

ALL AMERICAN MAN

Collected Original Songs by Jake Weld

All original lyrics by Jake Weld

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Track List:

1. Rockin' Right Along
2. One Step, Two Step
3. Order Up
4. Tucson
5. Vaya con Dios
6. All American Man
7. Sangre de Cristos
8. Ten Below
9. Last Call

Rockin' Right Along

Started early this morning
Warm coffee with the dawn
Then pushed the cows back down the canyon
Those girls always wander where they don't belong

Mending fence line on the mesa
Along that rutted-out two-track
An hour just to get up there
Flat tire made it two coming back
Ranching's mostly just repairing two thousand acres going wrong

Not much here is perfect
But it ain't yet all gone wrong
Banker called 'bout the note on the irrigation line
Few more months' interest, we'll do the time
Come calving season, that note'll settle fine
And we're rockin' right along

The southern tank is running dry
Input line has sprung a leak
We'll patch it tomorrow afternoon
Until then, there's water in the creek

Ranching's mostly just repairing two thousand acres going wrong

Not much here is perfect
But it ain't yet all gone wrong
Cattle drifting down the draw
Pulling long shadows across the land
One last gate to tighten
And we're rockin' right along

A ranch don't ask questions
Like saint or sinner, saved or damned
It's more concerned with fixed or broke
Fence or gate, boss or hand

Ranching's mostly just repairing two thousand acres going wrong

Not much here is perfect
But it ain't yet all gone wrong
Cold beer on the front porch
Dog stretched out on the lawn
That third step might need fixing
But we're still rockin' right along
Yeah, we're still rockin' right along

One Step, Two Step

Step inside, it's Friday night
Smoke drifts high in the dim bar light
Boots two-step as the music swings
Worked all week for what tonight brings

One step, two step, don't hate the view
One step, two step, don't mind if I do
Cold beer in hand, I step in the line
Spin the next girl 'round right on time

Only two things don't pass this town by
The dust on the bar and the beer truck outside

Rest of us are just passing through
Unless for a night we decide not to

One step, two step, another beer
One step, two step, thank you, dear
I just saw one of God's greatest gifts
Boots and Wranglers and a bare midriff

One step, two step, a six-foot-three wall of plaid
One step, two step, oh man, my bad
Didn't see she was here with you
Lemme get you a beer, hell, make it two

Only two things don't pass this town by
The dust on the bar and the beer truck outside
Rest of us are just passing through
Unless for a night we decide not to

One step, two step, you brought a friend
One step, two step, hand out again
Would you like to dance with me
It's just a dance, not a guarantee

One step, two step, three songs more
One step, two step, then out the door
Laughter in the parking lot
Some head home, and some do not

Only two things don't pass this town by
The dust on the bar and the beer truck outside
Rest of us are just passing through
Unless for a night we decide not to

One Step
Two Step

Order Up

Hot and black, steam rolls up the glass
It's called coffee here, but barely passes
Just does its job, warms to wake
Served with grits or toughened steak

Boots crunch dirt across the tiles
First and last diner in 300 miles
Mesquite, sage, rock and road
Highway hums in Morse code

Mesas hold the heat of day
Washes cut deep, dry scars stay
Ridges rise where shadows fall
Sun keeps time on the canyon wall

She's where the sign shades the glare
Her hands grip a mug, out she stares
Plates slide past, a trucker pays
Someone leaves, someone stays

Greeting, order, eat then pay
Another night slides into day

Mesas hold the heat of day
Washes cut deep, dry scars stay
Ridges rise where shadows fall
Sun keeps time on the canyon wall

A few miles back the road gets wide
Breakdown lane, she drifted to the side
She sat for hours, no gas, no lights
No care left if she survived the night

When morning broke, she walked the road
Saw the diner, in she flowed
Breakfast, dinner, coffee black
No one asked if she was going back

Mesas hold the heat of day
Washes cut deep, dry scars stay
Ridges rise where shadows fall
Sun keeps time on the canyon wall

Coffee kept refilling, time after time
First they'd ask, later just hand signs
One busy day, told to fill her own
Then a section in back was hers alone

Orders up and the sun goes down

Then back it comes to bake the ground
Breakfast, dinner, coffee black
Days to seasons, years just stack

Mesas hold the heat of day
Washes cut deep, dry scars stay
Ridges rise where shadows fall
Sun keeps time on the canyon wall

