

THE BIRTH OF FOREST CHUMP

A six-volume chronicle of breakdown, death, and rebirth through song.

DEDICATION

Dedicated to Janet Sue Kim — my soul mate, ex-wife, dark star, muse, and mirror. You are the most extraordinary person I have ever met. Even knowing how everything would end, I still would have married you in a heartbeat. Your influence and imagination helped shape my artistic vision — and, in the end, my destiny. There is no Forest Chump without Janet Sue Kim, and for that I will always be grateful.

We raised two wonderful boys together and created enough memories for two lifetimes. Forest Chump was born from both of us — the meeting of Ryan Lee Reid and your boundless imagination. You taught me to dream bigger and to believe in the impossible.

If we don't see each other again in this lifetime, I'll see you in the next. Some souls are drawn together no matter how many worlds they have to cross to find one another...JanYan

—Forest Chump

SPECIAL THANKS

To **Mom & Dad**, for the love and support that kept me grounded through every storm. To **Magnus & Sebastian** – your grandparents and I love you very much and will always be here for you, no matter what. To **Aaron Bakalian** for your huge heart. **Larry Belinski** for your continued support and dedication to your craft. To **Bryce Bennett** for your inspiring originality in your artistic pursuits and dedication to your vision. To **Isaac Berg** for your kindness in Seoul. To **Jules Calacanis** for being kind to me and always trying to follow your artistic light. To **Esther & Robert Ditty** for being earnest, inspirational, and introducing me to Parliament all those years ago. To **Ken Fountain** for giving me a different creative outlet. To **Byron Hernandez** for your friendship during the hard times. To **Kristine Huete** for always experimenting artistically. To **Jayson Huffman** for introducing me to audio production in those early days. To **Andrea Mazzoni** for your oenophile education and always elevating my experience. To **Clay Mckay** for playing drums in those early days. To **Sean O'hara** for your friendship and creating a space to experiment and grind in the early days. To **Craig Patterson** for being a wonderful neighbor. To **Justin Phan** for all the help, memories, and friendship we created. To **Lisa & Scott Reid** for being the familial rock and just plain wonderful people. To **Tom Savage** for those early Blakeman days. To **Daniel & Zack Schneider** for being great friends and team mates growing up. To **Joanna Scott** for your unmatched hospitality. To **Chef Danny Trace** for creating some of my greatest culinary experiences. To **Eunice & Jayden Van Aarde** for inspiring me and reminding me of the fragility of life. To **My TikTok Family** for your continued support and kind words.

To **James Viega**, for your steady hand, patience, creativity, and perfectionism in every detail. To **Derrek Phillips** for being my rock in the studio and dishing out face melting inventive rhythms. To **Harmoni Kelley** for your musicianship, soulful vocals, style, vibe, and killer bass lines. To **Dave Percefull at Yellow Dog Studio**, for giving me a place where this project could truly breathe. To **Ethan & Casey at Yellow Dog Studio** for your support and encouragement during the recording process. To **Andres Melo** for always being kind, supportive, and helpful in my artistic endeavors. To **Ryan Casey** for sharing your musicianship, ideas, and killer sound. To **Sound Dog in Seoul** for giving musicians a spot to try out new ideas and experiment. To **Blackbird Studio** for letting me work out the ideas for these six albums in real time. To **Tony Rancich at Sonic Ranch Studio** for being so hospitable and gracious with your time. To **Ronnie Tate at Star City Studios** for being true to your art and doing your thing. To **Richiman & Groove Nice** for emptying yourself into your sound and staying true to your vision. To **Steinway & Sons** for supporting my art and providing me with concert grands. To **Bösendorfer** for providing the most interesting instruments I have ever played. To **Rebecca May** for being my first piano teacher to inspire me. To **Paul English** for being my mentor and single biggest influence on my musical approach. To **Clive Swansbourne** for teaching me balance and articulation through the classical medium. To **Elaine Law Firm** for helping me set up all my legal and business endeavors.

To the artists who shaped my sound — Bach, Basquiat, Chet Baker, Lead Belly, Charles Brown, Bukowski, Chopin, Blossom Dearie, Bill Evans, Glenn Gould, Johnny Hartman, Lightning Hopkins, Edward Hopper, Jay-Z, Etta Jones, Kierkegaard, Renee Magritte, Nas, Rachmaninoff, Rakim, Schoenberg, Big Mamma Thornton, Bob Wills, Teddy Wilson, Zapp & Roger — and to every late-night piano that kept me company when no one else did.

And to everyone who believed in Forest Chump before Forest Chump existed — thank you for reminding me why I do this.

PART I: 1 MAN, 1 PIANO, 1 MIC, 1 CABIN

Volume 1: SONGS OF THE SOUTH

A stripped-down reckoning with blues, folk, and country standards — slowed, reinterpreted, and filtered through a Southern Gothic lens. Recorded in isolation, this volume revives American ghosts with only voice and piano, shaped by trauma and the resolve to keep going.

Volume 2: THE DEATH OF RYAN LEE REID

Original songs born from incarceration, psych ward stays, and emotional annihilation. Blunt, humorous, and harrowing, this is the first glimpse of Forest Chump stepping forward while Ryan Lee Reid disappears. The lyrics cut deep; the truths cut deeper.

Volume 3: JAZZ CHUMP ON LOST LOVE

Jazz standards that drift through the quiet corners of the heart, where longing turns into reflection. With nothing but piano and voice, transforming classic and rarely played standards into intimate portraits of love remembered, not forgotten.

Volume 4: CLASSICAL CHUMP

A fusion of structure and emotion: original classical compositions, reworks of Rachmaninoff, and compositions created in real-time using deliberate parametric systems. Romantic, impressionist, baroque, atonal, and experimental pieces make up this formal yet deeply personal volume.

Part II: ELECTRONIC CHUMP

Volume 5: ELECTRONIC CHUMP

Disco cowboys. Bonnie and Clyde in the year 3000. A wild ride through trap beats, breakbeats, and synth swagger. These originals bring levity, absurdity, and electricity. Features 2× Grammy-winning drummer **Derrek Phillips** (Roland SPDx) and **Harmoni Kelley** (electric bass) on an electronic arrangement of one of Forest Chump's classical compositions. **James Viega**, one of Nashville's finest engineers and producer for Garth Brooks, adds his sonic production magic.

