

MIKE AND THE MOONPIES

For a band that regularly plays 250 shows a year, there's nothing like coming back home.

'One To Grow On,' the eighth studio album from Mike and the Moonpies, is a musical homecoming that returns the group to its roots as a workingman's country band. Layered with Telecaster twang, honky tonk harmonies and lyrics that highlight the Everyman's struggle to remain optimistic during a 9-to-5 world, this is organic music for dancehalls and car stereos — a soundtrack for the mid-week blues, shot through with weekend energy.

"I wanted to create a record you could crank loudly in your truck on Friday afternoon at quitting time," says frontman Mike Harmeier, who wrote 'One To Grow On' in his backyard studio on the outskirts of Austin. "To do that, I developed a narrative and a central character. It's a guy who's working hard to make ends meet, all while living in the moment and hoping to stay appreciative of the things he has. A guy who takes pride in what he does but is still searching for a balance in his life. There are a lot of similarities between him and me."

For more than a decade, Harmeier and his band of hard-touring road warriors — pedal steel player Zach Moulton, guitarist Catlin Rutherford, bassist Omar Oyoque and drummer Kyle Ponder — have traveled far beyond their Austin homeland, flying the flag for homegrown Texas music in more than a dozen countries. They've become global ambassadors of a blue-collar country sound, striking a balance between timeless influences and cool, contemporary appeal. Along the way, they've stretched their legs, following the breakthrough success of 2018's *Steak Night at the Prairie Rose* with records like 2019's *Cheap Silver & Solid Country Gold* (an album inspired by the classic country-politan hits of the early 1970s, recorded at Abbey Road Studios with help from the London Symphony Orchestra) and 2020's *Touch of You: The Lost Songs of Gary Stewart* (a collection of nine unreleased songs written by the honky-tonk hero).

When the COVID-19 pandemic brought the Moonpies' busy schedule to a halt, Harmeier found himself back home in Austin, inspired to return to the sound that had launched his band's career. He didn't need to look far for ideas.

"I have an old, square-bodied Chevy pickup from 1985," he says. "My dad had the same one. I used to work with him as an electrician when I was younger, and I started thinking about my dad, my grandfather, and the original owner of that truck. I thought about the kids I grew up with. Everyone I know who isn't a musician is working construction. They're putting one foot in front of the other and trying to appreciate the moment they're in, while basically working 24/7, 365. A lot of people live their lives that way, and they inspired me to write a workingman's story

A workingman himself, Harmeier headed to his backyard studio, where he used his free time to his advantage. He wrote. He revised. He sent ideas to his producer and bandmates, who helped mold and modify the songs from their own home studios. What emerged was a sound that split the difference between 70s southern rock and 90s country, with twin guitar leads and earthy storytelling. 'One To Grow On' took shape during those months of isolation — months that found all of the Moonpies collaborating remotely, remaining active even while in quarantine.

"We'd never had that kind of time on our hands before," Harmeier remembers. "I would develop the character as far as I could then send it to our producer [Adam Odor] for even more rewrites and then finally to the band for their input. They got to know the material long before we went into the studio. They got to know the album's central character, as well, and they wrote instrumental parts to convey the consciousness of that guy."

Co-produced with longtime collaborator Odor and recorded at Yellow Dog Studios in Wimberley, Texas, 'One To Grow On' kicks off with "Paycheck to Paycheck," an anthem for hardscrabble living. Driven forward by fiery fretwork, breakneck tempos, and vocal harmonies from Shiny Soul Sisters' Alice Spencer and Kelley Mickwee, the song serves as a primer for what's to come — the wild west atmospherics of "Whose Side Are You On," the greasy funky-tonk of "The Vein," and everything in between. Shooter Jennings makes a pair of appearances, playing synthesizer on songs like "Social Drinkers," while former Moonpie John Carbone returns to the fold to play keyboards throughout the album. Three members of fellow Texas-based outfit Quaker City Night Hawks join the band on "Burn Out," an autobiographical country-rocker that closes 'One To Grow On' by focusing not upon the character Harmeier has created, but upon the narrator himself.

"I knew I was writing a character-driven record, but I wasn't sure who he was until we finished," says Harmeier. "He's a bit of me, a bit of my father, and a bit of my friends. He's the Everyman. He's everyone I know, and everyone I don't know."