Tucson

Ten p.m. on a Monday night
Stepped off a plane into desert air
Cool and clear but something strange
Saguaros standing everywhere

Neon flashes past taxi glass
Cactus where no trees grow
Like an ocean where the tide's gone for good
Leaving dry seabed to show

Morning showed what night had hid
Dust and sunburnt brown
Speedway Boulevard runs edge to edge
Mountains over a spread-out town

Storefront signs all fading out
Payday loans and cash for gold
Burritos wrapped in silver foil
Bronze canyons ancient and cold

Tucson's the best damn strip mall in America
Backed up to a billion years of stone
Mountains and ridges, washes and plains
Earth laid bare, cut to the bone

Tucson's the best damn strip mall in America
Where the lost and living meet
Everything that's wrong with America
And everything right, out on these streets

If you listen, the desert speaks
In a language you can learn

The ocotillo lights like fire
When desert bloom gets its turn

Catalinas north to hold your bearings
South opens into sky
The dry desert is full of motion
Once you learn to train your eye

Some things don't show up easy
Some you only learn with time
Even standing in the middle of it
I couldn't always read the signs

Looking ain't the same as seeing
And seeing ain't the same as knowing
Took me time to read between the lines
In a place that's slow in showing

Tucson's the best damn strip mall in America
Backed up to a billion years of stone
Mountains and ridges, washes and plains
Earth laid bare, cut to the bone

Tucson's the best damn strip mall in America
Where the lost and living meet
Everything that's wrong with America
And everything right, out on these streets

A little rough to look at
If you're just passing through
But give it time and you might see
A second Tucson shows itself to you

Behind that sprawl of strip malls
The desert's still in view

Vaya con Dios

Evening breeze carries sage down the canyon
The Rio Grande runs brown and cold
Big Bend for a river trip
Two weeks in the river's folds

Supper on the southern shore
A silent line of men appears
Forty-five green water cans
Flannel shirts dusty from the trail

One man uncoiled a length of rope
I could see what they had planned
Only one of forty-five could swim
A risky plan for the Rio Grande

No nadar, agua fría, peligroso
No bueno... mis amigos llevar
No... no... no
Sí. Sí. Sí
Sí? Sí. Bueno, sí
It was agreed

So we loaded the canoes
Ferried them two by two
Across the river by the full moon's light
And not a one drowned that night

As they stepped out on the Texas bank
They shook our hands like men
Muchas gracias amigos
We clasped hands back
Buena suerte en Estados Unidos
Vaya con Dios, amigos
As they hiked north to lives we'd never know

Back across the river
Just trying to understand
We spread out our maps
By lamplight in the sand
Closest road lay fifty miles south
And before they'd reach a two-track north
There were fifty dry Texas miles more

In the middle of a hundred miles
Of rock and desert clay
I spent one clear night
A coyote (kai-YOH-tay)

There are rivers in the desert

And there are lines on maps
But out there in the canyons
It's not as clean as that
But you can tell a lot about a man
By the way he shakes your hand
And just how far he'll travel
To cross the Rio Grande

All American Man

All American Man
All American Man
Seven hundred years
Watching over the land

I walk along
The canyon wall
Ghostly figure
Five feet tall

All American Man
Painted on the stone
Seven hundred years
Standing alone

Where'd you come from
Where'd they go
Do we only reap
What we sow

Cities lost
To history
Anasazi
Mystery

Broken pottery
On the ground
Little pieces
All around

Shaped by hand
Out of clay
Still held something
Yesterday

Now it's just
Broken pottery
On the ground
Little pieces
All around

It's hard to see
What it used to be
It's just all
Memories

Like broken pottery
On the ground
Little pieces
All around
All American Man
All American Man
Seven hundred years
Watching over the land

Sangre de Cristos

Note: This song is intentionally in conversation with Hannah Kent's novel *Burial Rites*. Her novel brings Agnes' interior world into three dimensions; this song moves the historical frame from Iceland to Colorado and sits with the ambiguity of it all.