Part III: STUDIO CHUMP

Volume 6: STUDIO CHUMP

This is the proof. Songs forged in fire, brought to life with elite session players **Derrek Phillips** (drums) and **Harmoni Kelley** (bass, vocals). Recorded at **Yellow Dog Studio** and produced by **James Viega** it's the final arc of the journey — *Forest Chump made it out, but Ryan Lee Reid didn't.*

VOLUME 1. SONGS OF THE SOUTH

ARTIST STATEMENT

Forest Chump wasn't born in a blaze of glory — he was carved out slowly, in the quiet, with scars for ink and a piano for witness. This is where the story begins — not with a hit record, but with a busted past, a battered heart, and a second chance.

Volume 1: SONGS OF THE SOUTH is a collection of reinterpretations — not only of Southern blues, folk, and country songs, but of memory, identity, and grief. These are songs that have weathered time and transformation, and so have I.

As a fifth-generation Texan, having lived just 300 yards from the old Imperial State Prison Farm in Sugar Land — the same prison that once held Huddie “Lead Belly” Ledbetter — the connection between music and survival runs deep. The midnight train still runs past those fields. Its whistle cuts through the air like the memory of a song, and of what it meant to survive.

Some of these tunes, like “Trouble in Mind,” “Texas Flood,” or “In the Pines,” carry a long tradition of sorrow and defiance. But within that pain, there's also motion — a slow churning toward freedom. These are songs for anyone who's had to endure: heartbreak, betrayal, hospitalization, humiliation, or the quiet ache of starting over.

This record was born from isolation — just one man, one piano, one mic, and one cabin. There was no production crew, no fancy gear — just the will to keep going and the need to tell the truth, one note at a time.

This is *The Birth of Forest Chump*.

ABOUT THE ALBUM

Volume 1: SONGS OF THE SOUTH reimagines a set of iconic American tunes through the lens of a solitary piano and a lived-in voice — stripped down, slowed down, and steeped in the soil of the South.

These aren't cover songs. They're recoveries. Each arrangement is a reclamation — of space, of agency, of the emotional weight buried in the original versions. What once strutted is now swaying. What once wailed now whispers. The swing has a drag to it. The gospel leans blues. The blues lean Southern Gothic.

Drawing from folk standards, prison songs, and electric blues classics, the album doesn't chase authenticity — it returns to it. Not in fidelity to the original recordings, but in fidelity to the feeling behind them: betrayal, despair, guilt, grace.

The piano speaks like an old friend who's seen too much. The voice doesn't decorate — it testifies.

Together, they don't just revisit the American South — they haunt it.

TRACK NOTES

These nine songs weren't chosen for nostalgia — they were chosen for their honesty. Each one carries a different shade of survival: the loneliness of exile, the bitterness of betrayal, the stubborn hope of a new morning. In arranging them, I didn't want to replicate them. I wanted to reveal. What emerged is a collection of Southern ghosts, each summoned through the voice and the piano — no frills, no filter, just feeling.

“TROUBLE IN MIND” *by RICHARD M. JONES*

A prison blues standard recorded by everyone from Bertha Hill to Nina Simone — and once played on the Sugar Land prison yard where Lead Belly was locked up. I recorded this after surviving a suicide attempt, during a time when I couldn't see a way forward. The lyric “but I won't be blue always” isn't just a line — it became a lifeline. I slowed the tempo and kept it bare.

“IN THE PINES” *by LEAD BELLY*

Also known as “Where Did You Sleep Last Night,” this Appalachian ballad has been passed down like a whispered warning. After finding a message on my spouse's phone during the final months of our marriage, this song took on a new kind of ache. It's about silence, shame, and what's left unsaid in the dark.

“NOBODY KNOWS YOU WHEN YOU'RE DOWN & OUT” *by JIMMIE COX*

A classic of the Great Depression and every depression since. It's about friends who disappear, fortunes that vanish, and the humiliation of needing help. I recorded this one slowly, almost as if I was talking to myself — because sometimes that's the only one left to talk to.

“TEXAS FLOOD” *by LARRY DAVIS & JOSEPH SCOTT*

Originally made famous by Stevie Ray Vaughan, this song always felt bigger than just weather — it's about being overwhelmed by something you can't control. My version leans into that helplessness, not with a guitar solo, but with quiet desperation in the piano and voice. The storm here isn't outside — it's internal.

“PRIDE & JOY” *by STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN*

I reimagined this one as a slower piano-driven lament. It's not the strutting love song you might expect — it's a postmortem slow shuffle. This version mourns what should've been sweet.

“EVIL GAL BLUES” *by LIONEL HAMPTON & LEONARD FEATHER*

I rewrote this one from the ground up. The original was Dinah Washington's and Aretha Franklin's, but this version is mine. “She's an evil gal, took everything from me” — that's how it starts, and it doesn't let up. It's not a metaphor. It's about being used, drained, left hollow. There's nothing playful about it. Just the slow realization that love, when weaponized, can ruin you.

“MIDNIGHT SPECIAL” *by LEAD BELLY*

A traditional prison song that Lead Belly helped bring into the American consciousness. I heard the train whistle nearly every night while living in Sugar Land, just like the inmates once did. That whistle meant hope — the possibility that someone, somewhere, was still moving. I let that rhythm guide the entire arrangement.

“NO MORE LOVIN’” *by FOREST CHUMP*

I wrote this one at a time when I couldn't tell if I was being gaslit or just going crazy. She said nothing had changed, but everything had — this isn't a breakup song. It's a realization. A cold, clear, piano-lit moment where the truth finally stares back at you.

RECORDING CONTEXT

This album wasn't tracked in a studio with glass walls and golden plaques. It was recorded in a quiet cabin with just one man, one mic, one piano — and **James Viega** behind the board, helping capture it all.

I played on a modeled Bosendorfer 280VC using Modartt's Pianoteq plugin. That may sound technical, but it matters. It gave me the weight and harmonic warmth of an acoustic piano without leaving the room I was trying to heal in.

Everything was tracked live. No overdubs. No edits. No fancy tricks. Just voice, piano, and the space between them. The goal wasn't perfection — it was presence. To sit with these songs and let them speak without interruption.

A PERSONAL NOTE

I didn't plan to make this album. I just needed something to hold onto.

Most of these songs came back to me while I was in the middle of losing everything — my marriage, my sanity, my reputation, and for a time, even my will to live. I didn't set out to reinvent them. I just sat down with the piano and let them speak the way they needed to.

There's no polish here. What you hear is what I had. But if there's one thing I've learned, it's that even in the dark, music has a way of carrying the truth — especially the kind of truth you can't say out loud.

Thank you for listening.

— Forest Chump

VOLUME 2. THE DEATH OF RYAN LEE REID

ARTIST STATEMENT

This album is not a concept. It's a burial.

Volume 2: THE DEATH OF RYAN LEE REID isn't just a title — it's a process. These songs were written during the hardest years of my life, in the middle of a storm that almost took me with it. I lost my mind. I lost my marriage. I lost control over my own name.

