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**HALFWAY TO HAZARD**

Chad Warrix and David Tolliver were raised with about 50 miles and another county between them in the southeastern end of Kentucky. Their parents are hard-working blue-collar middle-class, they both have two older sisters, they grew up in small and smaller towns, did well in school, played sports, went fishing, and jumped on dirt bikes and ATV's every chance they got. When they were old enough to drive a car, each crossed their county line to get to Hazard, Queen City of the Mountains and, says Tolliver, "the social hub for people who grew up where we did." Warrix concurs. "There wasn't anything much in Jackson where I'm from, and even less in Hindman, where David's from. But Hazard had a movie theater and several places to eat."

Halfway to Hazard are the opening words of "Cold," the first song David Tolliver and Chad Warrix wrote together several years after each had put Kentucky in their rear view mirror and ended up in Music City. A pain-and-booze soaked ache for love gone cold, the geographical reference to the midway point from opposite directions to the Queen City of the Mountains is one they both know well, a literal and figurative mile marker on the paths both took to become Halfway to Hazard.

A little bit country and a little bit rock and roll describes the duo, and their self-titled debut album, a richly-colored portrait of their lives set to words and music that is both deeply personal and utterly familiar to people with small town roots and great big dreams. Their self titled album is the realization of the yearning that yanked David Tolliver out of Knott County and Chad Warrix out of Breathitt County and set them up together in Nashville, Tennessee, a pairing as smooth as Kentucky bourbon, with an edge as rough as a dirt road.

"I don't ever remember not singing," Tolliver says. "My mother got me started, maybe I did something in church and she noticed I could sing. But from the time I was little, I was on stage, in a little tuxedo, singing to tracks, making appearances wherever she could get me booked. She was my manager and my booking agent, my dad drove the Winnebago and my gear was a mic and two speakers. When I was about nine, we put together a cassette we called *At This Moment* to sell after shows. I loved it, who wouldn't? I got to sing, got lots of attention from girls."

"I lived two counties away and I knew who he was," Warrix says. "The first time I ever saw him sing we were both about ten, he probably came to my school."

When Tolliver started 9<sup>th</sup> grade, he decided to play for his high school basketball team, and music took a backseat for a while to hoops. “In Kentucky, basketball was everything,” he says.

At just about the time Tolliver picked up the roundball, Warrix’s attention turned to music. “My mother’s side of the family was extremely musical,” he explains. “She was one of eight kids, and everybody sang and played. Music was what they all did. When I was in 8<sup>th</sup> grade I picked up her guitar and started playing. Had taken piano lessons a few years earlier, but I got obsessed with the guitar, and would just lock myself in my room and play for ten hours at a time. I joined the school band, a pop music kind of thing. This is where I really started to grow as a musician. Like most teenage guitar players, I did my share of garage bands. I loved to sing, but thought that was too hard, playing and singing at the same time, so I just focused on playing mostly.”

After graduating high school in ‘93, Tolliver went to Hazard Community College for a year, then transferred to University of Kentucky in Lexington. His plans for a medical degree got sidelined by UK’s active social and fraternity scene. When he wasn’t in class or partying, he worked part time in a restaurant, Max & Erma’s.

Warrix meanwhile, was drawn to the music business, which he correctly surmised he could study at Nashville’s Belmont University. “It changed my whole life,” he admits. “I enrolled in 1993, and it was such a cool time to be there. Nashville was really hitting on all cylinders then. Brad Paisley was just another student there and so many people had talent. We were all finding our roles, what we wanted to do and be. It was an incredible environment. I knew I wanted to be in the music business, but while I was there, I found myself doing music. You just couldn’t help it. I always had my guitar and was singing. I’d sing anywhere on campus or off, basically to anybody that would listen.” “This is when I found my voice.”

Back at Max & Erma’s in Lexington, Tolliver had an epiphany one night at the service stand. “I just knew I wanted to make music again. I called my mom right then and there and told her, and with her blessing, I moved to Nashville. I was gonna come in like a lion, but I found out pretty quick once I got here that I wasn’t half as good as I thought I was.”

That was 1998, which is also the year Warrix graduated from Belmont. He and his band, Sodium, had a house gig at Courtyard Café, a suburban restaurant and bar whose alumni include The Kinley’s, the Warren Brothers and Phil Vassar.

While Sodium was pure rock and roll, Tolliver leaned country, and immersed himself in the songwriter scene that permeates Music City. Both rolled along under the radar until Sodium snagged manager, Christopher Washko. Warrix suggested Washko check out his buddy, a recommendation that led to him coming on board with Washko securing a publishing deal with EMI for Tolliver. Around the same time, Sodium got a recording deal, though it did not prove as fruitful. “It was really tough as a rock band to overcome being from Nashville, and the perception that everyone is country. We finally signed with Universal out of New York, we had a single on the radio, but we might as well have been in the witness protection program. We cut about four songs before we got dropped. It was pretty discouraging.”

