



# ROOTSY PRESENTERAR

## **Daryl Dodd - Stronger Proof**

Dualtone      Distribution: Border Music

Stronger Proof, Deryl Dodd's fittingly titled new album (Dualtone Records, Oct. 5) is a deeply satisfying collection of stone country and twangy rock, but it represents something more as well. This spirited and dead-earnest record is the triumphant culmination of a long and arduous journey by a writer/artist who refused to give up after his career was derailed and his dreams were dashed just as he was about to realize them. But Dodd has no regrets about the harrowing ordeal he went through, because it has brought him to a better place than he could have imagined before his troubles started.

Dodd seemed to have everything going his way in the 1990s. After relocating to Nashville in 1991, the Texas-reared writer/singer/guitarist worked his way up through the Music City ranks, beginning his ascent when he was hired as lead guitarist and harmony singer for Martina McBride, which put him on stadium stages during McBride's tour with Garth Brooks (later, he'd open for Brooks himself). After working with the likes of John Hiatt, Kevin Welch and Rodney Foster while continuing to write songs, Dodd inked a publishing deal with BMG Music, leading to numerous covers, notably including cuts on two of Tim McGraw's multi-platinum albums. In 1994, he joined Tracy Lawrence's band on rhythm guitar and harmony vocals, moonlighting on recording sessions with McBride, Lawrence and Foster, among others. A year later, he landed a recording contract with Columbia Records. His 1996 debut album, *One Ride in Vegas*, spawned the hit single, "That's How I Got to Memphis" (written by legendary storyteller Tom T. Hall) and brought critical acclaim, national tours and a growing number of newfound fans. Dodd's self-titled 1998 follow-up put him on the fast track. As a single from the album climbed the charts, he was invited to open tours for Tim McGraw and Brooks and Dunn that together would take him through the summer of 1999, enabling him to expose his music to tens of thousands of concertgoers.

But earlier in the year, he'd started feeling worn down and out of sorts – a situation he initially attributed to "burning the candle at both ends." He began to feel progressively worse, finding himself unable to play guitar during one gig, then getting out of bed a couple of weeks later to discover he couldn't raise his arms to brush his teeth or comb his hair. Driving to an in-studio performance at Nashville's WSM, Dodd started seeing double and made a detour to the nearest hospital, where he was diagnosed with an ear infection. But he kept working, having learned as a star high school runner back to play with pain. As he tried, with decreasing effectiveness, to maintain his rigorous schedule, his condition continued to deteriorate, and doctors feared an aneurism or a brain tumor. After blood tests turned up nothing, Dodd was given a spinal tap, which finally revealed his problem: an acute case of viral encephalitis, a debilitating illness that attacks the central nervous system. Dodd's doctors believed he'd recover, provided he went through with the prescribed treatment, which required 24-hour bed rest. So there would be no touring for this emerging star, no way for him to do the things necessary to take the single all the way home. Deryl found it deeply ironic that the song was titled "A Bitter End." What followed was six months of frustrating immobility, as Dodd was confined to his bed, unable even to take solace in his primary form of self-therapy, playing the guitar. One day during his months of inaction, he happened upon a TV documentary about fellow Texan Lance Armstrong, who'd fought back from a life-threatening bout with cancer to win the Tour de France. Armstrong's miraculous journey from the abyss to athletic triumph inspired Dodd, strengthening his resolve. After what seemed to him to be a small eternity, Dodd finally started feeling better, but at first, he says, for every step forward he took two steps back. His first attempt to pick up the guitar – only to find he couldn't make his left hand form the chords on the fretboard because his hand shook uncontrollably – freaked him out so much that he didn't touch the instrument for another several months. In all, Dodd spent another year and a half in rehabilitation, slowly regaining the skills that had been second nature to him before illness had robbed him of his motor skills.

