

SYKAMORE

Pinto

TRACK-BY-TRACK

TITLE: Pinto

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PINTO

This was the first song I wrote that really felt like I was in a new territory. I was in “new record land.” You’re trying to write for a new project, and it’s hard to shake the sound of the old stuff. You want growth. It was just me home, back myself working on this song, and the idea of the Ford Pinto always fascinated me because it was a disaster of a car. It had a reputation for exploding and being combustible and easily flammable. I couldn’t help but draw this connection between that car and a lot of young relationships. Young love is hot and heavy and high and low, and it doesn’t take anything for it to explode. It was such a cool connection in a way. I wanted to write about a young couple with a shitty old car as a mirror for their relationship. I was in love with a lot of sound from the 70s and 80s, and it felt appropriate this was an old car. I drew a lot of inspiration from 80s pop melodies, and it ended up being such a great catalyst to the rest of this record. Suddenly it felt like I knew what I wanted to write about and how I wanted it to sound. It became the perfect bookend to write the rest of this record.

JUST 4 JULY

This is one of the first songs I wrote when I got to Nashville. It was written before Pinto, but we cut it in a different way. This is a co-write between me, Trannie Anderson, and Jimi Bell. It’s special to me because the three of us were just three young writers, and none of us had a hit or anything. We were all under 27 at the time, and there was no seniority in the room. There was no “this person is *this* writer” that we were defaulting to. It was purely collaborative, and no jaded, we must write a hit mentality. It was just what are we all digging right now so let’s try to let that come out in what we’re writing.

We were searching for titles. That was a title born out of us trying to describe a summer romance or trying to keep it a summer romance, but it’s more than that. It is when you realize it’s not just for July. The backwards vocal we turned into a synth part. It’s one of the more creative, colorful sounds on the record. It’s straight up four on the floor, and its honest. It’s also probably the oldest song I’ve written. I think I’d lived in Nashville for 2 months, and it stood the test of time.

DANCING IN THE DARK

I wrote this one with a guy named Ben Johnson. It was on Halloween of 2018. I was into this one kind of chord progression, and I couldn’t get it out of my head. I wrote the lyrics with a lot of melody laid down first. We had a lot of the melody before we had any lyrics, and that almost led how we wanted

the song to be. It's very carefree. Let's not think about what is going to happen tomorrow. Let's not dampen the mood by worrying about the future. Let's be together in this moment. The image of dancing in the dark came quickly, supported by the carefree-ness of the song. Who cares what happens? We can't see anything. We're leaving it up to fate. It's a cool song you can roll your windows down and listen to on the highway. It's very melodic. Something I love in the songwriting process is thinking of cool melodies that will stick with you forever.

CHEAP THRILLS

This is the first song I ever wrote with Ben Stennis and Jaren Boyer. These two awesome guys are like two brothers to me. They have a real connection, and I came into the writing room. I'd never met either of them before, but we almost instantly clicked and started joking around. There was this lighthearted energy in the room. I've been able to relate to it -- being broke but being able to take stock of things you have and the relationships you have. Basically, getting rich on cheap thrills. I wanted that to be the payoff line. It's a straight-ahead country song.

OUT OF LUCK

This is a co-write with Bobby Campbell. We were listening to an Adele song called "All I Ask" from her latest record. One of the lyrics jumped out -- "it matters how this ends because what if I never love again." That struck a chord with me. If it's true that you're only ever made for one person, what happens if you were made for that person, and it doesn't work out? Then, you're out of luck. It's a sad image to think about. When you're younger, that's something you might believe. We also didn't have anything piano-led at that point, and Bobby is such a talented keys player, so we wanted something straight-down-the-middle tragic.

RECORD HIGH

For this one, we just talked about a musician's experience with the consumption of music. My whole life, I've used music as an escape a means of catharsis or therapy. I've never really written a song thanking music for being that support in my life. The idea is that you can get "high" off a record. It's a drug in its own way. It has a way of reassuring you or taking you away when you need it. It's always cool to write a song like that with two other people who are obviously so invested with music. It was a session of us reminiscing about what these songs meant to us.