Tolliver had put together a band he called Dtox, a nickname Warrix had given him. Dtox was playing “country with a little edge to it” at the usual live music joints around town, and Tolliver knew things hadn’t quite worked out for Sodium. “I called Chad and asked him to come play with us one night.” It was perfect timing for Warrix, who says he was trying to figure out what to do and where to go from where he was, which was essentially halfway to nowhere.

“We went to see Musik Mafia one night and were standing in the parking lot of Mercy Lounge,” Tolliver remembers. “I had a writing appointment the next day with Kris Bergsnes and invited Chad to come along. We got together and the three of us wrote ‘Cold.’” It was at that session that the phrase Halfway to Hazard was first put to paper (“...Halfway to Hazard, with the rain comin’ down).”

It was also when the idea of a duo first took seed. “Kris kept telling us how good we sounded together, so I came on with Dtox,” says Warrix. “Our manager got us a gig playing at 3<sup>rd</sup> & Lindsley every Tuesday night at 6, so we’d get people on their way home from work. At first it was like five people, then ten, then 20, until it built up to standing room only. It became a real social thing, and lots of music business people came. The more we played together, the more into the country side of it I got. I ended up getting back to my roots and one thing I always knew but became so apparent to me again was that good music is good music no matter what the genre.”

Labels began to check them out, among them Luke Lewis, who heads Universal Music Group Nashville and Mercury Nashville. He suggested producer Byron Gallimore check them out. Gallimore brought along manager Scott Siman, whose client Tim McGraw also saw the duo’s potential. Tolliver and Warrix signed a deal with Mercury. And with Gallimore and McGraw signed on to co-produce thru their joint venture, StyleSonic Records, Tolliver and Warrix began recording their first album.

“We basically had the record written,” says Tolliver. “We started recording in the spring of 2006. Tim was there every day, he had great ideas, was very involved in the creative process, but he and Byron let us make the record we wanted to make.” Warrix agrees, “We had a blast in the studio. It was all about teamwork.”

That philosophy defines the entire project. Instrumentally, Warrix plays acoustic and electric guitar, the mandolin and the ganjo. Tolliver—who did not start playing until he moved to Nashville—is on acoustic guitar. They trade lead vocals depending on the song: Warrix handles “Die By My Own Hand,” “Taking Me On” and “Burn It Down,” while Tolliver takes lead on “The Devil And The Cross,” “Cold,” and “Got Back Up.” “Daisy,” a poignant story song which introduced the duo to radio this spring, is richly sung by both, with Tolliver taking the verses and Warrix leading on the chorus. The same goes for “Countrified” and “I’m Tired,” a song that gives a weary-to-the-bone emotion to an all-too universal rehash of a relationship that has taken a terrible toll.

All but two of the 11 songs on the album were written by Tolliver and Warrix, and each of those ten draws from personal experience. “Every song we write is personal to some degree,” Tolliver admits. “That might could get you in trouble, but when you’ve got writing partners, you can always blame it on somebody else.”

Which can come in handy sometimes---both are married with young children. They laugh and point the finger, for instance, at co-writer Arlis Arbritton for the bitter “I’m Tired,” noting that since he’s not in the room they’ll blame him for the idea. “Writing songs and making music is all about creative release,” says Warrix. “My wife sometimes says, ‘Why can’t you just tell me what you feel?’ Well, I feel like we are, continues Warrix. If you listen to “Taking Me On,” we’re those music guys. We’re tough to be around, we’re not easy. That song is kind of the ‘thank you.’ It’s easier to sing it than say it.”

Rivers Rutherford teams with the two for the regretful lament “Die By My Own Hand.” The two songs they did not write are “The Devil And The Cross” (James Dowell), a redemptive tale of preacher’s son’s wild ways and his prodigal-like journey home, and the twanged-out Skynryd-flavored southern rocker “Countrified,” co-written by Jeffery Steele, one of Music Row’s most successful and respected contemporary writers. Scoring a Steele song is a coup for a first album by a novice act, but even more impressive for the two was the writer’s reaction to their interpretation. “We really changed it up from the way it was demoed,” Warrix admits. “We were sorta nervous to play it for him, but after he heard it he said it was the first time anyone had ever played one of his songs for him and he liked it better than the way he had done it. That was a huge compliment.”

Halfway to Hazard is no-holds barred, nothing held back, pedal to metal, all the way. It is music that is honest, open, gritty and rough around the edges by musicians who make no excuses for who they are or apologies for where they’re from. They’re Halfway to Hazard, and they’re taking the long way home.

**For more information on Halfway To Hazard, contact  
Amber Williams at 615.524.7516 or [amber.williams@umusic.com](mailto:amber.williams@umusic.com) or  
Visit [www.halfwaytohazard.com](http://www.halfwaytohazard.com) or [www.umgnashville.com](http://www.umgnashville.com)**