

Eleanor Buckland, lead vocal and acoustic guitar; Isa Burke, harmony vocal and lead acoustic guitar; Mali Obomsawin, harmony vocal and bass; Sean Trischka, drums

We learned this classic Dolly Parton and Porter Wagoner song off of the Trio album, as sung by Dolly, Emmylou Harris, and Linda Ronstadt. For Halloween of 2015, we dressed up as the three women of Trio, with drummer Sean Trischka as Russ Kunkel, and performed a set of music from that record. Performed in traditional music settings and pop country stages alike, "The Pain of Loving You" was the perfect song to bridge the diverse influences and themes of our album.

Oh the pain of loving you Oh the misery I go through Never knowing what to do Oh the pain of loving you

You just can't stand to see me happy Seems you hurt me all you can Still I go on loving you But I never understand

Oh the pain of loving you Oh the misery I go through Never knowing what to do
Oh the pain of loving you
To love and hate at the same time
The line between the two is fine
The two have bound me heart and soul
So strong that I can't let you go
Oh the pain of loving you
Oh the misery I go through
Never knowing what to do
Oh the pain of loving you

8. GOOD OLD AMERICAN VALUES

Mali Obomsawin, lead vocals and bass; Isa Burke, harmony vocal, fiddle, and electric guitar; Eleanor Buckland, harmony vocal; Sean Trischka, drums

This song was written in the wake of the Standing Rock demonstrations against the Dakota Access Pipeline and the election of Donald Trump. At the crossroads of unchecked capitalism and American racism comes "Good Old American Values."

Aside from the 1964 album Bitter Tears: Ballads of the American Indian, and similar works by American-Indian enthusiasts Johnny Cash and Peter La Farge, country and roots music have typically employed Native people as a trope. Moreover, lyrics and tune-titles in folk, old-time, and bluegrass repertoire traditionally serve to essentialize, mock and disparage us. Not surprisingly, while we appear often in the lyrics and turns of phrase

of these songs, they have seldom been penned or sung by Natives.

I am Abenaki, and I grew up singing country songs like La Farge's "Custer" and "Ira Hayes" with my father and lifelong musician, Tom Obomsawin, in the indistinct space between his kitchen and living room at the Odanak Indian Reservation (Quebec). He guided my immersion into music and introduced me to an abundance of unproblematic folk songs, but let me discover for myself when it was the familiar voices of my musical heroes that caricatured and erased my people. This conflict has led me to examine the greater scope of racism in music: What kinds of lyrical racism are acceptable and why? Has our society ruled anti-Black lyrics in popular music, or in folk songs and tune-titles to be unacceptable? Popular music culture will, by definition, beat traditional music to eradicating racist lyrics and tropes, but where is the line of tolerance for racism (of any stripe) drawn in either style? As an Indigenous songwriter, I hope that it becomes equally unacceptable to write and sing anti-Native lyrics as it now is to write and sing anti-Black lyrics. Unfortunately, Indian hating is a good old American tradition. In fact, American culture has depended on it.

It is this assertion that "Good Old American Values" serves to examine. What defines America's character? Is it the country's founding in mass murder and the expropriation of Native land from the hands of the slaughtered? Is it the enslavement and domination of this land, and of the African people stolen and forced to "tame the continent" (Trump 2018)? "Good Old American Values" discusses the scope of American domination, from the global missions to proselytize, capture, and/or kill Black and Brown people from each continent, to rewriting history as it celebrates its victories and erases its inhumanities. This kind of domination breeds and is sustained by a deep national arrogance and entitlement, disguised as patriotism. It casts greed as virtuousness and exploitation as innovation. Ultimately, the tradition and attitude of domination underlying America allows not only the rewriting and reframing of history, but

the definition of reality and determination of the future. At the end of the day, domination and greed are rewarded by capitalism. Without the structure of white supremacy and system of domination it has created, the founding of America, the development of American culture, and the success of global capitalism would not have been possible.