But it didn't stop there. My body of work — years of songs, videos, writing, recordings, and creative history — was deliberately erased. Not by accident. Not by time. By someone else's hand. I watched my digital existence vanish, piece by piece, like a funeral in reverse. When your past is deleted in real time, it doesn't just feel like a loss. It feels like death.

Every note on this record was played alone — no band, no overdubs, just a piano and a man in pieces. Some of the songs were written while I was institutionalized or in a jail cell. Others came afterward, in the wreckage. All of them are true.

Ryan Lee Reid didn't make it out of that fire. Forest Chump did.

ABOUT THE ALBUM

This is a solo piano album, but it's not easy listening. These songs weren't written for comfort. They were written for survival.

THE DEATH OF RYAN LEE REID is an exorcism in twelve parts. Every track is an original — composed, performed, and recorded alone. There's no polish, no façade. The tempos drift. The keys blur. But the emotion never wavers. That's the point.

Where Volume 1 paid tribute to Southern tradition, Volume 2 is about shedding skin. These are not genre pieces. They are internal dispatches from a man caught between collapse and rebirth. Some were written in a jail cell. Others came during psychiatric hospitalization. And a few were sketched out in the silence that followed.

If Volume 1 is the voice of the ghost, this is the sound of the body burning.

TRACK NOTES

These songs weren't composed at a piano bench with a notebook and a plan — they came out in fragments, like breath through broken ribs. Some were written behind locked doors, some after the fallout. What holds them together isn't form or genre — it's what they cost. Each one carries part of the man who didn't make it out.

“EGO” *by FOREST CHUMP*

This one came out like a fistfight — me versus the voices in my head. Living with schizoaffective disorder, those voices aren't just metaphors. They're constant, cruel, and convincing. I wrote this song in one sitting, like I was finally punching back. It's not poetic. It's not polished. It's just the truth, told loud and without apology.

“PILLBILLY BLUES” *by FOREST CHUMP*

This one's an elegy for anyone who's been broke, doped, and laughed at their own collapse. I wrote it after the psych ward, when pills and late bills were running my life. There's sarcasm in the lines, but every word is true. It's about streaming pennies, rock bottom's basement, and how hitting the floor for a dropped pill can feel like a holy mission. This is gallows humor — Southern fried and barely holding on.

“WATCH OUT FOR TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE” *by FOREST CHUMP*

I wrote this one when the spell broke. It's about the kind of person who makes you fall fast — and then drains you dry. I raised kids that weren't mine (but I love them and think of them as mine), lied to cover for her, and almost didn't survive it. The song isn't subtle because what happened to me wasn't subtle. It's a warning, plain and simple: some charm is weaponized.

“ALL I DO IS EAT AND WEAR MY MONEY” *by FOREST CHUMP*

This is what it looks like when grief puts on designer clothes. I wrote it at a time when I was blowing money just to feel something — caviar, Balmain, and the dumbest shit imaginable. There's humor in it, but it's not a joke. I wasn't living. I was spending to survive. And the more I bought, the emptier it felt.

“BUSY LIVIN', BUSY DYIN'” *by FOREST CHUMP*

This song came from that gray space between hope and burnout — when every day feels the same, and you're not sure which direction you're headed anymore. I felt like a cowboy with nowhere left to ride, still singing songs while the clock kept ticking. It's about motion without meaning. Life without traction. And wondering if you're living at all, or just slowly fading out.

“DON’T SCOOTER BRAUN ME” *by FOREST CHUMP*

This one’s about being used — emotionally, creatively, and professionally. I wrote love songs on demand to hold a relationship together that was already falling apart. When someone takes your talent and turns it into leverage, it stops being collaboration — it becomes control. This is me taking the pen back.

“THE RHYTHM OF TEXAS” *by FOREST CHUMP*

This one’s about where I come from — musically and spiritually. Texas has a rhythm all its own: part swing, part soul, part swagger. From Lead Belly to DJ Screw, Bob Wills to Selena, the beat here is as wide as the sky. I wrote this as a reminder that no matter how far I fall, the rhythm of Texas still feels like home.

“DAY DRINKING” *by FOREST CHUMP*

This song came from that place where coping turns into a lifestyle. It’s funny on purpose — a little beer-cation with Dr. Shiner — but the punchline hides something real. I wasn’t just drinking for fun. I was drinking to forget. Sometimes the pain starts early in the day, and you meet it where it lives.

“SOMEDAY” *by FOREST CHUMP*

I wrote this for a 15 year old boy who didn’t get their “someday”. It’s a song about potential — what could’ve been, what should’ve been — and the heartbreak of watching that light go out too soon. Some lives burn fast and bright. This is my way of making sure that fire doesn’t disappear.

“LIFE IS A RIDE BUILT FOR TWO” *by FOREST CHUMP*

This song is about finding your other half — I wrote this when I found my soul mate like a promise. A soul mate is forever, even if the promise doesn’t last.

“ROUND TOP DAYS” *by FOREST CHUMP*

Round Top was where love felt effortless, untouched by time or doubt. It’s where we first went away, fell in love, and got married. The air was slower there, the nights softer, and everything seemed possible. I carry those days with a quiet kind of gratitude — for the peace we found, however briefly, and the beauty of believing it could last.

“FEELIN’ RECKLESS” *by FOREST CHUMP*

A moonshine-fueled mission statement. Part Houston hurricane, part rodeo clown in orbit, it’s built on bad decisions. Loud lyrics, punchline-heavy beat, proudly unhinged energy. Not about getting it right — about turning it up, knocking it down, and waking up grinning with no regrets.

RECORDING CONTEXT

This album wasn't made in a studio. It was made in a state of survival.

Most of these songs were recorded alone, in a bare space with a single microphone and a modeled Bosendorfer 280VC using Modartt's Pianoteq plugin. No fancy studio, no team, No click. Just my hands, my voice, **James Viega**, and whatever I had left that day.

I didn't record these tracks to impress anyone. I recorded them to stay alive — to get the thoughts out of my head before they swallowed me whole. There's noise. There's unevenness. There's breath where maybe there shouldn't be. I kept all of it.

Because sometimes, you don't need a perfect take. You need a true one.

A PERSONAL NOTE

This album wasn't made in a moment of clarity. It came from the middle of a breakdown — after jail, after the hospital, after everything I thought I was had been stripped away or deleted.

Some of these songs came fast. Others dragged their feet through the dark. All of them were written by someone trying to figure out what was left when the old self died.

If you've ever felt like you were falling apart, I hope something in here makes you feel a little less alone. This isn't about closure. It's about survival.

