

MYRON ELKINS

Factories, Farms & Amphetamines



photo credit: Jimmy Fontaine

Myron Elkins didn't set out to become a full-time musician. After graduating from high school, the then 17-year-old instead became a welder in his hometown of Otsego, Michigan and had every intention of making that his career. However, fate had other plans. Three years ago, a relative signed him up for a battle of the bands at a local venue, despite the fact Elkins' only prior experience with live music was playing at church and a few bars in the small Michigan town where he grew up. With just three weeks' notice, Elkins put a band together featuring three of his cousins and a friend. Although the group didn't win (they came in second), the experience opened Elkins' eyes to a very different career path.

Now, at 21 years old, he's poised to become one of music's most intriguing new artists with the release of his Dave Cobb-produced debut album, *Factories, Farms & Amphetamines*, via Elektra/Low Country Sound. Across the album's ten tracks, Elkins crafts sharp observations informed by his working-class upbringing, infusing his music with rich personal experience. "I actually wrote a lot of these songs on the album in my head while I was welding," he says. "I just loved to play and write all of the time. Finding people who want to do that with you isn't always easy, but we made it work. And with this bunch of songs, it made it all worth it."

For Elkins, songwriting is an intensely personal process. He actually finds it challenging to have emotional distance from his lyrics or write from the perspective of another character. Rather than being weaknesses, however, these qualities are strengths. The barnstorming title track and country-leaning "Wrong Side of the River" illuminate two sides of his upbringing and showcase his perceptive self-awareness. "Factories, Farms & Amphetamines" is a realistic look at what it's like growing up and facing challenges, both from within your own family and because of your circumstances. "Wrong Side of

the River,” meanwhile, encourages embracing where you’re from, because a supportive home life can make all the difference even if you’re not living on the so-called right side of town. Other songs are just as emotionally heavy. For example, the easygoing, soul-influenced “Hands to Myself,” which is a stark, empathetic portrait of what it’s like to face domestic abuse. Through these songs, Elkins conveys that two things can be true: Home can be an idyllic small town and a place with a dark side.

“I’m interested in stories. I’m writing about where I come from. Things I’ve seen and things I’ve heard. I had only been out of Michigan one time—before I started the band, so that little part of Michigan is all I really knew when writing this album.”

Musically, *Factories, Farms & Amphetamines* reflects the gritty mix of classic rock, country and the blues Elkins heard growing up, putting the album squarely in the league of Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers, Bob Seger, and the Allman Brothers. Fittingly, Elkins also boasts a wise-beyond-his-years voice with a broad range. He unleashes a powerful belt on the blues-influenced ache “Old Trauma,” for example, and indulges in some rock ‘n’ roll ferocity on “Nashville Money,” a song that breaks the fourth wall while pondering being a recording artist. Another example of Elkins’ observational acuity, he wrote that song in 2021, while in the van driving through Nashville on the way to Leiper’s Fork, where the band stayed while recording the album.

This thematic diversity illustrates Elkins’ instinct-based approach to his music. “For me, songwriting isn’t like, ‘Uh oh, I have to write a song because I need a song,’” he says. “It’s more like, ‘I have this idea and I want to see what I can turn that feeling or idea into musically.’ It’s like if you have a sugar tooth or something, you need to go get something sweet, maybe some ice cream.”

Growing up, Elkins learned about classic country artists such as George Jones and Waylon Jennings via his grandfather (or “PAPAW”), who taught him how to pick guitars on the porch. Like many kids, he learned to sing in church on Sundays, and developed a deep, gravelly singing voice. When he was around 14 or 15, Elkins also started writing original music, inspired by stories he heard from family members about living in West Virginia coal camps.

Being able to chart his own destiny made a big impression on him. “When I first started, I was just trying to be like everything that I was listening to,” Elkins says, while noting other early favorites included Elvis Presley and Johnny Cash. “I guess most people probably do that when they first start out. But once I realized that I could have my own sound, I started writing my own stuff. I figured that if I messed something up or changed it, at least people wouldn’t know I did, right?”

Elkins doesn’t mind the hard work; in fact, after that fateful battle of the bands, he and his band practiced almost every day for three years straight in between working long hours at their respective day jobs. “We’d get together around 7 o’clock at the practice barn, and we’d play until after midnight,” he says. “I had to get up at 4 am for a 12-hour welding shift, so it wasn’t always easy.” Even with this dedication, Elkins viewed music as secondary to his welding career even up until very recently. In fact, two months before recording *Factories, Farms & Amphetamines*, he was still working a factory job.

Recording in a studio was a big step forward for the nascent group. Luckily, Elkins and his band were already fans of Dave Cobb’s live-band production style before signing with Elektra/Low Country Sound, and so they relished the chance to record with him at his studio, Nashville RCA Studio A. “We always used to joke about how we were

going to get Dave Cobb to do our first album,” Elkins says. “All the time. Then one day, I was on a call with him. It was real strange, but in a good way.” Elkins was admittedly a little intimidated to record in the same studio as Waylon Jennings and Dolly Parton. However, he was especially thrilled to work with Cobb, who produced some of Elkin’s most formative albums, the ones he listened to constantly as a teenager as he developed his own musical tastes: Jason Isbell’s *Southeastern*, Chris Stapleton’s *Traveller*, Sturgill Simpson’s *Metamodern Sounds in Country Music*.

“I came in with probably 30 songs that we had widdled down from 50-60.” Elkins says, “Dave would just sit down with us and say ‘ok, let’s hear what you got.’ He knew pretty quickly which ones he wanted to dive into, and from there, it was just kind of a Dave Cobb crash course. We’d only been in the studio one time before that, so there might have been a thing or two that we needed to learn.”

Elkins walked away from recording with Cobb already looking forward to making his next album. “Now when I’m writing songs, I have all these Dave-isms in my head—like, ‘Oh, yeah, there we go. All right, throw this here.’ Before we recorded *Factories, Farms & Amphetamines*, I thought maybe you had to be a superhero to make a record. Next time, it’s going to be a little easier.” This confidence, combined with touring that’s allowing them to see far-flung places—Elkins has joined Marcus King, Blackberry Smoke, Lucero and Kaleo on the road—has broadened his horizons and expectations.

“I love how this album turned out,” Elkins reflects, “but I’m real curious to know what people think of it. Hopefully they can at least respect it. But I’m more curious as to where this whole thing could go — where it might take me.” ■

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