

## ON EVERYTHING

Here's the question: Why make a record?

After releasing *Love Calling* in 2013, my fourteenth album in thirty years, I went through a time when I wondered if I had anything new to say, if anyone was listening.

I got curious about creativity outside the traditional music business. Along with writing songs and playing shows, I helped build a nonprofit called SongwritingWith:Soldiers, wrote a book (as yet unpublished) on how artists look at work, and worked with individuals and companies to help them put their conflicts, their dreams, into songs. And I fell into a new love relationship. Through it all, the constant was the songs, the writing.

Which brings me to *Everything*, and the three things that came together in my life to make it possible.

The first is SongwritingWith:Soldiers, a program that brings professional songwriters together with wounded veterans to write songs about combat and the return home. This project has shown me the world from a different angle. To recognize all that I have to be grateful for and to know that others hurt in ways we can't imagine. I've witnessed how songs can change a life, even save a life. Over the years, they've certainly saved mine.

Second, I'm done with cynicism. The collective yelling of politics, the news, social media – we're stuck in a digital traffic jam where nothing changes and the volume just gets louder. Never has the need for human kindness, compassion for strangers, and speaking up for love been higher. The best tool I've got is music, it's what I can do to reach out to others.

And the third? I crossed the mid-century mark several years ago. I don't see things the way I did before. More than ever I believe in love, hope, faith and gratitude. It's a view that only comes with time. The stakes are different now, more urgent.

Around February of 2016, these pieces began falling into place. I started digging through songs I'd written over the last five years, on my own and with people like Matraca Berg, Radney Foster, James House, Jay Clementi, and Bruce Robison. I kept writing. I reached out to Stewart Lerman, who co-produced six records with me, starting in 1996 with *Deep Fantastic Blue*. We started with thirty songs and narrowed it down to twelve. I put together a group of some of my favorite musicians and friends – Roscoe Beck (bass), Michael Ramos (keyboards), J.J. Johnson (drums), Charlie Sexton (guitar), and David Mansfield (mandolin, pedal steel and strings) – and we gathered in late August 2016 for three days of recording at Arlyn Studios in Austin, Texas. James House, Beth Nielsen Chapman, Bonnie Bishop, Kelly Willis, and Bruce Robison sang harmony.

My criteria for the songs on *Everything*? – they had to come from a true place, to say what I feel right now, and do it without cynicism. They had to carry a message that brings people together, that shares love in all different ways.

I'm not so naïve as to think that just putting out a song, an album, will change the world. But I do believe music can change someone's day for the better. That's where it all begins and all that I hope for.

Why make another album?

Because I have something to say, and somebody out there might need to hear it.

I carried this question around for a few years.

It took awhile, but I found the answer – *Everything*.

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