

1. Breathin' Smoke is a song from the perspective of a convict firefighter. These prisoners are usually non-violent offenders who are given the "reward" of getting out from behind bars to receive fire-fighting training. Most of these men are in for drunk-driving, crystal meth & theft, parole violations, etc. I took some liberty in the song by having the main character be in for beating up his women's lover--a violent offense that might preclude a prisoner from getting into this profession. In a perfect world, these guys receive their training, their pittance of a pay--somewhere in the vicinity of \$1 an hour, and then \$2 an hour when you're on a fire--then they move back into regular society as trained wildland firefighters. In actuality, many of them get out, and end up right back in--which is why California leads the U.S. in incarceration. In Susanville, it's easy to spot them--they get driven all over the County in the back of rigs that look like dual-axled ambulances, with narrow slotted windows for the prisoners to stare out of. Sadly, many of these men lose their lives each year in California's wildfires. I don't advocate crime or sympathize with all criminals, but I do think locking up addicts just expands upon a broken system.

2. The Skedaddles are a Mountain range just east of where I currently live in the Honey Lake Valley of California. They're a sculpted wind-blown span of volcanic mountains, and near sunset, cast shadows in their canyons that can't help but make them look oddly sensual--sort of like nude golden figures stretched seductively across the foreground playa of Honey Lake. Once I had the melody for this song stuck in my head, I worked out the chord progression looking out the window at the mountains near sunset-- it seemed to me after a while that the melody just sort of dawdled along slowly against the backing rhythm.

3. I wrote "Comin' Back" when I was broke & living back in Michigan after my first national tour in 2006. During the tour my bandmate Cisco Mirabent and I played a place called the Whitehorse Tavern in Flint, MI a few times. For those who don't know Flint, it has been vying for the #1 spot as murder capital in the US for a number of years--only competition is Detroit, and a city in New Jersey. Yet the Whitehorse is a throwback to a time when Flint, Detroit, & the Willow Run manufacturing plant not only helped win WWII, but also built the groundwork for another generation of GM employees to earn a living, and raise their families. Sadly, now Flint is a ghost of its former self, and that summer in '06 served as an early bellwether to the state of our current economy as I write this in 2008. Every worker that came into the Whitehorse had stories to tell of being bought out for retirement, getting laid off, and wondering what the hell they were going to do next. For these workers, the Whitehorse is one of the last holdouts in a sea of uncertainty.

4. Awake from the Dream is a throwback to a different point in my life--but one oddly enough I've repeated two or three times since it was written in 2003. This almost made FBG's last album in 2004 "Acoustic Beef", but was nixed because I was still trying to sing it in too high of a key (bluegrass tenor denial...) So I started from scratch in a lowered key, and pieced this one together from the original inspiration as well as some more recent love & loss. If this album finds it way into the hands of certain people, they'll most likely be able to piece together the time frame with my original inspiration--factor in 2003--to present, and you'll find at least two other co-inspirators. Some say "time heals all," but I think those people haven't reminisced enough with an accordion and dobro.

5. This old Hoagy Carmichael tune is one of two on the album that features my sister, Melissa Risk on upright Piano. We grew up playing music, and I can safely say she was probably the most direct influence on my early musical tastes, as she was schooled by a great enthusiast of jazz & swing, Sally Case, her organ & piano teacher. My Grandma (Eva) Rogala also greatly influenced both of us with her love of Glenn Miller & swing jazz, and also by singing Andrews Sisters tunes to us when we were too young to even walk. To this day, the earliest tune I can remember is my Grandma singing "Three Little Fishies" to me while rocking me to sleep. We first attempted this tune in October of 2007 when I had just bought a '64 Gibson L-48 from Elderly in Lansing, MI. She started playing the melody, and I improvised on the arch-top-- it sounded so good that when I flew back to Michigan in January of 2008, I recorded her playing the rhythm on her upright piano, and I stacked on the other tracks when I got back to Susanville.

6. I wrote this song after falling madly in love in Portland, Oregon in the summer of 2007. The song tells the story in a talking blues style, and doesn't need too much explanation. Everything in the song is true, and the band that makes an appearance toward the end is not a band--so much as a group of great musicians that gets together once a month in the Alberta District of Portland to jam. I was in the right place at the right time, and I send my love & appreciation to Chuck, the Sawtooth Mountain Boys, and Pabst Blue Ribbon--the de-facto national sponsor of bluegrass jams everywhere. To all the teetotalers, you'll never know what yer missin'.

