

## Notes on the Making of the Album “This Chain”

I always try to pay tribute to mentors and idols in my concerts and records, so the inclusion of songs by Utah Phillips, Si Kahn and Townes Van Zandt was already decided when I began recording this new album in March 2023. I only had a few new songs; I hadn't been writing much in the year or so since my album “A World Like This” came out in October 2021. The pandemic had ground on, the wheels of justice turned ever so slowly for the leaders and plotters of the failed coup, and I began to regain lost work at nursing and veterans' homes, as the worst of the pandemic began to fade and live music opportunities resumed. I cautiously resumed touring, but got Covid in July 2022, four days after getting off the plane in Seattle, and blew a week of gigs in Washington and Oregon!

But I toured Australia for the first time in three years and came home in November 2022 without contracting Covid, even after a week of gigs in California on the way home! Things began looking up, and songs began to come once again, even though the wheels were a little rusty.

I struggle with questions of why I keep writing songs and making CDs, and this one was not easy to make. But bringing back the core musicians from my recent albums—Michael Wellen and Doug Robinson in the rhythm section, Rich DePaolo handling so many guitar parts and harmonies, and Molly MacMillan on piano and keys—was so much fun. They make it look so easy and in Will Russell's beautiful old church at Wilburland, the songs sound so warm.

We began with three songs, then slowly, a few more came and there were eight... and eventually, the eleven songs that make up this album. “Down in the Dumps Tonight” and “If I Could Turn Back Time” were written and recorded in the last weeks of the project, as we had begun mixing the album, and three other songs ended up on the cutting room floor. This album, these 11 songs, feel whole, complete, kind of like a chain, if you'll pardon the pun. It might be the last you hear from me for awhile, at least from the studio. If all goes well, I intend to hit the road a lot more over the next couple of years, with these songs and plenty in reserve.

George Mann  
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**1. Terrace in the Sky:** I used to live in New York City, my apartment roof looked down at the George Washington Bridge and I could see the whole west side of Manhattan, all the way down to the twin towers of the World Trade Center. A premonition, perhaps, of chickens coming home to roost, but also a song of self-reflection, as I had left the

working world for the life of a folksinger when I wrote this in 1999. Singing and playing this song reminds me of those days.

**2. The Legendary Lot 13:** I wrote this about and for one of my oldest friends and have always wanted to hear it rock with a band. A simple and familiar story of lost love set in a deserted campground long ago. Tim Ball's sweet fiddle was just the ticket, and Tim and Rich DePaolo on slide guitar bring it home.

**3. I'll Be Here in the Morning:** This is one of my favorite Townes Van Zandt songs and features some lovely piano by Molly MacMillan and harmonies by Mary Bentley and SingTrece! I didn't know much of Townes's work before his death, but discovering his songs had a lot to do with the development of my songwriting style and sound over the last 25 years.

**4. If I Could Turn Back Time:** I get to the end of an album, usually four months or so after recording commences, and there's always one more song waiting, wanting to be written. On my recent CDs, it either becomes the first or last song. But when I wrote this on August 17, just a month or so before the planned release of the CD, I knew it had to be somewhere higher than last in the playlist. Will Russell captured the mood of this song perfectly in his recording.

**5. Tell Me About Woody Again:** I imagined the storyline of this song, complete with its setting and tragedies, weeks before I attempted to write it. I knew I would be spending a few nights at Beluthahatchee, the artist's retreat in Florida where Woody had spent several months and written many songs toward the end of his rambling in the early 1950s. I waited until I got there, and this song came out of that magical place.

**6. Aragon Mill:** This is the first song of Si Kahn's I ever heard, on the "Carry it On!" CD that featured Si, Pete Seeger and Jane Sapp. Si's words cut right to the heart of the matter, in this case, loss and despair. The mill has shut down and it ain't coming back. Featuring Molly MacMillan on piano and SingTrece! on vocals.

**7. Down in the Dumps Tonight:** I feel this song as a breath of fresh air every time I hear it. It seems like this song was so easy to write. I was thinking about a friend who lost a child at the start of the pandemic and still struggles with the grief, but I kept hearing hope in the melody as it was being written.

**8. This Chain:** I wrote this in a teardrop trailer I was quarantining in upon returning to California from my 2022 Australia tour. Trying to stay safe and protect my friends, I kept to myself and tested for three days.... and I was due to sing in Nevada City that weekend. Thoughts of Utah Phillips and his influence, his wisdom, came back to me, as well as thoughts of Tiff, the veteran who looked a little like Utah and loved his music. This story is mostly true, though I might have exaggerated some of the details in the writing process.

**9. The Goodnight-Loving Trail:** This great song by Utah Phillips hits home as I enter my seventh decade on the planet. I sit down on the job more often... but this song is always fun to sing and a reminder that someday, we'll all be all used up.

**10. Just as Dangerous Alone:** Covid took so many people, but few I knew as well as the hellraiser from Pittsburgh, Anne Feeney. This song was also written at Beluthatchee, the home of the author Stetson Kennedy, where Anne had once also visited.

**11. The Wreck on the Highway:** The novelty of a song like this, first recorded in the 1930s and made famous by Roy Acuff, among your typical folk/pop fanfare of the times, made me want to record a new version. The refrain "I didn't see nobody pray" seems apropos in these times.