

Craig Finn - Clear Heart Full Eyes

In July 2011, I went to Austin Texas to make a record. The Hold Steady was on a four month break, and I wanted to try something a little different. Earlier in the year, I had written a bunch of songs that were outside of the norm for The Hold Steady, a little quieter and perhaps more narrative. I also wanted to gain some experience and insight into the process of making a record by working with new people.

It was July in Austin. It was hot. Really hot.

I had enlisted Mike McCarthy to produce the record. I really admire his work and his thoughts on songs and recording. Prior to arriving, I had sent Mike acoustic demos of 23 songs. They were very rough recordings, just acoustic guitar and vocals recorded live into my laptop. The songs had mostly been written in the first half of 2011, when I was experimenting with trying to write a new song every day.

When I arrived in Austin, we trimmed the list down to 14 songs and made simple but good sounding recordings of each of these, each live with just acoustic and vocal. Then we talked about possible instrumentation and arrangements. We listened to records. We conceptualized and talked about what we were hearing in our heads. We sketched out rough ideas

The next Monday, four musicians showed up: Josh Block, Jesse Ebaugh, Ricky Ray Jackson, and Billy White. Mike had chosen them, and he chose well. We said hellos and got to work. We moved quickly. I would show them the song and they would learn it, and quickly we were rolling tape. I sang the vocals live in the studio, something I hadn't really done before. I don't believe any song took more than three takes. These players brought a ton of enthusiasm and energy to the recording. It was really exciting to watch and hear them play together. We averaged a couple songs a day. By that Friday evening we had 14 songs tracked, including the vocals. We spent a few days listening and then did a few overdubs. We drove around in Austin, listening to rough mixes.

I left Austin three weeks after I arrived. It was still really hot.

When considering the songs as a whole, I realized that a lot of the songs deal with displacement, and people that are struggling while out of their element or comfort zone. A lot of the songs are about being alone. This is all pretty fertile ground for a musician that spends a lot of time on tour. It's also telling about the way we made this record, going to a friendly but fairly unfamiliar place to work with all new people.

I'm calling this record "Clear Heart Full Eyes". It's a juxtaposed reference to Friday Night Lights, a TV show that excited and moved me and also happened in Texas. Further, "Clear Heart" signifies honesty and transparency, and "Full Eyes" suggests experience. Thus, it's about being optimistic and open without succumbing to the weariness or doubt that comes with age and experience. To me, that is what it's all about.

I hope you enjoy the music. I am very proud of it.

Thank you.