

JOHN SCOFIELD

COUNTRY FOR OLD MEN



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JOHN SCOFIELD
(guitar, ukulele)

LARRY GOLDINGS
(piano, Hammond organ)

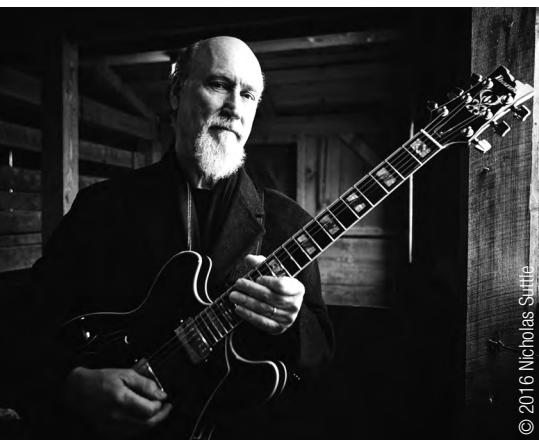
STEVE SWALLOW
(bass)

BILL STEWART
(drums)



Larry Goldings, Steve Swallow, John Scofield, Bill Stewart

1. MR FOOL 5:05
[Darrell Edwards / George Jones / Herbie Treece] Fort Knox Music Inc. / Glad Music Publishing / Trio Music Company / BMI
2. I'M SO LONESOME I COULD CRY 7:02
[Hank Williams] Sony/ATV Acuff Rose Music / BMI
3. BARTENDER'S BLUES 5:18
[James Taylor] Country Road Music / ASCAP
4. WILDWOOD FLOWER 3:54
[Joseph Philbrick Webster]
5. WAYFARING STRANGER 6:31
[Traditional]
6. MAMA TRIED 5:19
[Merle Haggard] Sony/ATV Acuff Rose Music / BMI
7. JOLENE 7:36
[Dolly Parton] Velvet Apple Music / BMI
8. FADED LOVE 6:33
[Bob Wills, John Lee Wills, Billy Jack Wills] Warner/Chappell Music Inc. /BMI
9. JUST A GIRL I USED TO KNOW 4:10
[Jack Clement] Universal Songs Of Polygram International Inc. / BMI
10. RED RIVER VALLEY 6:17
[Traditional]
11. YOU'RE STILL THE ONE 4:21
[Shania Twain / John Robert Lange] Loon Echo Inc. / BMI
12. I'M AN OLD COWHAND 0:31
[Johnny Mercer] Sony/ATV Music Publishing / ASCAP



COUNTRY FOR OLD MEN

By Phil Madeira

Going as far back as Electric Outlet's "Best Western" and "King For A Day" (1984),

John Scofield has long been flirting with the sounds of country music.

Hammer-ons and double-stops have marked his style as much as the outside and modal riffs one would expect from a jazz icon. A prophetic utterance that bespoke the coming of **Country For Old Men** was John's lovely duet of Buck Owens' "Cryin' Time" on *That's What I Say* (2005) with **Larry Goldings** at the Hammond organ, followed by a beautiful

rendition of Charlie Rich's "Behind Closed Doors" on *This Meets That* (2007) where he is joined by **Steve Swallow** and **Bill Stewart**. Another hint at a country outing was "Chap Dance" from *Past Present* (2015). And it came to pass... Behold **Country For Old Men**, a sampler of Country Music, old and new, from Texas, California, Tennessee, Kentucky, and... Ontario.

"I wanted to play these songs because I've always liked country music from afar.

"I knew that if we picked the right songs, we could turn them into jazz.

This has certainly been done before... Gary Burton with his Country Roads album... Bob Wills was the first example of doing what we're doing that I know of. I wanted to swing it like Bob Wills did, but in a modern jazz style. You can swing anything as long as it's simple."

The songs Mr. Scofield has chosen are as much about the voices that are associated with them as they are about their adaptability. As is his method,

The guitarist sat with the classic recordings of each song, and transcribed the nuances of each singer's performance.

His guitar tone and style are singularly his own, just as unique as each of the vocalists who originally sang these songs.