Thank you for listening.

— Forest Chump

VOLUME 3. JAZZ CHUMP ON LOST LOVE

ARTIST STATEMENT

This record lives in the quiet between heartbreak and healing — in the moments when the room is empty, the night runs long, and you can still hear the echo of what used to be love. It's the sound of someone talking to themselves after everyone else has gone home.

Every song here carries a different shade of goodbye — the kind that burns, the kind that fades, and the kind that just slips away. *Jazz Chump on Lost Love* isn't about romance so much as the aftermath of it — the long silence after the laughter, the soft ache that comes when memory outstays its welcome.

These standards have been sung a thousand ways before, but I wanted to play them like I lived them — slower, quieter, stripped down to voice and piano. The blues of the South sits underneath it all, shaping the phrasing and space between notes. The swing is subdued, the edges softened, but the emotion stays raw.

I didn't want to chase nostalgia or perfection. I wanted to tell the truth — that love can be beautiful, foolish, selfish, and kind, sometimes all in the same verse. That we fall too easily, hold on too tightly, and learn too late.

In the broader story of *The Birth of Forest Chump*, this volume isn't about loss — it's about recognition. The realization that even broken love leaves something worth keeping: a melody, a memory, a reason to keep playing.

Because somewhere between heartbreak and forgiveness, between the last drink and the first light, the music still lingers — and that, in itself, is a kind of love.

ABOUT THE ALBUM

Jazz Chump on Lost Love was recorded the same way most heartbreaks are remembered — quietly, alone, and a little out of time. Every track was captured in a single room with nothing but voice, piano, and the kind of silence that tells its own story.

The goal wasn't to recreate the golden age of the American Songbook, but to reinterpret it through the lens of Southern soul and lived experience — to let the phrasing lean, the tempo breathe, and the imperfections carry weight. These songs were never meant to be polished; they were meant to be felt.

The arrangements move between torch-song intimacy and Southern restraint, sometimes bending the harmony just enough to suggest the blues. You can hear the ghosts of gospel phrasing, late-night barroom jazz, and a little country ache underneath. Everything is slowed down — not for effect, but for truth. Love doesn't rush when it hurts.

In sound and spirit, this volume stands as the emotional heartbeat of *The Birth of Forest Chump*. Where the earlier work searched for identity through defiance, this one finds peace in acceptance. The focus isn't on the end of love, but on what remains — the tenderness, the humor, and the quiet dignity that follow.

The piano becomes a companion here, not an instrument — responding, sighing, sometimes saying what words can't. It's a conversation between memory and melody, between what was said and what was meant.

Because in the end, love may fade, but its echo — like music — never truly disappears.

TRACK NOTES

Improvisation is the heart of this album. I didn't come in with polished arrangements or fixed ideas. I let the songs unfold in real time — reshaping melodies, bending chords, rewriting forms on the fly. Sometimes I changed the structure. Sometimes I just change my mind.

This is less about honoring the canon and more about challenging it — not out of disrespect, but because these songs deserve to keep growing. I wasn't trying to preserve anything. I was trying to feel something.

“STORMY WEATHER / SUNDAY KIND OF LOVE” *by ARLEN & KOEHLER / BELLE, LEONARD, RHODES & PRIMA*

A medley of turbulence and longing. *Stormy Weather* aches with the weight of love's unpredictability, while *A Sunday Kind of Love* dreams of something steady, warm, and lasting. Together, they form the full weather report of the heart — thunder followed by hope.

“DON'T GO TO STRANGERS” *by KENT, MANN & EVANS*

The plea here isn't desperation; it's understanding. It's someone who knows the ending but still asks to be remembered. The phrasing leans forward, then falls back — like holding out your hand and realizing it's not going to be taken.

“MEAN OL' MOON” *by WALTER MURPHY & SETH MACFARLANE*

Seth MacFarlane's modern standard feels timeless here. The moon becomes a witness — the only one who sees both sides of heartbreak. There's humor in the loneliness, a wink through the tears. Not all sadness has to be tragic. Sometimes it just needs good lighting.

“I COULD HAVE TOLD YOU” *by JIMMY VAN HEUSEN & CARL SIGMAN*

Some truths come too late to change anything. This song carries the weight of hindsight — the ache of someone who saw the ending coming but fell anyway. It's sung not with regret, but with affection for the fool who loved too much.

“CRY ME A RIVER” *by ARTHUR HAMILTON*

A classic torch song turned confession. Instead of vengeance, this version finds release. The tears aren't a demand — they're proof you felt something real. It's less about crying and more about cleansing.

“I FALL IN LOVE TOO EASILY” *by JULE STYNE & SAMMY CAHN*

The most honest song on the record. It admits what we all try to hide — that some of us are built to hope. Every phrase lands like a sigh that already knows better. Falling in love again isn't a mistake; it's a compulsion, and maybe a kind of grace.

“YOU DON’T KNOW WHAT LOVE IS” *by GENE DE PAUL & DON RAYE*

The heart of the record. Raw, direct, unflinching. This is the song that understands how love teaches through pain. It’s not angry — it’s exhausted. The final chord hangs in the air like truth refusing to fade.

“THE THINGS WE DID LAST SUMMER” *by SAMMY CAHN & JULE STYNE*

The season ends, the memories don’t. This closer looks back with warmth instead of sorrow. Love passes, but nostalgia lingers sweetly. It’s a reminder that even the most fleeting connection leaves something worth keeping.

“THE THRILL IS GONE” *by ROY HAWKINS & RICK DARNELL*

There’s a quiet dignity in acceptance. This one isn’t about bitterness — it’s about that slow exhale when you finally stop fighting what’s already gone. The tempo drifts like smoke. Every chord sits in the space between memory and mercy.

RECORDING CONTEXT

These songs were recorded live — one mic, one piano, and no safety net. I played a modeled Bosendorfer 280VC using Modartt's Pianoteq plugin, which gave me the depth and dynamics of a concert grand in a space that didn't have one. **James Viega** tracked the session — capturing the bare stripped down nature contained within.

There were no charts, no overdubs, no vocal comping. Most takes were done in one or two passes, guided entirely by feel. I didn't edit out imperfections — I leaned into them. The air, the breath, the hesitation — it's all part of the story.

This isn't how most people approach *The American Songbook*. But for me, improvising with no plan and no polish was the only way it felt honest.

A PERSONAL NOTE

I didn't record this to mourn. I recorded it to remember. Because even when love ends, the sound of it lingers — in the way a chair still feels warm after someone leaves the room. These performances are the echoes of that warmth.