Eastern sky lit Westcliffe's square
Snow still clung, hard and thin
Gallows shadow in the yard
As they brought two prisoners in

Freddy dropped first, Agnes next
Under a sky of lead
They swung as pure white peaks
Turned crimson overhead

And the Sangre de Cristo Mountains
Rise high in the west
Blood of Christ's long shadow
Puts every soul to test

Two days west of Colorado Springs
Where Wet Mountain Valley lies

A lonely ranch sat beneath peaks
Under iron winter skies

Pete Johansson worked that land
He coaxed it to bear fruit
When silver's boom rolled through the town
His gate lay on the route

A kinder man you've never met
Of that there is no dispute
Of his daughter Agnes less was known
Rumors tangle up the truth

Some say men just had their way
So Freddy she did recruit
Others think the idea his
Love or greed his pursuit

And the Sangre de Cristo Mountains
Rise high in the west
Blood of Christ's long shadow
Puts every soul to test

All we know is in winter deep
On a cold and blowing night
Freddy swung an ax on Pete
Snuffing out his light

No longer just a rancher's hand
Freddy swung again
Old Nathan took the blow that night
But the old man fought like ten

And the Sangre de Cristo Mountains
Rise high in the west
Blood of Christ's long shadow
Puts every soul to test

Agnes stood beside the stove
A long knife in her hand
She watched Old Nathan fight for breath
While her father left the land

She said, These bloody mountains can see us all

But Christ's truth they'll never tell
Then she drove the blade into Old Nate
And sent him down to hell

Some say Freddy knew of silver
In the strongbox by the bed
Some say him and Agnes dreamed
Of running her father's spread

Were these crimes of passion
Had they been planned ahead
Did Old Nathan cross a line
To earn the drops he bled

And the Sangre de Cristo Mountains
Rise high in the west
Blood of Christ's long shadow
Puts every soul to test

Freddy and Agnes never spoke
Of what led to the first ax blow
But after swinging in the gallows
They joined Pete and Nate six feet below

Truth gets lost on winter nights
Like tracks beneath the snow
Only the Sangre de Cristo peaks
Can see what men don't know

And the Sangre de Cristo Mountains
Rise high in the west
Blood of Christ's long shadow
Puts every soul to test
Blood of Christ's long shadow
Puts every soul to test

Ten Below

Cold vinyl crackles as I slip inside
Breath hits glass, two fronts collide
Frost flowers bloom like a rising tide
Geometric expansion on the Great Divide

I turn the key and the engine moans
Metal on metal as the fan belt groans
A diesel's heat is slow to climb
I let go the wheel, frozen in time

Darkness devours my headlight's glow
Nothing moves fast at ten below

Waiting for defrost to do its job
I reach for the radio, turn the knob
Static cracks but drops the sound
Not much makes it this far from town

The engine growls back at the cold
I can hear pistons but can't see road
I crank up the fan but dial it back
Waiting for warmth as I sit in black

Darkness devours my headlights' glow
Nothing moves fast when it's ten below

Oil heats slow and the engine warms
Ice divides as the crystals deform
Finally frost begins to let go
A thin low line of the world shows

Blower cranked, the windshield clears
Can finally see enough to leave from here
3 a.m., Colorado Plateau
Nothing moves fast when it's ten below

Last Call

I polish the same streaked glasses
For the same stained group of guys
Another Tuesday night in the bar
Pouring out the whiskey they pay for with lies

Ken Kesey's laughin' and poppin' some pills
As Tom Waits flags the waitress down
To ask her for bourbon and dog meat
And where to dump a body in town

Hunter S. calls Steinbeck sentimental
For loving his characters' flaws
John snipes that acid Gonzo's a shortcut
Chasing tracers for cheap trick applause

The Beatniks are all lighting up joints
Walt Whitman asks for a blow
Ginsberg winks to the old man
And the whole bar just pretends not to know

And Hemingway's itchin' to fight
Callin' Melville an old man with no sea
I pop Ernest in the back of the head
You know damn well the whale wasn't the point
So they discuss symbols and plots over props
Trading toasts for the rest of the night

Hawthorne and Faulkner are coming
But they can't make it through the front door
'Cause they can't agree if the past is behind them
Or if crossing a threshold ever changes the score

I ring the bell for the last call
And they all make a move for the bar
Callin' for women or whiskey
That they can take home in a jar

It's my job to make the last call
Call them once more to the bar
Where they beg for women or whiskey
That they can take home in a jar

But we'll all go home empty-handed
Soggy minds drag shuffling feet
They'll write better tales of better men
Before the next time we meet

But we'll all go home empty-handed
Soggy minds confuse comfort for light
They'll write better tales of better men
To earn back what they drank tonight
They'll write better tales of better men
To earn back what they drank tonight

They'll write the tales of better men
And I'll pour the whiskey for the ones we could have been