

Patterson Hood

Heat Lightning Rumbles in the Distance

Release date: 9/11/12 on ATO Records



Back in January, worn out from having spent a year on tour and facing a new album's release and another year spent mostly on a bus, away from the comforts of home and family, I decided to try to write a book. I had made a couple of stabs in that direction before (as well as a couple of screenplays) but had so far failed to complete one. The thing is, I love to write on the road. I write most every day out there. It's usually not songs, as completing a song amid all of the noise, distractions and music blasting on the bus is very difficult (I do often start songs there that get finished later) but writing non-musical compositions comes pretty easy for me out here and it sure passes the time. Beside, I had an idea for a story I wanted to write and it started coming very easily. By our third month on the road I already had a pretty firm outline of what I wanted and several chapters that I felt really good about.

I was calling my book "Slam Dancing in the Pews", named after a cassette that Virgil Kane had recorded in 1992 when Cooley and I were playing shows under that name after the break up of Adam's House Cat. The book was basically half-assed fictionalization of that very turbulent period of my life. I was 27, my band broke up, I got divorced and left my hometown to live in Memphis. My car got stolen, our band's truck got stripped and I fell in love. I fell out with my family (who I was very, very close to) and had my heart broken. I seriously pondered killing myself several times but instead wrote literally over 500 songs in a three-year period. A time when I reinvented myself artistically and experienced a sort of rebirth that led to a lot of the things I have done in the last two decades.

My book would sort of tell that story, but interspersed with lyrics from that period of my life, as well as new song lyrics either set in that time or from the point of view of various characters from the book. The structure would be chapter / song / chapter / song and so on. If the book was coming fast, the songs were coming even easier. Then the booked stopped coming. Someday I may want to tell that story, but timing is everything and this just isn't the time for it.

The songs, however continued to pour out, taking a few left turns and then morphing into its own thing. Most of this album comes from that short period of time between February and June of 2011. The songs begin in the period that the book was set in, but don't end there, as they really just were the impetus for writing about the life I am living now and contrasting it with the troubled times of two decades ago.

I called it Heat Lightning Rumbles in the Distance and decided that spring to record it as a solo album. I could clearly hear in my head exactly how I wanted every song to sound and made a list of who I wanted to play on each one. It is in some ways the most personal album I've ever made. There has always been a lot of me in all of the albums we've done, but usually semi-disguised as character sketches and stories, but the first person narrative in this one is pretty firmly rooted in autobiography, albeit in two dramatically differing time periods.

A Festival of Teeth - The making of Heat Lightning:

I have GarageBand on my computer so I decided to record a rough sketch of the album in my office, off from our kitchen at our house. The new songs nearly sequenced themselves into a near narrative and I started passing out my GarageBand demos to various friends and relations and received near unanimous positive feedback from it.

David Hood is a session bass player who played on tons of those great Muscle Shoals soul classics back in the day. He played bass on The Staple Singers' classic "I'll Take You There" as well as hits by Aretha Franklin, Wilson Pickett, Bobby Womack, Bob Seger, Paul Simon, Willie Nelson and Etta James. He is also my Dad and he came over to record with me last fall and absolutely outdid himself. His playing on the title cut is just stunning and we had an amazing time working together.

David Barbe, who has partnered with me on almost everything I've done for about a decade now, co-produced and played bass on the rest of the album.

Kelly Hogan has long been one of my favorite people and I knew I wanted her to sing on my album. She has just recently recorded an album of her own and she and I had attempted to co-write a song for it. She sent me a set of lyrics to an unfinished song she was working on about our friend Vic Chesnutt. I loved her lyrics and set about re-writing it and turning it into a song called "Come Back Little Star" which I then sent back to her to complete, but alas she didn't get it finished in time to make her album and upon deciding to do my album, asked her if I could finish it for my album and she agreed. She came down to Georgia and sang on it and on "After The Damage" which I also wrote with her voice in mind. Upon singing her takes she could see through the glass into the control room what she described as "A Festival of Teeth."

As always, Brad Morgan played drums and just keeps getting better and better all of the time. As a lot of the songs were piano based (and since I'm just not a very good piano player) I was fortunate to have Jay Gonzalez playing Andy Baker's grand piano (on indefinite loan to Chase Park Transduction) as well as Wurlitzer, accordion and Mellotron. John Neff came by to play some spot-on pedal steel and we even got Cooley in to play banjo on a couple of tracks.

My love for the Denton, Texas band Centro-matic is well known and once again I was fortunate to have Will Johnson and Scott Danbom in for a few days each to play with me. Will came in October, played some guitar and did some stunning singing. Scott came by in August and played upright piano on "Leaving Time", then came back in early December and played the fiddle. I had always heard cello on some of these songs and for the first time got to play with Jacob Morris (Madeline, Moths and Old Smokey).

In the end, I think we made the most intimate and personal record of my career and I'm extremely proud of how it all turned out. I have put together a really good band, The Downtown Rumlbers, to go out tour behind it and I'm really looking forward to taking this show on the road.

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(Back lounge, Philly and I-85S November 19-20, 2011 and Ann's Kitchen in Baltimore, Baltimore MD. June 18, 2012)

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