Gathered with him are a stellar ensemble of regulars: **Larry Goldings**, **Bill Stewart**, and **Steve Swallow**. The intuitive give and take between old friends is apparent from the first few measures of George Jones' "Mr. Fool". With **Swallow** and **Stewart** holding down a traditional 4/4 shuffle, and pianist **Goldings** conjuring the ghost of Floyd Cramer, the listener is taken straight to Nashville, circa 1959. **Scofield** reflects Jones' melismatic phrasing as the band swings comfortably, pushing no particular boundaries, settling in to something like country music. In keeping with his gracious manner, **John** welcomes the listener with familiarity, warmth, and sincerity. On the heels of this relatively sunny stroll down a gravel road, the weather changes. The band's

take on Hank Williams' "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry" reminds the jazz purist that **Scofield** has not "gone country", and jarringly so. Of the track, **John** notes, "It's the ultimate composition.

Instead of 'three chords and truth', it's two chords and the truth.

We took that and turned it into one chord and the truth", flying the classic melody over a whole-tone jam.

Of his blistering approach to this track, **John** says "We are trying to cause damage". Again, jazz is the goal, and while Hank may well roll in his grave, **Scofield** means no disrespect. To the contrary, the love of a forlorn lyric and a simple melody provides the players with a perfect launch pad to get as outside of the song as is possible. **Scofield** ends the song with a signature contortion, as if to respond with discomfort to one of the most devastating lyrics ever written-

"Did you ever see a robin weep
When leaves begin to die?
Like me, he's lost the will to live
I'm so lonesome I could cry"

All but two of these songs, each a hit in its own day, bear the burden of some of the saddest lyrics ever sung. Perhaps our human condition can only be faced when the hard truth is delivered with a comforting melody. Asked if the lyrics influence how he plays the song, **John** replies, *"It helps me to play the song if I know the lyrics, because otherwise I'm just playing some lick."*

Circling back to George Jones, "The Possum", who made a hit single of *"Bartender's Blues"*, Sco and Co find themselves swinging in high cotton. **Mr. Stewart** eschews the common side-stick approach to a country waltz, dancing on his cymbals, his touch as graceful as ever, while **Mr. Scofield** pays his respects to **Mr. Jones**. Meanwhile, **Mr. Swallow** embraces the role of country bassist, through the changes, minding his own business, and laying low in the most beautiful way. **Mr. Goldings'** Hammond organ is in familiar gospel territory, bringing the church into the bar. *"The way he plays on this record is just perfect because of his understanding of country music, and his incredible musicianship as a jazz stylist. Even more than*

all that is the way he intuits what everybody else plays."

Of *"Wildwood Flower"* **Mr. Scofield** says, *"This is one of the first songs you learn to play on guitar."* The song, made popular by The Carter Family, dates back to The Civil War, or as some Southerners have called it, *"The War of Northern Aggression"*. Speaking of aggression, the always astounding **Mr. Stewart** is tapped into a Sherman's March of sorts, with a take-no-prisoners approach that carries the song's strange form, leaving **Scofield**, **Goldings**, and **Swallow** free to celebrate its child-like melody and phrasing. *"I'm addicted to Bill's playing. When someone knows how to snap the music like that, it brings it to a whole new place."*

Always eager for a chance to "play the blues", **Mr. Scofield** does just that with *"Wayfaring Stranger"*, another song he learned as a young guitar student. Finding Bill Monroe's version of the song *"absolutely chilling"*, he says,

"There's this Blues Country Appalachian connection that's very mysterious."

It's **Mr. Scofield's** brilliant ability to embody the voice of connected genres that makes his playing so listenable and so engaging. Part of that brilliance is sheer virtuosity,



but an equal part is his delight in trespassing across the demarcations of genre.

John calls Merle Haggard's tragic *"Mama Tried"* *"one of the greatest lyrics ever written"*, and turns it into a jazz standard. His beautifully bent chordal working of the melody breaks into a soulful tone dance. His turnaround figure calls to mind Chet Atkins, one of George Harrison's greatest influences. It is a reminder that

in the days when *"country wasn't cool"* among baby boomers, the Beatles and the Byrds were bringing country sounds, songs, and stylings through the back door of pop music.