Country music has for too long exploited Native people for aesthetic and rhetorical purposes. Colonialism persists, dolls itself up, and postures as good capitalism, as Native land is continually abused. Treaties are violated, resources are extracted, and Native voices are silenced by media inattention and a culture of erasure. The best I can offer is to reclaim and repurpose the rhetorical and aesthetic space of country music carved out for me by colonialism, in pursuit of beauty and truth. In the fabulous words of Sherman Alexie, "Yes, colonialism created George Custer and Andrew Jackson [...] but colonialism also created Miles Davis" (2014, 42).

- * Trump, Donald J. 2018. US Naval Academy Commencement Address.
- * Alexie, Sherman. 2014. What I've Stolen, What I've Earned. Brooklyn, NY: Hanging Loose Press.

Good old American values Taming the tigers and baboons So they work for us now by the sweet sweat on their brow That's some good old American values

Good old American cartoons Indians and cowboys and saloons It's all history by now and we hold the pen anyhow Drawing good old American cartoons



Trusty American tycoons Kicking their feet up in Cancun They're making us proud, making friends the whole world 'round Those trusty American tycoons

Good old American values Conquest, she looks best in costume But by the end of the day there's a fortune to be made On those good old American values

9. LEAVE ME NOW

Eleanor Buckland, lead vocal and acoustic guitar; Isa Burke, harmony vocal and fiddle; Mali Obomsawin, harmony vocal and bass

The folk tradition holds countless songs of grief and loss, written and sung with graphic honesty. As a folk musician and songwriter I've always been especially drawn to these songs. I wanted to give life to this story in a way that was emotionally honest while using plain language, true to the folk ballad tradition. When I brought the song to the band, I lovingly demanded that Isa write a fiddle tune to go with it.

Baby girl born on the 4th of July Sticks and stones may break my bones



Her name's gonna make me cry Leave me now, leave me here I don't need you now I ain't never gonna need you again

Plant the seed, you watch it grow Then haul the water from Mason's creek Gonna reap just what you sow

Leave me now, my love's turned cold I don't need you now I see the devil inside your soul

In the dead of the night, the babe she cried With fingers cold and bruised all black One last breath she died

Leave not a trace, get on down the road Leave me here with your disgrace Buried in the field I hoed

Leave me now, leave me here I don't need you now I ain't never gonna need you again

10. SHAKING AS IT TURNS

Isa Burke, lead vocal and banjo; Mali Obomsawin, harmony vocal and bass; Eleanor Buckland, harmony vocal; Sean Trischka, drums

Who does this country belong to? Who does folk music belong to? What have our musical and political heroes of the past gotten wrong? How does it feel — physically, mentally, politically — to live in America at this time? I began writing this song in the wake of the white supremacist rally and resulting violence in Charlottesville, Virginia in July 2017. While sitting in the audience at a Gillian Welch concert, during the set break, those questions were weighing heavily on my mind and I began feverishly writing what became the first verses of "Shaking As It Turns." Those lyrics then found their way to a melody I'd originally written on the banjo, for another song. I then enlisted Ellie to help me finish the chorus, and Mali to contribute some key lyrics.

Is this land yours? Is this land mine? The fault lines crack and the fists they fly In the heat of the night I touch the falling sky

It's a story as old as the flag in the yard The money's too tight and the work's too hard Baby, do you know just who your enemies are

And the world it sings

And the world it burns
I feel the world shaking as it turns
I feel the world shaking as it turns

With eyes shut tight and the blood washed clean The capital shines but it's a poison gleam See the monuments fall, to god's great machine

And the world it sings And the world it burns I feel the world shaking as it turns I feel the world shaking as it turns

Judgment comes like a lightning strike And the levees break and the oceans rise And that little black train it could be here tonight

So don't talk about love if your love won't burn If your love won't fight, if your love won't yearn 'Cause a love don't win, if it waits on some return And the world it sings And the world it burns I feel the world shaking as it turns I feel the world shaking as it turns

11. MORPHINE

Mali Obomsawin, lead vocal; Eleanor Buckland, harmony vocal and acoustic guitar; Isa Burke, harmony vocal and electric guitar; Sean Trischka, drums

Substance-use disorders are among the most stigmatized health conditions in the American public sphere. Meanwhile, the "Opioid Crisis" has been declared a national epidemic. The epidemic does not discriminate by income, gender, or race, and affects rural and urban America alike, but the stories and voices of individuals with substance-use disorders are seldom heard, and those individuals seeking help are often shunned. These forbidden stories hold futures imagined and hopes envisioned. They hold turning points in individuals' lives—love, disappointment, pain, and breaches of trust that lead to cycles of trauma and a search for escape. Whether the agent for an individual is physical or emotional pain, this epidemic consumes lives. "Morphine" speaks to these experiences. Coming from poor and rural America, it is about people we love.

