

Bold new flavors

Josh Abbott Band's latest release *Until My Voice Goes Out* ain't your same old vanilla ice cream
By S.D. Henderson

BORN UNDER THE BLUE LIGHTS OF LUBBOCK, The Josh Abbott Band grew up touring across Texas and established a growing presence in Texas music. So, what do you do when you start a band in college, get pretty good, and put out some records that make you a name, a nice living and establish a strong core of fans in Texas music?

I suppose that is the eternal question in music. How do you preserve the core and stimulate progress? What happens if you move forward then look back and nobody's behind you? Josh Abbott and the band asked the eternal questions and responded with a bold new flavor of Texas music in their upcoming release *Until My Voice Goes Out*.

What started ten years ago with a couple of fraternity brothers at an open mic night rapidly evolved into the current incarnation of The Josh Abbott Band. The core duo at the Blue Light Live; singer-songwriter Josh Abbott and co-founder and banjo player Austin Davis formed the nucleus that would soon include Edward Villanueva on drums and fiddler Preston Wait and expanded to add bass player James Hertless and Caleb Keeter on guitar by 2010.

After adding keyboard player David Fralin in 2015, JAB was ready to explore new territory by the time they released *Front Row Seat* in 2015.

Seeds of growth

CREATIVE GROWTH REQUIRES a little pain and a lot of risk. It would have been easy to follow up *Front Row Seat* with another release that delivered the same tested formula that led to the previous album's success.

But a close look inside *Front Row Seat* reveals seeds of growth that took root and bloomed in *Until My Voice Goes Out*. JAB isn't afraid to tinker with the compositions and concepts that most fans expect from their favorite artists. It's intentional, as Josh Abbott says, "I just didn't want to be one of those Texas country bands that makes the same album over and over."

Until My Voice Goes Out is anything but the same album before. Taking a bold chance, they intentionally altered the soundscape you would have expected by adding a strings and horns on multiple tracks. The resulting sound is something that you're simply not going to find elsewhere on the charts. "Texas music was built on taking

chances," and Abbott relates, "This is brand new icing, some new flavors, it's not the same old ice cream. The strings and horns really added a lot to the songs."

JAB is certainly not alone by incorporating strings and horns into their music, and certainly not the first to bring that sound into the mix. But you have to go back pretty far, right around Ray Price and Jim Reeves to see it as deeply woven into the music as in *Until My Voice Goes Out*. "Merle Haggard used horns, too," Abbott notes. "So we felt pretty comfortable with the horns being there and providing a little bit of fun."

Weight and depth

AT THE END OF THE DAY, the measure of the weight of an album is going to be found in the songs. There's a heaviness and a depth to *Until My Voice Goes Out* that reflects some of the personal challenges of the past year for Abbott. The year was marked by new heights, with the birth of his first child, and new depths with the loss of his father, David Abbott, to complications from a stroke. The personal magnitude of his year are traced throughout the tracks on the album.

"This album is about appreciating the moment and your family and your friends, living life the right way," Abbott says. "It's about finding clarity and focusing on what's important."

Current fans will find a lot of the same energy and tone they've come to expect from the Josh Abbott Band, even newly layered with horns and strings, the core remains familiar and accessible. There are plenty of upbeat tracks ideal for sawdust floors and long necks.

My personal favorites, however, explore the ebbs and depths of a hard year of loss followed by growth in songs like the title track "Until My Voice Goes Out" and "Heartbeat and a Melody."

If I had to choose one song as a snapshot of a year, a man and a band, I'd point you towards "Ain't My Daddy's Town." Originally penned by two of Abbott's friends, Nashville songwriters Jeren Johnston and Rodney Clawson, the story of the song's eventual placement on the album is almost as compelling as the song itself.

The version on the album is a beautiful elegy to a dad and a life well lived. It's gut wrenching without a trace of emotional manipulation or falseness, because it's real, sparse, hopeful and honest.

"That song was brought to me in a very cosmic way," Abbott says. "They sent it to me on February 3 and asked, 'What do you think about doing this song?' and I told them that it really didn't feel personal, but maybe one day I could do it." Already

to stay away from material that strayed away from his own experience.

Cosmic way

Whether cruel or kind, the universe always has a hand in the songwriting process, as Abbott would experience days later. "Dad had the stroke six days later on February 9", Abbott relates. "I got the call. They were talking to the doctors and they asked if he'd ever had (stroke) symptoms before?"

Abbott's mom told the doctors that his dad had felt ill and had been taken home by a helper on Friday. It didn't take long for Josh to draw the lines between the dates. "They sent me that song the same day my dad had the warning stroke." Josh knew instantly, "I have to record this song."

The album was already mixed and mastered. releases for iTunes and CDs had already been planned and set.

None of that mattered, Abbott made calls and pushed everything back. Called the

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experience, who graciously agreed. The end result of the universe in motion is the album version of "This Ain't My Daddy's Town," a fitting tribute that blends seamlessly into the framework of the album as if it had always belonged there. Abbott says, "It's me saying goodbye to my dad."

As Guy Clark wrote, someday the song writes you.

On August 18, you can pick up a copy of *Until My Voice Goes*

port the release with the strings and horns added into the traveling JAB fold. It's a great insight into a band that doesn't believe that growth, creativity and experimentation don't stop with your most successful single. In jazz that's a given, but in Texas country music, it's an almost singular phenomenon. Worth the investment.

The Josh Abbott Band is scheduled to perform at the North Texas



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Until My Voice Goes Out will be released on August 18: Josh Abbott

deep in the recording process for the album, Abbott appreciated the song on its merits, but wanted

songwriters and asked if he could change some verses to make the song true of his dad and his

Out just as the universe intended. Later this fall, the Josh Abbott Band will kick off touring to sup-

Fair and Rodeo in Denton on August 18 and at the Bomb Factory in Deep Ellum on October 21