

Corey Smith
While the Gettin' Is Good

The way Corey Smith sees it, he owes a debt to his fans. And it's one he is determined to repay with his 10th album, *While the Gettin' Is Good*. The project, released on Sugar Hill Records, marks the first time that the singer-songwriter, a wildly popular touring artist who has produced all of his past efforts, has turned over the reins to a bona fide country music producer in Keith Stegall. The result is Smith's most ambitious record yet, as well as a return on the investment made by the fans who have supported him since his first album in 2003.

"A lot of start-up acts are using fan-funded programs to finance their record. That's what my whole career has been: Kickstarter before Kickstarter. When my fans show up and buy a ticket and a t-shirt, they're investing in what I'm doing," says Corey. "It's my responsibility to invest it wisely and give them the best album I can. That's what led me to *While the Gettin' Is Good*."

It's also what led him to Stegall, who has produced such radio heavyweights as Alan Jackson and Zac Brown Band. It was the producer's track record, country-music experience and easy-going nature that convinced Corey that he was the man to refine his signature acoustic sound. "Keith knows how to make country records," he says, "but I wanted to make my kind of country record and he understood that immediately. He simply wanted to get us comfortable in a studio environment so we could do what we do onstage every night. For me, it was very liberating to be able to focus solely on performing and not be burdened by a lot of the decision-making and drilling down that goes into producing. It was the first time I was able to go into the studio and focus on what I do best. Keith was there to handle the rest."

A collection of 12 songs, *While the Gettin' Is Good* was written entirely by Corey. As such, it's a deeply personal album, one that explores themes of love, hometown pride and even personal discovery. A close relative inspired one of the record's highlights, "Bend," about learning how to adapt to what life throws at you.

"I wrote 'Bend' about a family member who was struggling with issues and I realized through writing this song that I was also talking about myself at the same time," says Corey, who scored a Top 20 album with *The Broken Record* in 2011. "So that song really hits home."

Still, the album stands as the Jefferson, Georgia, native's most upbeat. Especially on the nostalgic "Pride," a bouncing look back at Corey's high school days, from pep rallies to game day. His children attend the same school he did and together they often attend high-school football games, where the one-time social studies teacher sees friendly faces from his past.

"I remember sitting up in the stands going, 'Man, this is so cool.' I'm so glad we decided to stay here and let my kids be a part of this tradition," he says. "'Pride' summarizes who I am and even how my career has developed."

Likewise, album opener "Don't Mind" coasts along with a New Orleans vibe, full of fiddle and clarinet. A fun, happy song, it sets the tone for the record and pays tribute to the things we all gladly bear when we're in love. It also epitomizes Corey's current worldview.

"I have a 2006 truck that runs great, so I don't need a new truck. I don't have much time to get on a big lake, so I don't need a bass boat. I could have bought some really cool stuff with the money that I spent on this record, but I didn't, because I'm happy," he says. "It's a privilege to be able to do something like this, finance it myself and not have anyone telling me how my music needs to sound."

Nonetheless, Corey has hit on the perfect song for today's country radio: the approachable ballad "Taking the Edge Off." It's a road-weary travelogue, like Bob Seger's "Turn the Page" or Zac Brown Band's "Colder Weather," about the loneliness of touring and how people who travel combat such feelings.

"It captures a certain mood that we go through, especially in the winter. It's really a grind, it gets cold and lonely, and you're taking the edge off with a drink," he admits. "I remember being in Omaha and it was cold as hell. I worked on that tune throughout the day and night there and every time I hear it, I am transported back to that time."

Now, however, Corey is focused squarely on the future. As the new album title suggests, he's ready to make a determined grab at country's brass ring while the gettin' is good. And with Keith Stegall and Sugar Hill Records behind him, the gettin' has never been better. As the perseverant Corey is fond of saying, "There is more than one way to skin a cat in country music."

"I always dreamed of being able to make a record like this. I wanted to explore all the possibilities of a song and work with a producer who was among the best and who could teach me," he says. "What makes me different is that I write all these songs, and I write them from the heart. I've lived them."

Which is exactly why his fans are willing to go along for the ride and invest so much in an artist who speaks to their way of life. To Corey, *While the Gettin' Is Good* is his way of opening up his heart, along with his wallet, and paying them back.

"I'm going to take the goodwill they've given me and continually invest it into making better and better records that reflect who I am and my vision," he says. "They've entrusted me with a lot, so I'm trying to be the best steward I can be."

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