Dolly Parton not only sang *"Jolene"*, but wrote it from her own dramatic story in the hills of East Tennessee. Suggesting the Scottish connection to Appalachia, **John** says,

"I love the almost medieval sound of 'Jolene'."

I can hear the bagpipes out on the moor in about the year 1150. It transforms into modal jazz, reminiscent of Coltrane." The stunning

piano work from **Mr. Goldings**, stretching out with a possible sideways glance to McCoy Tyner, reveals the glorious scope of his ability to compose on the fly.

The Bob Wills classic "**Faded Love**" is another song crafted from a relatively ancient melody of the Nineteenth Century. Here again, **Scofield** and band swing it standard style. Shining on the Hammond organ, **Mr. Goldings** provides a lush backdrop for **John's** angular voice, until breaking into a soulful, joyous percussive solo.

Mr. Swallow's solo on "**Just a Girl I Used To Know**" is plain spoken yet sophisticated all at once, ironically embodying humility in its virtuosity. Of his friend and mentor of many years **Mr. Scofield** says,

"He's one of the most amazing people I've ever met, even outside of the music. But he really relishes the role of the bass player. He understands the architecture of music. Steve is a giant."

John connects **Steve's** playing to the great guitarist **Jim Hall**: "*I can hear Jim in Steve's playing; I don't know if anyone else can, but I can.*" The high regard and deep friendship is apparent in Sco's words and in the grooves. The song, written by "Cowboy" Jack Clement, has been recorded often, but two notable interpretations are those by George Jones and Ray Charles. Again, Sco leans into "The Possum" for his melodic phrasing. It's over far too soon.

"We stole the top of 'Red River Valley' from Johnny and The Hurricanes' 'Red River Rock'," John confesses. It doesn't take long for the garage band of compadres to drop the rock pretense and come out swinging to the song's changes, which happen to be the same as "*When The Saints Go Marching In*". This is a band operating at full tilt, moreover, these are friendships in full blossom.

In a record full of classics, one is curious about the inclusion of "**You're Still The One**", a Shania Twain hit from the late 1990's, an era when Country seemed to have lost its way. Sco opines, "*It's become a weird new genre of rock*", adding

"But I love this song. It's a perfect piece of pop". This reading is lovely and evocative of the positive lyric, a paean to lasting love. **Mr. Goldings'** drawbar play is inventive and playful, as Sco gently "*does damage*", bending the notes his way, and making jazz.

The band packs up, mission accomplished. Jazz made.

And then... the last few measures of the album find **John** alone, plucking out Johnny Mercer's "**I'm An Old Cowhand**" on a ukulele, much like the boy **Scofield** of decades ago figuring out how to play "**Wildwood Flower**" on a student guitar. Looks like he's figured it out.

Phil Madeira

Nashville composer, musician, producer whose songs have been recorded by Emmylou Harris, The Civil Wars, Alison Krauss, Buddy Miller, Ricky Skaggs, Garth Brooks, and many others.

JOHN SCOFIELD
(guitar, ukulele on 12)

LARRY GOLDINGS
(piano on 1, 5, 6, Hammond organ
on 2-4, 7-11)

STEVE SWALLOW
(bass)

BILL STEWART
(drums)



Produced by **John Scofield**

Recorded on April 3 and 4, 2016 at **Carriage House, CT**

Recording & Mixing Engineer: **Jay Newland**

Assistant Recording Engineer: **Mikhail Pivovarov**

Mastered by **Mark Wilder** at **Battery Studios, NY**

Art Direction: **Susan Scofield** and **Farida Bachir**

Cover & Liner Photography: **Nicholas Suttle**

Additional Liner Photography: **John Abbott**

Liner notes: **Phil Madeira**

Designed by **Françoise Bergmann**

A&R: **Brian Bacchus**

Executive Producer: **Farida Bachir**

John Scofield plays Ibanez Guitars and Ko'okau Ukelele

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