

TEXAS RENEGADE

Some would call it fate. Others might chalk it up to coincidence. Either way, the story of Texas Renegade's genesis seems more than random—and their new album, “Bad Dreams and Other Things,” proves the union was meant to be.

Consider this. Twins Tyson and Eli Carver, who were born in the Texas Hill Country town of Wimberley, moved to Durango, Colo., at age 14. That same year, Andy Bertelsen moved with his family to Wimberley. When the twins graduated high school, the lure of their hometown tugged them back—when a friend introduced them to their future bandmates, their course was set. The Carvers and Bertelsen formed Texas Renegade in 2002; drummer Luke Ayres came on in 2007, and the newest addition Hunter St. Marie (perfect name for a guitar player) joined in 2010. Except for Ayres and St. Marie, it's the only band any of them have been in (unless you count Bertelsen's stint playing snare in his elementary-school band).

In Texas Renegade—the moniker their first guitarist bestowed on them at a high-school party—Bertelsen handles lead vocals, songwriting and guitar. Mandolinist/guitarist/backing vocalist Tyson and bassist Eli picked up their instruments at 20 and 19, respectively, after ditching fiddle lessons at age 13. St. Marie taught himself to play his father's guitar at age 12 (upside down no less – his father was left handed), and only Ayres (drums) has played his instrument—or any instrument—consistently since early childhood.

But they're hardly a batch of late-bloomers. Bertelsen's voice, which could earn him honorary Braun brother status in Reckless Kelly, carries the nuances of a practiced, yet intuitive singer. With mandolin and harp as frequent lead instruments and Tyson's harmonies, Texas Renegade creates a soulful, rootsy country-rock blend that places them squarely in the Americana realm; which is only fitting for a band whose formative influences include the Wallflowers, John Hiatt, Counting Crows, Emmylou Harris, the essential Texans and the classic rock their parents played.

“Bad Dreams and Other Things,” their third album, cements their status among talents like The Band of Heathens, Jack Ingram, the aforementioned Reckless Kelly and similar artists who share deep Lone Star roots and hybrid sensibilities. And like many of those artists, they honed their skills under the tutelage of Kent Finlay at Cheatham Street Warehouse in San Marcos, where the Carvers, Bertelsen and St. Marie earned degrees at Texas State University. (Ayres' degree is from Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene.)

Recorded mainly at Top Hat Recording in South Austin and produced by Austin drummer Stephen Belans (James McMurtry, Alejandro Escovedo), who helmed their last release, “After Everything,” it features 12 Bertelsen-penned cuts and guest spots by keyboardist Michael Ramos (BoDeans, John Mellencamp) Dobro player Cindy Cashdollar (Van Morrison, Ryan Adams) and guitarists Gabe Rhodes, Brad Rice and John Sanchez.

Filled with smart lyrics and sweet harmonies, “Bad Dreams” stylistically encompasses everything from the harp- and guitar-driven mid-tempo rock of the first single, “Crazy,” to the soulful country-

rock of “Coming Home,” the mournful “Comanche Moon” and the heartfelt “St. Christopher,” an acoustic ballad about death that Bertelsen sings with such an ache in his voice, he leaves no doubt about its authenticity.

“Every one of my songs has some sort of story behind it,” he notes. “That is to say, every single song stems from some actual event that has occurred. However, the extent can vary considerably from song to song.” Rarely, he admits, does he write a song that’s entirely based in reality. Which is not to say his lyrics aren’t personal—or meaningful.

At least some of his inspiration has to come from being so involved in the lives of his bandmates. Bertelsen and the Carvers are also roommates, and all five swear they’re having the time of their lives in the band.

“We like to think we have more fun than any other band on the scene right now,” says Tyson. “People always approach us and say they really enjoy the music, but they also enjoy the fact that we are having fun onstage. We are the true definition of a band. Everyone has equal say and we are a family of guys who really care about one another and love to play music together.”

Adds Eli, “We have a lot of fun together on the road and have a very laid-back vibe when we’re together. Pretty much anything goes.”

“Anything” includes Camp, a fluffy canine described by Tyson as “half Lhasa-apsó, a quarter Chihuahua and a quarter wolf,” who has traveled everywhere with the band for two years. “Some people think he has magical powers, but we just think he is the coolest dog in the world,” says Tyson. Adds Eli, “People try to steal him everywhere we go. There is a very good chance he is more famous than we are.”

Well, maybe for now. But once people get a chance to hear “Bad Dreams and Other Things,” Camp’s popularity may have to take a back seat to the band’s. He’ll still get to ride in his primo leather captain’s chair, though—unless they graduate to a bus, in which case, he’ll probably get two seats—and his own bunk.

Because, like the rest of these guys, he’s a Texas Renegade!

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