There's a kind of mercy in turning pain into melody. Somewhere between the chords and the quiet, I started to see that love isn't measured by how long it lasts, but by how deeply it was felt. Every song on this album is a confession — not of regret, but of gratitude for having felt anything at all.

So if you've ever lost someone, or watched a love fade and wondered what to do with the ache it leaves behind, this one's for you. Pour a glass, stay a while. Let the music talk while you just sit and breathe.

Because in the end, that's what we do — we turn our stories into songs, our heartbreak into art, and our endings into something worth listening to.

Thank you for listening.

— Forest Chump

VOLUME 4. CLASSICAL CHUMP

ARTIST STATEMENT

This album is not improvised in the way most people use the word. Nothing here was random. Every note — whether composed, arranged, or composed in real-time — came from structure. From rules. From a deliberate process of limiting chaos through design.

Volume 4: CLASSICAL CHUMP is a collection of original compositions, reimagined concert works, and real-time compositions that follow strict internal logic. One real-time composition is built using Michael Wiedeburg 1775 Treatise on baroque real-time composition, “*Der sich selbst informirende Clavierspieler*”.

Others follow self directed systems of mirrored intervals, tritone symmetry, or parametric constraints. Even when I was composing in real-time, I was not reacting emotionally, but executing ideas with intent.

This is not a display of spontaneity. It's a study in control, and what can be expressed when emotion is funneled through structure and form.

ABOUT THE ALBUM

This album is made up of three threads woven together:

1. **Original compositions** rooted in Romanticism and Impressionism
2. **Solo piano arrangements** of all three movements of Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 2
3. **Original real-time composition** — each built around a specific set of constraints or guiding logic

The composed pieces are fully notated but emotionally loose — lyrical, harmonically rich, and often leaning toward ambiguity. The Rachmaninoff arrangements are not transcriptions; they're interpretations, rewritten to live and breathe through solo piano without an orchestra behind them, and more accessible to the modern musical palette.

The real-time compositions vary widely. Some are shaped by intervallic rules (like tritone symmetry). Another borrows from a 1775 Treatise outlining a baroque real-time compositional system. Freedom inside structure. Each real-time composition is a thought experiment made musical.

Everything on this album is performed alone — no edits, no overlays. Just one pianist in conversation with the past, the present, and whatever's left of the future.

TRACK NOTES

These aren't recital pieces — but they're not guesses, either. Every work on this album is built on structure. Some were fully composed and notated. Others were composed in real-time, but always within strict constraints: symmetry, intervallic systems, harmonic direction, or counterpoint.

Nothing here was made to sound impressive. It was made to hold meaning. Whether I was adapting Rachmaninoff, writing original themes, or composing in real-time with a self-imposed rule set, the goal was always the same — to turn thought into motion, and structure into feeling.

“MAGNUS’S THEME” *by FOREST CHUMP*

Magnus is the older brother — curious, cautious, and deeply kind. He called me Dad, and I took that seriously. His theme is steady, almost noble, with moments of restraint that feel like he's holding something in. I wrote it to sound like a kid who grew up too fast, but still looked out for everyone else.

“SEBASTIAN’S THEME” *by FOREST CHUMP*

Sebastian is the little one — a whirlwind of energy and emotion. His theme is playful, erratic, and tender in the way little kids are when they trust you completely. There's a restlessness in the left hand and bursts of melody in the right, like he's running through a memory I can't hold onto anymore.

“FOREVER YOUR FATHER” *by FOREST CHUMP*

Composed as a love letter in sound, *Forever Your Father* is both a lullaby and a legacy for the two sons I loved raising with all my heart. It moves between tenderness and strength. At its core, it's not about perfection, but presence — the enduring promise of a father's love that remains.

“SCHIZOAFFECTIVE” *by FOREST CHUMP*

This one's stormy — overlapping motifs like voices in a diner, all talking at once, none of them mine. I built the piece on mental clutter: looping fragments, sudden shifts, moments of clarity buried under noise. But G minor holds it together. It's not madness. It's the sound of living with it.

“PIANO CONCERTO NO. 2” by SERGEI RACHMANINOFF

“I. MODERATO” *solo arrangement by FOREST CHUMP*

I kept as much of Rachmaninoff's grandeur as I could without the orchestra and unnecessary filler sections. This movement is all about rising from collapse, something I know too well. My version turns the sweeping string lines into heavy chordal breath — more solitary. Just a man and a piano, pulling himself upright.

“II. ADAGIO SOSTENUTO” *solo arrangement by FOREST CHUMP*

This is the stillness after the storm — the moment when you realize you've survived, but nothing feels whole. I slowed the tempo and let the silences linger. The melody isn't just beautiful — it's lonely.

“III. ALLEGRO SCHERZANDO” *solo arrangement by FOREST CHUMP*

This scherzo is usually triumphant — a full-circle return. But stripped down, it becomes a sprint without a finish line. I played it with clenched teeth and loose wrists, letting the rhythmic drive carry the emotional weight. It's chaos, yes — but it's earned. You can't fake this kind of speed through survival.

“REAL-TIME COMPOSITION NO. 1” *by FOREST CHUMP*

This piece is built on Michael Wiedeburg’s 18th-century real-time compositional method — a guidebook for ornamentation, cadences, and voice leading. I used his rules as a framework but stayed in the moment, weaving lines that talk across each other rather than follow. It’s contrapuntal, but not fugal — like several thoughts in dialogue, occasionally overlapping, occasionally arguing.

“REAL-TIME COMPOSITION NO. 2” *by FOREST CHUMP*

I approached this like a lieder singer with no words — 19th century romantic harmony and Bel Canto principles filtered through touch and breath. Think Chopin meets Bellini in a dream. The rubato isn’t just expressive — it’s desperate. There are no lyrics, but it still says: I was here. I felt all of it. And I’m still singing.

“REAL-TIME COMPOSITION NO. 3” *by FOREST CHUMP*

This is the farthest I’ve gone from tradition. I built a self-imposed system of tritone-based symmetry, pushing away tonality but clinging to structure. There’s no home key — just rotation, tension, and orbit. I composed this in real-time in one take. It’s not supposed to feel good. It’s supposed to feel true.

RECORDING CONTEXT

These pieces were recorded under the same conditions as the rest of the series — solo, live, and stripped to the essentials. I played a modeled Bosendorfer 280VC using Modartt's Pianoteq plugin, tracked through a single mic. No edits. No overdubs. Just a clean capture of what actually happened.

But unlike the folk and jazz volumes, this one demanded more discipline. Even the real-time compositions followed tight internal logic — rules I'd set in advance: consistent tritone intervals, mirrored motifs, harmonic constraints. This wasn't freeform. It was formal and rule based.

