

DAVID LUNING

John Prine forced David Luning to drop out of college. Not at gunpoint or anything—the two had never even met—but the effect of hearing the songwriting legend's music for the first time had an equally compelling effect on Luning, who was studying film scoring at the Berklee College of Music in Boston at the time. Now an accomplished artist in his own right, Luning is preparing to release his most dynamic and gripping collection to date, 'Restless,' and he can trace it all back to one fateful night that changed everything.

"A couple of friends invited me over to share some songs at their apartment, and that was the first time I'd ever really listened to Americana music or folk or country or whatever you want to call it," remembers Luning. "They showed me John Prine, and it just resonated with me so much. I was like, 'Oh my god, this is what I have to do with my life.' I just figured it out in that moment."

Luning dropped out of school almost immediately, moved back to his native California, and devoted himself to songwriting and performing. He worked his way up through open mics to large festival performances, piecing together a band to flesh out his songs along the way and hitting the road to tour with a fierce determination. His self-released debut album, 'Just Drop On By,' garnered acclaim from both critics and fellow musicians alike, with country megastar Keith Urban hailing Luning's "staunch originality." Songs from the album landed numerous film and TV placements, most recently on NBC's 'Grimm,' and Luning's reputation for exhilarating live performances earned him dates with luminaries like Jackie Greene, Dave and Phil Alvin, and Elvin Bishop, along with a slew of festival performances up and down the West Coast.

If 'Just Drop On by' announced the arrival of a promising new talent, 'Restless' delivers on that potential and then some. Recorded under the guidance of engineer/producer Karl Derfler (Tom Waits, Dave Matthews) and with Luning's longtime live bandmates—Ben Dubin (bass & harmonica), Linden Reed (drums), and Dave Sampson (guitar & mandolin)—the album marks a major step forward, both sonically and emotionally.

"With the first record, I produced and engineered everything myself," explains Luning. "I'd never worked with an outside producer before, so it was nerve-racking going into the studio with Karl for the first time, but it was just a perfect fit. It was like he knew what I wanted in my music before I even did, and he could push my performances where they needed to go and really take my music to another level."

Luning and his band set up shop at the stunning Panoramic Studios in Stinson, California, crafting a darker, grittier vibe for the music and exploring a wider palette than ever before. While many of Luning's songs are inspired by the lives and stories of the men and women he's grown up with in California or met on the road, the lyrics are all filtered through his own unique perspective and reflect his remarkable personal journey. Perhaps no track fits that bill more directly than "Driftin,'" an infectious road warrior's anthem that finds Luning singing, "I wanna keep on drifting like a rambling man."

"I had so much fun on tour going from place to place and playing to new people all the time and I got into the rhythm of it all, so when it ended and we came home I wasn't

ready to stop," he explains. "We pulled into Ben's house to unload our gear and I said, 'Ben, we're packing up and we're gonna go somewhere tomorrow right? We're gonna keep on going right?'"

Much of the album is uptempo and exuberant—"Almost Sounds Like Laughing" is a foot-stomping folk tune with the energy of a runaway train—but Luning shows off his remarkable depth and range on some of the record's more restrained tracks, like the slow-burning "Brother In Chains" and delicate "Gonna Forget About You," which finds him pulling his vocals back to an intimate near-whisper that conveys a world of heartache and regret. "In Hell I Am" started life as an acoustic blues on a resonator guitar before morphing into a fiery, electric rocker, while "Bet It All On Black" takes on a harder, Southern edge, with Luning repeating the mantra, "Ain't no use in holding back."

"It's essentially about a person who's kind of carefree," he says, "and they know that something might not be the best thing to do, but they're going all in with it anyway. They're just going for it, regardless of the outcome and any repercussions they might face."

If that sounds familiar, perhaps like the attitude of a man who might risk everything to drop out of school and move across the country to pursue a dream, it's no coincidence. With songs this good, it's a safe bet that a restless soul like David Luning is going to keep on traveling for a long time to come.