

HAYDEN BAKER BARELY GETTIN' BY

4 ★★★★★☆



Barely Gettin' By / Ain't Gonna Lay This Guitar Down / Let Love Do Its Thing / Leave The Rest Up To You / Tendency For Tennessee / Something I Can't Do / Reason To Run / Don't Meet Your Heroes (Feat. Brad Paisley) / I Think I'd Rather Not Know (Prelude) / I Think I'd Rather Not Know / Even The Ghosts Left Town / South Of Santa Fe / Is It Cold In Oklahoma / Walk With Me Jesus (Live & Acoustic)

Producer: not listed

Independent

48:36

The Katy, Texas native's first new full-length album since 2020's *Against The Grain* (he put out an EP titled *Growing Pains* in 2023), is 14 tracks of, more

often than not, toe-tapping country—that kicks off in style with the steel and fiddle-heavy title track.

The equally enjoyable *Ain't Gonna Lay This Guitar Down* is pleasantly reminiscent of Brooks & Dunn—a perhaps inevitable connection given the story on Baker's website which reveals that the singer-songwriter-guitarist received a small scale acoustic guitar as a gift at the age of three that was signed by none other than Ronnie Dunn and Kix Brooks. Hayden also became the first artist/writer to be signed to Ronnie Dunn's publishing company, Perfect Pitch.

Let Love Do Its Thing slows the pace down a little and is also pretty satisfying, though *Leave The Rest Up To You*, however, is much better. It is a lovely tune that would be ideal as a slow dance number on a Texas hardwood floor—as would *Tendency For Tennessee*.

This exquisite number is

the kind of song that already sounds timeless, like something

next track, the moodily downbeat *Even The Ghosts Left Town*.

“... toe-tapping country—that kicks off in style with the steel and fiddle-heavy title track.”

Johnny Lee would have recorded in the 70s, and it therefore wouldn't sound out of place on the Urban Cowboy soundtrack. Praise indeed and it definitely warranted a repeat listen—and then a couple more. I also quite liked *Something I Can't Do*, which boasts another hummable tune.

Brad Paisley pops up to join in the guitar slinging on lively instrumental *Don't Meet Your Heroes*. I'm not usually a fan of instrumentals on country albums, but this one was okay.

I Think I'd Rather Not Know (Prelude) is a short, rock-y piece that leads into *I Think I'd Rather Not Know*, a song which may be a bit too 'heavy' for some, especially following the sweet country highs of *Leave The Rest Up To You* and *Tendency For Tennessee*. I know it was for me and I ended up skipping to the

I found *South Of Santa Fe* to be quite moody too, but I enjoyed it more and really loved the 'dusty-bordertown-with-an-element-of-danger' feel it conjures up.

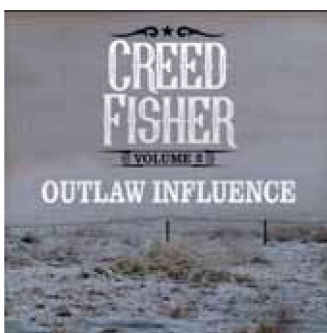
Is It Cold In Oklahoma is a beautiful—and delightfully sung—love song, with some utterly glorious fiddle playing, and the reflective and heartfelt *Walk With Me Jesus* is a fitting way to bring to a close a fine overall effort.

As is quite often the case when country singers add in a couple of 'rockier' tracks, if all the songs had been of the same quality as this album's 'countryest' moments, we'd probably be talking five stars. That said, this is probably the best country LP I've ever heard from an artist wearing a baseball cap on the cover!

Adrian Peel

CREED FISHER OUTLAW INFLUENCE, VOL. 2

3 1/2 ★★★★★☆



I Could Cry / Georgia On A Fast Train / Jackson

Producers: Creed Fisher, Bart Rose & Josh Rodgers

Fishdog Records

44:13

For the second volume of his *Outlaw Influence*, Creed Fisher dips into the catalogues of Waylon, Haggard, Paycheck, Hank Jr. and more. It's the kind of thing Fisher could do in his sleep but he still manages to convey a genuine appreciation for material that has obviously played a large part in shaping

who he is as a country artist.

Of course, even defying what makes an artist an Outlaw can be endlessly debated, but like many other things, you tend to know it when you hear it, and it would be easy to make the case that Hank Williams and George Jones are the truest of them all when it comes to Outlaws. Therefore it won't come as a surprise to find Fisher covering *I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry* and the Billy Yates song *Choices* that befitted Jones like a green sequinned Nudie suit.

Marty Robbins' *Big Iron* takes the Outlaw thing even more literally but on songs like *Jackson*, *Someday When Things Are Good*, or *Don't You Think This Outlaw Bit's Done Got Out Of Hand* it proves difficult to

shake the timing and delivery of Cash, Haggard and Jennings, so synonymous with their original singers are the songs.

Hank Jr's *Weatherman* is too close to being a carbon copy of the original for its own good, however, over on *Long Haired Country Boy* and *The Ride* Fisher puts his own stamp more firmly on them. But Fisher knows his audience, and he releases albums more frequently than some people walk their dogs. We know he's paid his dues, he is a prolific writer of his own songs, and I suspect that any of these songs will be instantly on tap should he get a request at a live show where it will go down better than a Shiner Bock.

Duncan Warwick

Someday When Things Are Good / Weatherman / Don't You Think This Outlaw Bit's Done Got Out Of Hand / Old Violin / The Ride / Good Ol' Boys Like Me / Long Haired Country Boy / Big Iron / Choices / I'm So Lonesome