Everything you hear was shaped by design — from voice-leading to phrasing to pedal control. All guided by intention. The emotion comes through the structure, not in spite of it.

A PERSONAL NOTE

In a time when everything felt unstable, structure saved me. These pieces gave me rules to hold onto when nothing else made sense.

I wasn't chasing inspiration. I was building systems. Writing something I could trust, even if I couldn't trust myself. This album gave me a way to keep moving without falling apart.

If you hear clarity, it's because I needed it. If you hear restraint, it's because I earned it.

— Forest Chump

VOLUME 5. ELECTRONIC CHUMP

ARTIST STATEMENT

This is what happens when a fifth-generation Texan wires a honky-tonk to the mainframe, fires up a MIDI keyboard, and lets two Nashville heavyweights loose on the rhythm section. Two-time Grammy-winning drummer **Derrek Phillips** brings the heat on a Roland SPDx, while **Harmoni Kelley**—bassist and vocalist for **Kenny Chesney**—lays down an electronic low end that thumps like a diesel engine on the dance floor. At the console, **James Viega**—longtime engineer and producer for **Garth Brooks** and **Trisha Yearwood**—brings the polish that ties the chaos together, without ever taming it.

ELECTRONIC CHUMP is still country swagger with breakbeats, still satire with a side of swag—but now it's got a few more miles on the odometer and a lot more horsepower under the hood. For *Sebastian's Theme*—an electronic reimagining of one of my classical compositions—I traded the MIDI rig for a nine-foot concert grand Steinway, brought in just for the session at **Yellow Dog Studio**. Because sometimes even the ghosts deserve a dance remix.

After the wreckage of Volumes 1 through 4—the grief, the heartbreak, the shadow work—I needed to make something that moved. Something loud enough to drown out the past, and ridiculous enough to make me laugh in the middle of it. These songs are exaggerated, electrified versions of my reality: the pain's still there, but now it's wearing rhinestones, strobe lights, and the occasional cowboy hat.

Think of it as CountryCore 2.0, or Bonnie and Clyde in the year 3000. The beat goes hard. The boots still got spurs. And I'm still singing—just with a few more vocal FXs and a lot more reasons to move.

ABOUT THE ALBUM

This one's for the disco cowboys, the space outlaws, the ones two-stepping under neon lights. Volume 5 is the comic relief in *The Birth of Forest Chump* — but it's still serious music. These are my originals, electrified: breakbeats, trap hats, disco synths, and country swagger all colliding in one big, glittery crash. There's humor here, but also exhaustion — from fame culture, from genre rules, from the idea that you have to suffer to be taken seriously.

Most of this album came from me, a MIDI keyboard, and a willingness to get ridiculous. But for *Sebastian's Theme* — an electronic reimagining of one of my classical compositions — I stepped away from the rig and sat down at a nine-foot concert grand Steinway, brought in just for the **Yellow Dog Studio** session. It's my ghosts in 4/4 time, dressed for the dance floor.

Two-time Grammy-winning drummer **Derrek Phillips** plays the Roland SPDx on some tracks, bringing human swing to synthetic chaos, while **Harmoni Kelley** — bassist and vocalist for **Kenny Chesney** — drops an electronic low end that rumbles like a freight train headed straight for the club. Over it all, **James Viega** — engineer and producer for **Garth Brooks** and **Trisha Yearwood** — adds the final polish, letting the grit shine without sanding down the edges. Nothing here is too clean, too cool, or too controlled. That's the point. This is the volume where Forest Chump finally stops caring what anyone thinks — and just dances.

TRACK NOTES

Volume 5 trades the shadows of the South for the strobe lights of the future. These tracks don't unpack trauma — they light it on fire and dance through the smoke. I'm still telling stories, but this time it's through synth leads, sub-bass, and breakbeats. Think: country boy meets Daft Punk in a truck stop bathroom. There's swagger, satire, and a whole lot of distortion — both sonic and emotional. This volume revisits some earlier themes (CountryCore returns with a vengeance) but flips the mood: less confession, more confrontation. It's Bonnie and Clyde in the year 3000, armed with 808s and auto-tune. Every song here is a grin with a gold tooth.

“COUNTRYCORE” *by FOREST CHUMP*

Pure satire — but not just a joke. I wrote it to poke holes in the formula of modern country pop: the brand drops, the fake blue-collar cosplay, the algorithmic patriotism. Beneath the humor, there's frustration. I've lived the struggle these songs pretend to represent, and I know what a real country looks like — it doesn't come with a marketing budget.

“EGO” *by FOREST CHUMP*

A confrontation with the voice in your head that never shuts up — the one that calls you a failure, fraud, and joke. For anyone battling mental illness, that voice is relentless. This is my fight song. Raw, blunt, unapologetic.

“FEELIN' RECKLESS” *by FOREST CHUMP*

A moonshine-fueled mission statement. Part Houston hurricane, part rodeo clown in orbit, it's built for big bass and bad decisions. Loud lyrics, punchline-heavy beats, proudly unhinged energy. Not about getting it right — about turning it up, knocking it down, and waking up grinning with no regrets.

“WATCH OUT FOR TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE” *by FOREST CHUMP*

Written when the spell broke. About the kind of person who makes you fall fast, then drains you dry. Funk-boogie basslines and disco beats mask a warning: some charm is weaponized.

“DOUBLE WIDE ROCKET” *by FOREST CHUMP*

Neon space outlaw anthem. Deep-fried sci-fi with glitter on the boots. Two disco-damaged lovers blasting through the galaxy in a double-wide — a 31st-century Bonnie and Clyde with zero F's to give in zero G's. Chaos on purpose.

“KISS KISS BANG BANG” *by FOREST CHUMP*

She's got charm weaponized and bad news in heels. This came from that dangerous border where lust and trouble live side by side — and sometimes share a bed. Playful, loud, and a little unhinged, with a warning baked in: the second you're pulled in, the damage is already done.

“KILLIN’ JIM MILLER” *by FOREST CHUMP*

Swagger and shadows in a pulsing, electronic outlaw ballad about Texas’s deadliest man. Jim “Killin’ Jim” Miller — church on Sunday, murder for hire by Monday. 808s like gunshots, a stalking bassline, and lyrics painting him as the Lone Star devil in disguise.

“COWBOY DISCO” *by FOREST CHUMP*

Pure yeehaw-meets-EDM. Kicks the saloon doors open at 115 BPM with a bassline built for trouble. The neon-lit cousin to *Double Wide Rocket*, blending outlaw swagger with club heat. Simple lyrics by design — it’s about release.