CALIFORNIA KING

I wrote with Justin Morgan and Justin Weaver. Justin and I have written together a lot in the last year, and we hang out a lot. Somebody said something about a California King bed, and he was like we should write a song called "California King." A day or two later, I started messing around on guitar by myself, and I was like well, what if a California king is a male dude who's so into himself and thinks everybody knows him? What if we create this character? He thinks he's so Hollywood but he's a small-town jock that people don't know very well. We wanted to keep it like an almost homage to California rock in a way. It has a Laurel Canyon kind of feel to it, and I like to say it's a modern day "You're So Vain." I got to play acoustic on this one song, and that doesn't happen very much. It's kind of its own little special feature on the record. It's definitely a favorite.

WHERE TO FIND ME

I wrote this with Jason Massey and Austin Taylor Smith. At the time, I was just really having an appreciation for people in my life -- both romantically and platonically. They're the people who know

me well enough to know how to deal with my neuroses. If I'm getting caught up in overthinking, they know how to pull me out of it and help me and support me in those moments. "You know where to find me" felt like such a perfect way to neatly phrase it you. You feel kind of lost in those moments. You're tail spinning, wishing you could get a grip on your emotions. People have to go into that rabbit hole and pull you out. I feel lucky there are people in my life patient enough deal with that.

GO EASY ON ME

I wrote this one with Bobby Campbell, who worked with me closely on this record. He's my vocal producer and programmer. And Liz Rose, who is a huge writing hero of mine. She wrote a ton of Taylor Swift hits. She always wrote "Girl Crush" with Hillary Lindsey and Lori McKenna. She's on my bucket list of people to write with, and we got her in the room one rainy afternoon.

"Go Easy" was a title I brought in. I wanted a song that wasn't afraid to be a little bit vulnerable and show that you haven't moved on yet, but the person you used to be with has, and it's still bugging you. It's asking the person to consider their feelings. I know you don't owe me anything, but don't rub it in. We wanted to word it in a way that wasn't spiteful and wanted to show a little mercy. You know you're at a position of disadvantage, and you're showing your cards. I wanted that vulnerability to be on the record. It doesn't feel that common, especially with female artists. There's this overarching unspoken rule that women can't let their guard down, but that's not realistic. I let my guard down all the time. I knew Liz would be so great to write that with because she wrote so much of the Taylor stuff and Taylor is so good at being vulnerable. I also wanted to pay homage to Fleetwood Mac and have simply-produced songs. It's a cool moment to be laidback and have it more harmony-based, acoustic-based and let everything be really lyric focused.

LOCAL SINGLES

This was one of the later additions to the record. We'd already had two rounds of cuts. Once you get to that stage in the record, you start to look at stuff you desire to be there that isn't yet.... an energy. I had this title in my phone forever. I thought it was kind of hilarious because there are those sketchy ads for phone lines you can call and meet hot local singles. I thought it was just kind of comical. I wanted to write a song about people who are still single, and you can refer to them as the local singles. Almost treating them like how Garth [Brooks] talks about the "American Honky Tonk Bar Association" ...like they're some sort of unionized people. I was with Derek Ruttan and Chris Stevens., and I was like you guys are going to think this is dumb, but I've always wanted to write a song about local singles. I wanted it to be in a way where it felt like our community really owes a lot to us, we keep the nightlife going and keep things interesting. The duality between married friends and single friends showing itself was there, and then it was for the people who are single and ok with it.

STAY BROKE

This was inspired by "Take My Breath Away" or any of those 80s high school slow dance songs. A classic image of the kids with their arms all the way outstretched. I wanted a song like that, and I really wanted a cheesy John Cusack movie kind of song. There's a little part in the turn between the 1st chorus and second verse that comes back around. In my mind it's deliciously cheesy and just encapsulates what I wanted. A full-fledged "I'm in love with you and if it's wrong I want to be wrong." It was inspired by "Father Figure" by George Michael and the song "Take My Breath Away." Sloppy wet reverb... I wrote it with Jason Massey.

WALLFLOWER

I wrote Wallflower with Nathan Chapman, which was very exciting for me because I am a big fan of his work, particularly his production on Taylor Swift's albums. We went through a lot of ideas that day and really dug deep to find what turned out to be a pretty incredible song. We wanted to depict a person who felt like they'd been used up and damaged by a lot of relationships in the past and were clinging to the hope that maybe there was still one person out there who could help them find their way back from such a dark place. The idea of a dancefloor needing a wallflower to come out of hiding and make sense out of such a lonely space was a powerful image to us. I'm happy we kept the production simple, as the lyrics tend to stand alone and hold a lot of power, even in such a precious soundscape. It's one of my favorite songs on the record.