

Getting Rhinestoned by Jason Ringenberg

After writing and recording *Stand Tall* in 2017-18, I planned to take some time away from music creation to focus on other areas of my life. *Stand Tall* was such a landmark record for me. It truly changed my life. In early 2020 I had some songs left over that didn't quite fit *Stand Tall*. These weren't enough to make another record, nor did I have the fire to embark on another recording project.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, songs began to pour out. I felt increasingly excited and driven to record again. I put a guitar and recorder by my bed. I was ready to jump on any idea like a Revolutionary War Minuteman waiting to be called by Paul Revere.

The songs rolled out rather heavy. I reckon that was to be expected, with a world grappling with a pandemic and the United States embroiled in racial strife.

Two songs stood out during the writing process. I literally heard *I Rode With Crazy Horse* in a dream. I woke up and immediately hummed the words and melody into my phone recorder. I am enormously proud of that song. The story is loosely based on an old Lakota/Oglala legend that one of Crazy Horse's cousins rode and fought beside him through every battle, even to his death at Fort Robinson. History does not record his name.

Another high point was writing *The Freedom Rides Weren't Free*. I had been kicking around the idea to write a song about the Freedom Riders. Those folks were young Black and white activists who challenged the segregated bus systems in the South during the early 1960s. They were beaten, jailed, insulted, attacked with fire bombs, and in some cases expelled from college for their efforts. One morning the whole song came to me. The hook intentionally mirrors the American phrase "freedom isn't free." I believe the Civil Rights Movement was the Second American Revolution, and all who participated in it were true American heroes. The

song was written right before the major racial unrest during the summer of 2020.

Taken all together, this is a record populated by old souls and ghosts -- both people and places. The main song cycle of *Rhinestoned* examines my relationship with a changing Nashville and its role in country music.

Nashville without Rhinestones was written in 2017 during my Artist-in-Residence at Sequoia/Kings Canyon National Park. While I knew it wouldn't fit on *Stand Tall*, I figured it was a perfect anchor for another album more based in country music. Another song written at Sequoia is *Stoned on Rhinestones*, obviously related in concept to *Nashville without Rhinestones*.

Cover choices for *Rhinestoned* played a major role in the material selection. I wanted to do covers representing different phases of American Country Music. I chose the Carter Family's *The Storms are on the Ocean*, Hank Sr's *You Win Again*, the Ozark Mountain Daredevils' *Time Warp*, and a traditional Easter hymn from the 1800s, *Christ the Lord Is Risen Today*. I learned that song while hearing my daughters sing it in our church choir.

When it came time to record *Rhinestoned*, I decided to call up my old compadre George Bradfute. George is an incredibly gifted multi-instrumentalist and producer. He has produced most of my Jason and Farmer Jason records, but we hadn't done a full project together since 2012. His studio is in the basement of 1950s country superstar Jim Reeves. It is a place filled with Nashville history. I love recording at George's. Some of my best musical memories were hatched right there.

Given COVID-19 restrictions, recording was a rather lonesome process. George played most of the instruments. Steve Ebe (Carl Perkins, the Chicks, Marty Stuart) handled drums. Fats Kaplin (Jack White, the Judds, Hayes Carll, Tom Russell) worked his usual magic on steel guitar and fiddle. My daughters Addie and Camille pitched in on harmony vocals and piano. There were never more than four people in the studio. Most of the time it was just me and George hammering away in that storied basement.

The creation of *Rhinestoned* felt like a big gift, an unexpected blessing. That feeling continued as we finished the record and did a crowdfunding program to launch it. Old and new fans contributed their hard-earned dollars and good wishes to make it all happen. In the end, what started as a very quiet solo process became a team effort, with memories that I will always treasure.

Jason Ringenberg