“SEBASTIAN’S THEME” *by FOREST CHUMP*

An electronic reimagining of one of my classical compositions, played on a nine-foot concert grand Steinway at Yellow Dog Studio. Harmoni Kelley joins on electronic bass, giving the piece a pulse that blurs the line between recital hall and dance floor.

“ROLL THE DICE” *by BUKOWSKI arranged by FOREST CHUMP*

A one-minute musical rearrangement and distillation of Bukowski’s poem. The grit of his words meets my cowboy-electronic hybrid sound — part spoken-word saloon, part neon-lit confession booth.

RECORDING CONTEXT

Volume 5 was produced with zero acoustic instruments — except for one glorious exception — and 100% attitude. Most of these tracks were built with a MIDI keyboard inside a DAW, not a cabin: no rules, no filters, no one looking over my shoulder. Just me, a laptop, some beat packs, and a twisted sense of humor.

Every sound you hear was programmed, chopped, or warped into place — drum machines, modular synths, pitch-shifted vocals, auto-tuned hooks, trap hi-hats, and basslines fatter than a county fair corndog. Some vocal takes were recorded straight into a laptop mic, then mangled until they fit the aesthetic. A few tracks feature the Roland SPDx in the hands of **Derrek Phillips**, a two-time Grammy-winning drummer who somehow made a drum pad sound like a stampede of disco horses.

The lone acoustic moment comes on *Sebastian's Theme*, where I stepped away from the MIDI rig and onto a nine-foot concert grand Steinway, brought in for me at **Yellow Dog Studio**. **Harmoni Kelley** — bassist and vocalist for **Kenny Chesney** — joins me here on electronic bass, blurring the lines between recital hall and dance floor.

At the console for this volume — and all six volumes — is **James Viega**, longtime engineer and producer for **Garth Brooks** and **Trisha Yearwood**. His role: add the polish without taming the chaos. I didn't make Volume 5 to win any purist points. I made it because I needed to move again — physically, creatively, emotionally. The acoustic piano gave way to synth bass and space noise, and somehow it still sounds like me. Just... chompier.

A PERSONAL NOTE

After all the grief, the gaslighting, the ghost towns and breakdowns... I needed to have a little fun.

Volume 5 isn't about healing — it's about hijacking the getaway car. It's a sonic joyride through everything I wasn't supposed to feel: swagger, sarcasm, seduction, and straight-up absurdity. Most of it came from me, a MIDI keyboard, and the stubborn refusal to sit still. On *Sebastian's Theme*, I traded that setup for a nine-foot concert grand Steinway at **Yellow Dog Studio**, with **Harmoni Kelley** on electronic bass and **Derrek Phillips** on Roland SPDx — a reminder that even my ghosts know how to dance. And through it all, **James Viega** was at the console, adding just enough polish to let the grit shine.

These songs gave me room to laugh again, even if it was through gritted teeth and vocoder. There's real pain behind the glitter, but I didn't want to wear it on my sleeve this time — I wanted to wear sequins.

If the earlier volumes were about survival, this one's about reinvention. A disco ball cracked in half, reflecting a thousand versions of me. And if some of them are outlaws, clowns, or cowboys in space... so be it. I earned the right to play.

— Forest Chump

VOLUME 6. STUDIO CHUMP

ARTIST STATEMENT

Volume 6 is the closing chapter of *The Birth of Forest Chump* — but it's also a new beginning. After the stripped-down recordings, the digital exorcisms, the jail cells, and the psych ward laments, I wanted to give these songs the full treatment they deserved. This time, my hands were on the steering wheel more as an arranger than as a constant performer, shaping the music in the spirit of **Bill Evans and his Trio** — giving the rhythm section room to breathe, lead, and respond.

I play piano only on a handful of tracks, leaving much of the conversation to the band: Grammy-winning drummer **Derrek Phillips**, and **Harmoni Kelley**, bassist and vocalist for **Kenny Chesney** — both masters of feel, finesse, groove, and fire. The focus here isn't about one instrument dominating, but about the interplay — the kind of give-and-take that makes a band sound alive.

At the console, **James Viega** — longtime engineer and producer for **Garth Brooks** and **Trisha Yearwood** — brings the final polish, making sure every detail is clear without ever flattening the emotion.

But the heart of it is still the same. These are songs that survived rough demos, jailhouse scribbles, and psychiatric holds. Here, they rise with new life. The arrangements are lush, but the stories are raw. Every line, every chord, came from lived experience — I just had the luxury of sharing the load this time.

This volume is about reclaiming sound and space. It's about not just surviving, but thriving — louder, richer, and with a band behind me that knows how to feel it all.

ABOUT THE ALBUM

This isn't a repeat — it's a reinvention. Some of these songs first appeared in Volume 2, written during and after a complete personal collapse. But here, they've been rebuilt from the ground up — restructured with new arrangements, new players, and, in some cases, entirely new life. Volume 6 is where the songs breathe different air — not stripped down, but stood back up.

We tracked it all at **Yellow Dog Studio**, the kind of place where the walls listen. I played piano sparingly, choosing instead to approach the music as an arranger, much like **Bill Evans and his Trio** — letting the rhythm section drive the conversation. **Derrek Phillips** (2× Grammy-winning drummer) doesn't just play drums here — he shapes the space. **Harmoni Kelley** (bassist and vocalist for **Kenny Chesney**) doesn't just anchor the groove — she gives it lift. The interplay between them is the heartbeat of this record.

At the console, **James Viega** — longtime engineer and producer for **Garth Brooks** and **Trisha Yearwood** — adds his signature polish, making sure every nuance in the band's dialogue comes through without losing the rawness that defines these songs.

This album is full-band, full-blooded, and full of second chances. It's what happens when you make it out — not clean, not untouched, but unbroken. *Forest Chump lived to tell the tale. Ryan Lee Reid didn't.*

TRACK NOTES

These songs are different — not just because they're mine, but because of how they came to life. Some were scribbled in a journal in jail. Some were written with an unsanctioned pen I kept hidden in the psych ward. Others were finished in the quiet moments when the noise finally stopped. On this volume, I'm not carrying the weight alone: **Derrek Phillips**(drums) and **Harmoni Kelley** (bass and vocals) bring a fire, finesse, and groove that turns these survival stories into something you can move to. The arrangements are built like a **Bill Evans Trio** session — conversation between instruments, space for breath, rhythm section at the center. I play piano on only a handful of tracks, and overdubbed a D6, Wurly, Hohner Pianet N, and Fender Rhodes, stepping back to shape the whole picture. At the console, **James Viega** — longtime engineer and producer for **Garth Brooks** and **Trisha Yearwood** — adds the final polish without ever taming the edges. What you hear is one-take energy, real-time chemistry, and scars that swing. These aren't just songs — they're proof that Forest Chump made it out... but Ryan Lee Reid didn't.