When he could play and sing well enough to perform, he started showing up for songwriter nights at Nashville clubs. Then he reunited with guitarist Steve Rhian, drummer Eric Nelson and bass player Steve Carmack from his old band, the Homesick Cowboys – three guys who'd believed in him to such a degree that they'd waited for him to recover, and they started playing together again. Another fellow musician who believed in Dodd was Tim McGraw, who generously offered Deryl the opening slot on the Soul 2 Soul shed tour, a co-headlining jaunt with his wife, fellow superstar Faith Hill.

**Fortsättning nästa sida**

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When Sony invited him to record his long-delayed third album, Dodd threw label executives for a loop by requesting a move from the flagship Columbia label to Sony's newly formed Lucky Dog imprint, which was dedicated to Texas music and the Texas market. Sony argued that the move was akin to a demotion, but Dodd insisted, his resolve strengthened by a hard-earned understanding of who he was and what he needed. So it was that 2002's Pearl Snaps appeared on Lucky Dog, its first two singles, "Pearl Snaps" and "Honky Tonk Champagne," both hitting #1 on the Texas music chart. By Nashville standards this was a modest accomplishment, but, says Dodd, "It was as big deal to me." He followed this musical renewal with a personal one, leaving Nashville behind and returning home to Texas.

A split from Sony was inevitable, and after it occurred, Dodd dived headlong into the thriving hotbed of Texas music. "It was like starting over again," he recalls. "It was very hard and humbling but also very good, because I was the one calling the shots. We went anyplace that would have us, playing for food, motel rooms and gas money. But I was happy to have that problem, because after what I'd been through, it didn't seem like a problem at all – it was just life. And it made me see that I really did want it, and why I do it – it's about the music. That continued my healing process, because I was happy, and when you're happy it helps you to heal."

His first big break occurred when he was invited to record an album for the regionally renowned Live at Billy Bob's series, which has featured such artists as Haggard, Gary Stewart, David Alan Coe and Pat Green. Deryl Dodd Live at Billy Bobs, released in August 2003, contained the self-penned single "Things Are Fixin' to Get Real Good," which recounted his years in Nashville and return to Texas; it remained in the Top Three of the Texas Music charts for over 20 weeks. "It's all about stayin' positive," Dodd explains, "and it hit really big down here, opening a lot of doors in places like Austin and San Antone, where the Texas music scene has really established a niche."

Bolstered by the gratifying reaction his music was getting on his vast home turf, Dodd vowed to make the most musically and emotionally authentic record of his career. "For better or worse, I've lived my life on the albums I've recorded," he says. "I knew it was time to make a new studio album. I had no idea how we were gonna put it out or what we were gonna do – so this past March me and my band [including new bass player Kerry Wilson] just went in and did it." After hearing the record a few months later, Dualtone's Scott Robinson immediately offered Dodd a deal.

Stronger Proof contains ten originals plus a rendition of Kenny Rogers' "Love or Something Like It." Among the high points are the Buck Owens-style shuffle "Never Again," the homespun ode to a long-term loving relationship "She Does the Best She Can," the personal declaration of independence "Let Me Be" – which rocks with the sweaty authority of vintage Lynyrd Skynyrd – and the rueful title song, a classic beersoaked ballad that turns on sharply drawn double entendres.

I need some stronger proof to wash away my doubt  
If I'm gonna face the truth, then go ahead and pour it out  
It may be hard to swallow but I'm getting' to the bottom of this  
Before the night is through  
Come on and give it to me straight now,  
I need some stronger proof.  
The album closes with "The Crowd," a celebration of the synergistic connection Dodd has made with his fans. "They're the reason I'm still making music," he says of them, "and the reason I won't give up."

Five years after the beginning of his ordeal, Dodd has come out the other end, his music flowing and his spirit intact. "I've stayed true to the music – never say die," he says. "I think that's what makes it so sweet and rewarding, more now than ever."

It took years of pain and struggle but, Deryl Dodd is right where he wants to be, doing exactly what he wants to do – and who of us could ask for more than that?