

Ray Wylie Hubbard

A. *Enlightenment*, B. *Endarkenment* (Hint: There is no C)

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Distributed by Thirty Tigers/Red

It wasn't that long ago that Ray Wylie Hubbard allowed to an acquaintance that he wouldn't mind being a hybrid of Guy Clark and John Lee Hooker. Now, I'm no seer or mystic, but my instincts suggest that wish came true. And then some. *A. Enlightenment, B. Endarkenment (Hint: There is no C)* confirms it.

Ray Wylie Hubbard writes the kind of songs that make you want to ride along no matter where he's going, because you know it's gonna get strange somewhere along the way. The references to Muddy Waters being as deep as William Blake ("I really do believe it," Ray says) and lipstick pickups, resonator slides, the dreams of drunken poets, deceased call girls, opium, wasp's nests, clouds growing a tail, his ability to segue seamlessly from primal exclamations of carnal lust into songs about salvation without pausing for irony; and a craftsmanship that manages to rhyme mescaline and gasoline and Volkswagen with dragon while painting vivid portraits of characters both real and unreal, all evoke a sense of place that is larger than life but in no way made up.

Anyone who's followed Ray Wylie Hubbard over the long and winding path he has traveled already knows he possesses the kind of exceptional gift for observation that any songwriter yearns for. His sense of wonder is tempered by an accumulated wisdom and knowledge that comes with experience that has elevated him into the Wylie Lama of Texas Music, freely imparting songwriting verities to all kinds of aspiring musicians, which allows him to lay all his cards on the table and let the listener decide what it all means.

In case you're wondering where he's been since his last album *Snake Farm*, Ray's been writing, only he moved out of the song category to test his chops as a screenwriter, conceiving an outlaw western straight out of the Peckinpah school of blood and vengeance ("set in 1912 so we can have a Buick and a motorcycle and automatic weapons well as horses"). That his first screenplay actually got funded, filmed and slated for release is a testament to the caliber of his writing, the fact that Kris Kristofferson, Dwight Yoakam, and Lizzy Caplan appear among the ensemble of accomplished actors speaks volumes of the respect he has earned among his peers.

Besides the movies, a weekly Tuesday radio show and constant touring as well as producing other artists, his focus remains fixed on the song - constructing and performing stories set to music that resonate like no one else's. Not for nothing is he the dark literary, cat daddy of Americana songsters who was outlaw long before it was cool.

But don't take my word for it. Ray Wylie is far better-versed explaining how the sacred and the profane, the yin and the yang, the eternal and the now, the hippies and rednecks, the saved and the damned are all part of the same conversation.

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"I like to look at both enlightenment and endarkenment," he declares. "I feel comfortable observing each. Now I really feel like I gave up the right to judge anybody a longtime ago. With my behavior back in my twenties and thirties, I don't have that right. I really don't." That doesn't stop him from taking note of what's going on around him. "It's so turbulent right now," he says. "Like the idea of *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*. That's pretty strong and scary stuff, especially since I try to stay here in this Pollyanna world of hope and idealism I've created, but I'm able to get in that mind set and look at it and write it from the point of view of one who believes it."

"In '*Whoop and Hollar*' I can go in there and see the need for that kind of Salvation and understand why that need is there but then read about Chet Baker and heroin and think, yeah, man, it does make the deep things appear (which he captures in '*Opium*'). "I feel very fortunate, being able to see that, but not really go there."

"*Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*" and "*Whoop and Hollar*," two straight up gospel pieces that could be sung in a four square church are "straight, basic fundamental Pentecostal Bible," Ray explains with a sly grin. "Then all of a sudden I write about a naked woman in '*Drunken Poet's Dream*.'"

So what's up with the unusual title song? "It is my honoring Edgar Allen Poe's 'The Raven,'" he says, breaking into a conspiratorial smile. "That is my favorite poem of all time. It still is. I re-read it and as I was going to bed I thought, I should write something like this. I couldn't use a raven so I used a black sparrow. And it started. It was so weird, just laying in bed thinking, OK, here's Edgar Allen Poe, he's drinking, he's just lost the most precious thing in his life and all that. What would happen if I was in that frame of mind and suddenly this bird lands by my bed? What would it say? 'A. Enlightenment, B. Endarkenment (Hint: There Is No C).'"

He continues " Finally, a little bit later, came the line I'd heard my grandmother say when I was a kid, 'Heaven pours down rain and lightning bolts'— that line kind of sums it all up for me as far as everything, really... Heaven is this beautiful place and yet it pours down rain and lightning bolts on both the just and the unjust. So being mindful of this, I was reminded of one of my wife Judy's spiritualisms 'the days I can keep my gratitude higher than my expectations, those are good days.'

"When it's all said and done and the record is released whether I ride through the streets in a chariot with rose pedals falling upon me and thousands cheering my name or I find myself standing against a wall being asked if I want a cigarette and a blindfold, I am extremely grateful for each of these songs. And if the truth be known, after every song I write I always say, 'thanks' "

With a keen eye of observation and a wise man's knowledge, Ray Wylie Hubbard composes and performs songs that couldn't spring from anywhere else but out of his fertile rock and roll bluesy poet-in-the-blistering-heat southern noggin.

Hint: the answers are all within A. *Enlightenment*, B. *Endarkenment*.

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