“COUNTRYCORE” *by FOREST CHUMP*

This one's pure satire — but it's not just a joke. I wrote it to poke holes in the formula of modern country pop: the brand drops, the fake blue-collar cosplay, the algorithmic patriotism. But beneath the humor, there's frustration. I've lived the struggle these songs pretend to represent. And I've seen what a real country looks like — it doesn't come with a marketing budget.

“EGO” *by FOREST CHUMP*

This track is a full-on confrontation — not with another person, but with the voice in your head that never shuts up. The one that says you're a failure, a fraud, a joke. That voice lives rent-free in the mind of anyone battling mental illness, and mine has a sharp tongue. I wrote this as a fight song. Not polished, not poetic — just me telling my ego to go fuck itself and finally meaning it.

“FEELIN' RECKLESS” *by FOREST CHUMP*

This one's a moonshine-fueled mission statement. Part Houston hurricane, part rodeo clown in orbit, it's built for big bass and bad decisions. The lyrics are loud, the beat hits like a punchline, and the whole thing is proudly unhinged. It's not about getting it right — it's about turning it up, knocking it down, and waking up the next morning with a grin and no regrets. Good times are the philosophy. Reckless is the brand.

“DON'T SCOOTER BRAUN ME” *by FOREST CHUMP*

This one's about being used — emotionally, creatively, and professionally. I wrote love songs on demand to hold a relationship together that was already falling apart. When someone takes your talent and turns it into leverage, it stops being collaboration — it becomes control. This is me taking the pen back.

“DOUBLE WIDE ROCKET” *by FOREST CHUMP*

This is my neon space outlaw anthem. Think deep-fried sci-fi with glitter on the boots. It's two disco-damaged lovers blasting through the galaxy in a double wide — a 31st-century Bonnie and Clyde who give zero F's in zero G's. The beat's wild, the attitude's lawless, and the whole thing is one big yeehaw from the outer rim. It's chaos on purpose. 5150 at the cowboy disco.

“KISS KISS BANG BANG” *by FOREST CHUMP*

She's got charm weaponized and bad news in heels. This song came out of a place where lust and danger live right next to each other — and sometimes share a bed. It's playful, loud, and a little unhinged, just like the woman it describes. There's humor in it, but there's warning too. Because the second you're pulled in, the damage is already done. Kiss kiss. Bang bang. Good luck.

“PILLBILLY BLUES” *by FOREST CHUMP*

This one's an elegy for anyone who's been broke, doped, and laughed at their own collapse. I wrote it after the psych ward, when pills and late bills were running my life. There's sarcasm in the lines, but every word is true. It's about streaming pennies, rock bottom's basement, and how hitting the floor for a dropped pill can feel like a holy mission. This is gallows humor — Southern fried and barely holding on.

“MAGNUS'S THEME” *by FOREST CHUMP*

A companion piece to *Sebastian's Theme*, performed on a nine-foot concert grand Steinway at Yellow Dog Studio. Harmoni Kelley on bass brings warmth and gravity, with Derrek Phillips' drums framing it like a heartbeat. A quieter moment, but no less alive.

“ALL I DO IS EAT & WEAR MY MONEY” *by FOREST CHUMP*

This is what it looks like when grief puts on designer clothes. I wrote it at a time when I was blowing money just to feel something — caviar, Balmain, and the dumbest shit imaginable. There's humor in it, but it's not a joke. I wasn't living. I was spending to survive. And the more I bought, the emptier it felt.

“TROUBLE IN MIND” *by RICHARD M. JONES*

The only non-original on the album. A century-old blues standard reimagined with gospel undertones. A song of sorrow that refuses to sink — the perfect note to close this chapter.

“BUSY LIVIN' OR BUSY DYIN'” *by FOREST CHUMP*

This song came from that gray space between hope and burnout — when every day feels the same, and you're not sure which direction you're headed anymore. I felt like a cowboy with nowhere left to ride, still singing songs while the clock kept ticking. It's about motion without meaning. Life without traction. And wondering if you're living at all, or just slowly fading out.

“ROUND TOP DAYS” *by FOREST CHUMP*

Round Top was where love felt effortless, untouched by time or doubt. It's where we first went away, fell in love, and got married. The air was slower there, the nights softer, and everything seemed possible. I carry those days with a quiet kind of gratitude — for the peace we found, however briefly, and the beauty of believing it could last.

RECORDING CONTEXT

After tracking the earlier volumes in solitude — just one man, one piano, one mic — Volume 6 was my return to the studio and to collaboration. We cut these songs live at **Yellow Dog Studio**, where the chemistry was instant.

I approached this record more like an arranger than a constant performer, in the spirit of the **Bill Evans Trio** — giving the rhythm section space to lead the conversation. I only sat down at the piano on a handful of tracks, including *Magnus's Theme* on a nine-foot Steinway Concert D brought in specially for the session.

Derrek Phillips — two-time Grammy-winning drummer who's played with everyone from **Victor Wooten** to **Sly & The Family Stone** to **Hank Williams Jr.** — brought his rhythmic genius and intuitive sense of space. **Harmoni Kelley** — longtime bassist and vocalist for **Kenny Chesney** — anchored the low end with tone, taste, and a touch of Texas swagger.

While the stories remained mine — born in chaos, betrayal, and rebirth — the sound got bigger with the addition of the D6, Hohner Pianet N, and Fender Rhodes. We tracked live, no click tracks, just three players in a room telling the truth. **James Viega** — longtime engineer and producer for **Garth Brooks** and **Trisha Yearwood** — added the polish that let every detail shine without losing the grit.

A PERSONAL NOTE

After losing everything — my marriage, my kids, my name, my work, even my voice for a time — I never thought I'd be back in a studio, much less finishing a six-volume series with musicians of this caliber. But here we are.

Most of these songs were born in chaos — written in jail, in the psych ward, or in the wreckage of the life I used to live. To hear them now, shaped in the spirit of a **Bill Evans Trio** session, with **Derrek Phillips** and **Harmoni Kelley** breathing life into every bar, feels like a kind of redemption I never asked for but desperately needed. My own role here was often less about taking the spotlight and more about arranging the conversation, giving the rhythm section space to speak and filling in some of the spaces after the fact.

We didn't chase perfection. We chased feel. The kind of feel that comes from playing through the pain and laughing anyway. The kind that only shows up when you're finally free. **James Viega** made sure that freedom — the grit, the joy, the swing — was heard exactly as it was in the room.

Thanks for listening.

— Forest Chump