Mmm, my eyes grow wide
Climb the moon as it falls
On my knees begging for the morning
'Neath the weight of it all
When I was a baby
Used to sit on my daddy's knee
"If I was a bird," I said,
"I'd have the biggest and the strongest wings"

Then I was a young man Stood at the door with a quickness in my breath Just like my daddy done Left for the fun when it suited me best

Mmm, my eyes grow wide Climb the moon as it falls On my knees begging for the morning 'Neath the weight of it all

But the morning doesn't bring much An ache in my head and a sickness in my gut The only way out is up Glory train headed straight for the sun

Down to the trestle I fall Looking for a friend or a holy ghost She's the only god I know Going anywhere my morphine goes

Morphine, my eyes grow wide Climb the moon as it falls On my knees begging for the morning 'Neath the weight of it all

12. WHAT WILL WE DO

Isa Burke, vocals, banjo, and trash can lid; Eleanor Buckland, vocals and branch; Dan Cardinal, mellotron

This song comes from an Irish ballad singer named Mary Delaney. After hearing many friends and fellow musicians sing "What Will We Do" over the years, I suggested it to the band. I've always loved this song's melody, its turn of phrase, the way it celebrates the traveling life, and the way it asks questions that struggling people in every place and time have always been asking. We found that those questions touch upon many of the threads running through the songs we wrote for this album. We also couldn't resist adding a verse of our own.

What will we do if we have no money? Oh, true lovers, what will we do then? Only haul through the town for a hungry crown And we'll yodel it over again

What will we do if we marry a tinker? Oh, true lovers, what will we do then? Only sell a tin can and walk on with my man And we'll yodel it over again

What will we do if we marry a banker? Oh, true lovers, what will we do then?

Only take all we can, share the money 'cross the land And we'll yodel it over again

What will we do if we have a young daughter? Oh, true lovers, what will we do then? Only take her in hand and walk on with my man And we'll yodel it over again

What will we do if we have no money? Oh, true lovers, what will we do then? Only haul through the town for a hungry crown And we'll yodel it over again

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Smithsonian Folkways Recordings

Smithsonian Folkways Recordings is the nonprofit record label of the Smithsonian Institution, the national museum of the United States. Our mission is to document music, spoken word, instruction, and sounds from around the world. In this way, we continue the legacy of Moses Asch, who founded Folkways Records in 1948. The Smithsonian acquired Folkways from the Asch estate in 1987, and Smithsonian Folkways Recordings has continued the Folkways tradition by supporting the work of traditional artists and expressing a commitment to cultural diversity, education, and increased understanding among peoples through the production, documentation, preservation, and dissemination of sound.

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N WHAT WILL WE DO, LULA WILES CHANNEL INFECTIOUS ENERGY AND BOLD INSIGHT INTO MUSIC THAT STRIKES WITH PURPOSE. THE BAND FOSTERS CONTRADICTION, EMBRACING THE SPIRIT OF TRADITIONAL AMERICAN MUSIC, YET UNFLINCHINGLY CALLING INTO QUESTION THE VIRTUES OF THE CULTURE THAT PRODUCES IT—COUNTRY SONGS THAT SHINE A LIGHT ON A COUNTRY'S CRIMES; LOVE SONGS ABOUT BEING ALONE; MURDER BALLADS THAT CHALLENGE THE STANDARDS OF MORALITY. LULA WILES EXIST IN THE TENSE SPACE WHERE TRADITION AND REVOLUTION MEET, FROM WHICH THEIR HARMONIES RISE INTO THE AIR TO CREATE NEW AMERICAN MUSIC. 42 MINUTES, 40-PAGE BOOKLET WITH LYRICS.

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