

## **James Steinle - Bio**

“This record is all about self-analysis and really thinking hard about how someone ends up where they end up. The past, present, and future,” James Steinle says of *What I Came Here For*. “It frustrates me that everyone, including myself, who participates in the modern world is losing grip with reality. Especially the lost art of listening.”

Thanks to a chance encounter with legendary Texas songwriter and producer Bruce Robison, the two created James’ sophomore full-length album at Robison’s The Bunker studio on the outskirts of Austin. The entire album was recorded live-to-tape in one room.

“I knew I’d be foolish to not pursue this opportunity to work with a fellow South Texan who I grew up admiring for the songs he had penned,” James says. “There is an adrenaline rush in knowing I can’t lean on lots of effects or overdubs, that it’s just pure performance. I’m grateful Bruce let me cut these songs out there. Because I felt that’s how songs that aim to challenge modern life and its pitfalls need to be recorded. This was probably the most human process I will ever have recording music.”

Within the album’s 11 songs James’ songwriting style is on full display: often rich character sketches, some told in a first-person perspective and others with a wider lens, that eventually culminate in a deep understanding of who the person on the other side of the song is — even if they’re a product of his imagination or an amalgamation of stories he’s been told.

The album builds upon its various smaller themes from the title track — a waltzing number that veers in and out of spoken-word territory.

“It’s a wake-up call to someone who has been going through the motions, and in this case motions that make them miserable,” he says. “But complacency seems to be just as much a norm as it has always been.”

“It’s one of the older tracks on the record but I knew it was a complete thought once I finished the song and a concept I could build a record around. So when Bruce agreed to make a record with me, I knew this was the natural starting place.”

James’ upbringing is part of the reason he can see things from so many different angles. Born in South Texas, he spent his childhood in Saudi Arabia and Germany and had the privilege of traveling all over the world at a young age. He’s now based in Austin, where his unique worldview, the people he’s met and the places he’s seen inform the songs he writes.

“Without You,” an ode of sorts to day-to-day life in South Texas and the people who live it, paints a picture of a man named Jimmy, a sort of pseudo-grandfather to James.

“When I was 13, I was his chauffeur; we’d go check cattle, get ice cream, and crank Tejano & Norteño music with the windows down in his 1996 sky blue Chevy Tahoe,” James says. “Those were some of my best childhood memories. He treated everyone with respect and gave me a definition of what a good person looks like. After he passed a few years back I, like many songwriters do when loved ones pass, wanted to pay tribute to him.”

“I also had the line ‘I smell the feedlot just north of town gliding up on her wind,’ a saying my mom has always told me and one I really wanted to work into a song. In South Texas and lots of other rural places

that equate a northern cold front with a national holiday, the smell of manure on the breeze ahead of it is a dead giveaway that things are about to cool down and we're going to get some relief."

Sonically, *What I Came Here For* is the kind of songwriter album you would turn up loud while speeding down a two-lane highway. That is to say, along with James' lyrical prowess on full display, there's also an ace band playing behind him. Scott Davis joins him on bass, banjo and B3 organ; Geoff Queen on pedal steel, baritone guitar and dobro; Richie Millsap on drums and percussion; Sam Rives on Wurlitzer, B3 organ, piano, bass, and backing vocals; Brian Broussard on electric and acoustic guitars; along with Rich Brotherton, Caitlin Palmer and Jamie Lin Wilson on backing vocals.

Juliet McConkey co-wrote "In Love Again (Two Different Voices)" with James, and joins him on the track. "I started the song at work one day shortly after we met and just by visiting and playing music with Juliet a couple of times I knew it's something we could write together," he says. "It's something we had both observed in lots of relationships in our lives. In retrospect, this chapter of the record is definitely therapy for me in terms of how I'd like to do better in relationships and become a more present and honest person."

"Blue Collar Martyr," with its fuzzy build and creeping pace, is an ode to blue-collar workers who are losing jobs to automation. Narrated by a factory worker who's realized his impending fate, the moody track was one of James' favorite of the session.

"Recording-wise, this was my favorite performance we captured," he says. "The roominess and moodiness that the players on the record conveyed was a truly magical thing to experience first-hand. One of my favorite musical moments on the record is Brian Broussard's screeching-yet-deliberate guitar solo coming out of the second verse and into the chorus."

James has shared the bill and opened for fellow Americana acts such as Joe Ely, Bruce Robison and Kelly Willis, Charley Crockett, Marty Stuart and His Fabulous Superlatives, Jamie Lin Wilson, Robert Ellis, Jonny Burke, Michael Martin Murphey, Mike and the Moonpies, and Rodney Hayden.

Known for songs that take aim at topics such as western decay, urban angst, faded love, and what he calls "typical county country" fare, *What I Came Here For*, stays true to who James Steinle is, while further establishing him as a young songwriter with something significant to say about what's affecting the world around him.

"These songs are all about coping...with contemporary urban climates, and the homogenization of culture," James says. "This is a thread that runs all over the world and it weighs heavily on me. How we're stripping places of what made them what they are in the first place."