7. The Calico Mountains are a stretch of peaks nestled near the Black Rock Desert & Pyramid Lake in northwest Nevada--just across the border from near where I live in California. When I first moved to Susanville, I took a drive in the desert to clear my mind and drink in the new surroundings. Since living out west, I've learned that the desert is a great place to bleach the mind and to look for inspiration in emptiness. When I got back home, I had dreamt up a murder ballad along the lines of "Girl in the blue velvet band," "Long Black Veil" & "El Paso." That span of desert is like non-other in the US, and you can still see the ruts of wagon wheels baked into the clay from countless people that travelled west in the 1800's. The song tries to capture that era, and pay tribute to the unique British-American tradition of murder-ballads.

8. This song is comprised of three dobro parts, a bass, harmonica, and vocals. It is the first song I wrote on my shop-refurbished-Gonstead-resophonic-square-neck spider cone-dobrolic pleasure box (thanks Sven, you Norwegian son of a back-cracker), and is about sex. Not with Sven of course, which is why the refrain mentions a "sweet lovin' mama." Nor is it a song about sex with mothers, or sex between anything other than consenting heterosexual adults. It is simply a song about sex. Those that seek to write songs on dobros may learn quickly that the instrument lends itself toward songs about trains, feelin' blue, western rondo's, and of course, sex. Or perhaps the dobro is a mirror to the soul, in which case, I'm in the wrong profession. Seriously though--thanks Sven--the dobro will always be my favorite instrument regardless of my skill in playing it.

9. "Know you at all" is an oldie for me as well. It was written in 2003, after a night of sharing a bed with a pretty girl in Copper Harbor, Michigan. Nothing happened (honestly), and I woke up next to the girl not knowing a thing about her. At that point in my life, I found it much easier to love someone you didn't know, due in large part to the fact that the last girl I had "known" (both in the biblical sense and the literal) had turned out to have very deep-seated and well-hidden issues. I was also reading a lot of Kurt Vonnegut at the time, and came across a short story he wrote that shared my sentiments and was comprised of two characters in a similar situation. The last verse in the song is a direct quote from that short story, and was a poem/song that summed up the situation better than I could ever hope to. Cross bleak upper peninsula winters with beer, heartbreak, Hank Williams, Kurt Vonnegut, and the cute brunette bartender from Harley's at the Ramada Inn of Marquette--and this is the musical equivalent of what you get.

10. Fireball Mail has writing credit given to Roy Acuff, though I know it best from "Uncle" Josh Graeves version with the Foggy Mountain Boys (Flatt & Scruggs). His dobro is my standard for bluegrass, and this is my Frankenstein attempt at tipping my hat to that band, as well as Frostbitten Grass. I even copped a banjo riff from Taylor Klipp of "carp" fame toward the end. Much love to all northerners with a penchant for scotch-irish hillbilly music, and keep the dream alive. Just stay the hell out of the world loppet in Manitowish Waters if you want to make it to 50 without dialysis. But if you must go, bring vitamin c, a bar of soap, cranberry juice, and something crotchless to wear in red.

11. Breakin' Even was inspired from a quote in the "Last Waltz," which was the swan-song album/film of The Band in 1978. If you're the curious type, watch the movie, and pay attention to the interviews between the music, and you might catch what sparked the idea for this song.

12. Sentimental Journey is the second song with my sister Melissa Risk on piano, and was recorded with a vintage microphone that belonged to my Grandfather in his HAM radio days. The mic is an aluminum diaphragm bullet-style, and was his main microphone throughout his post WWII days as a radio & television repairman. I think he would have gotten a kick out of my interest in his old microphones, and I wish he was still alive to hear this tune recorded on one of his old workhorses. The only effect I added was the sound of a record needle, to give the song the sense of its proper medium for the period I was trying to capture.

I'd like to thank my family & friends, Cheryl (who is more beautiful than any bartender from Harley's in Marquette...), Frostbitten Grass, and Dan Flesher & Brian Lucas who taught me the basics in digital recording.

Wilson's Hotel was recorded on a Roland VS2400 & VS840 GX
by Philville Mobile Studios and Philville West from 1/08--10/08
All tracks were recorded, mixed and Mastered by Matt Sayles, Philville Studios.

All songs written or arranged by Matt Sayles, excluding Tracks 5 (Hoagy Carmichael), Track10 (Bud Green, Les Brown and Ben Homer), & Track 12 (Traditional).

All instruments & Vocals by Matt Sayles, excluding Tracks 5 & Track 10 with Melissa Risk on Upright Piano.

Instruments on Wilson's Hotel: Taylor 415 Jumbo, Gibson L-48, Gibson ES-347 with a Marshall JTM 30 Tube Amp, Norma Banjo, Santa Rosa A-style Mandolin, Hohner Button Accordion, late model Gonstead Square Neck Dobro, Takamine Dreadnaught, Yamaha Keyboard, Mountain Dulcimer, Honher & Lee Oskar Harps.