

THE DIRT DRIFTERS

Biography

They met in Nashville, five musicians from four states with backgrounds from across the spectrum and a hunger to make music that matters. Their growing suspicion that they had something special was confirmed over and over as they took to the road. Fans in one club after another reacted as they always do in the presence of the real thing, and The Dirt Drifters began attracting a rabid and loyal following.

By name and position they are lead singer/guitarist Matt Fleener, vocalist/guitarist Ryan Fleener, guitarist/vocalist Jeff Middleton, bassist Jeremy Little and drummer Nick Diamond. They bring resumes that embrace country, rock, funk and R&B to bear on a gritty, lyrical roadhouse country that offers something substantial to the heart, the mind and the dance floor. One of the best summations of their appeal came from the last member to join the group. Bass player Jeremy Little saw the others live and, he says, "I was floored. I knew this was where I belonged musically. It was fun. It was entertaining. I thought Matt was one of the most charismatic people I'd ever seen onstage. It was everything about music I wanted to be a part of."

Road-tested, club-polished, they signed to Warner Bros. Records. Their challenge, they knew, was to capture the night-after-night magic they produce on the road in the studio. Working with producer Justin Niebank, the phenomenal musical talent known for his work with Vince Gill, Brad Paisley and Keith Urban, among others, they have done just that. *This Is My Blood* wears like a badge of honor the dust and grit of the long road the band has traveled. From beginning to end, it weaves compelling stories from life's good and bad—stories all the more riveting for their truth.

"Everything on the record is our life," says Matt. "Not only are we playing all the music on the album and writing the songs, we've lived them."

For a band whose sound was forged on a thousand club stages, playing on the record was a prerequisite.

“Too many times,” says Nick, “the playing on a record is perfect but you don’t get the raw energy that goes with a live sound. We’re a band, and we knew we could bring that energy to every note.”

“Justin told us, ‘If you guys aren’t playing on the record, I don’t want to be a part of it,’” adds Matt. “Everybody knows how good he is at his job, but that speaks everything about him as a person and why he was so right for this project.”

“This wouldn’t be the record it is without Justin and the way he brought out the best in us,” says Jeff.

The result is that place where real life and real music meet head-on. *This Is My Blood* has Stones-level rocking on songs like “Something Better,” blue-collar poetry in “Name On My Shirt,” story-telling magic in “Married Men And Motel Rooms,” and lump-in-the-throat honesty in “This Is My Blood.” To top it off, there’s the pure adrenaline rush of “I’ll Shut Up Now,” which features a guest appearance from none other than musical icon Willie Nelson.

This is a record that is loud and raucous when it wants to be, soft and reflective when it needs to be, and filled with intelligence and insight throughout. The only real problem the quintet faced was choosing the final song line-up.

“We had nineteen songs,” says Ryan, “and had to narrow it down to eleven. Jeff made index cards and we hashed it out. It was a tough process, but we’re all really happy with the way it turned out.”

The result is top-shelf honky-tonk music, bringing vintage sounds and sensibilities up to date in a country landscape hungry to reconnect with its roots.

“We’re a country band,” says Jeff, “and I think that comes from the songwriting. We’ve all lived out the lyrics of these songs, struggling from paycheck to paycheck. I think that’s one of the main reasons audiences connect with this music.”

That connection, forged in their earliest days as a band, grew out of their backgrounds.

Brothers Matt and Ryan Fleener grew up in Oklahoma, the sons of a musically inclined mechanic and a schoolteacher. They moved to Nashville to pursue music themselves and after five years of dues-paying and wall-hitting as songwriters and as a duo, they met up with the musicians who would form The Dirt Drifters.

Jersey rocker Jeff Middleton headed to Nashville after being inspired by Garth Brooks to become a songwriter and musician, turning his back on the security of the business world to pursue a dream. Louisiana-born Nick Diamond was brought up in his preacher father's church playing multiple instruments. He settled on drums and, ironically enough, met the core of his future honky-tonk band mates at church. Jeremy Little cut his teeth in rock bands in Chattanooga, then moved to Nashville after graduation. His sound brought the finishing touches to the Drifters' musical brotherhood.

The band's blue-collar ethos remains firmly in place.

"We're a working band," says Nick. "On the day of our digital album release, we were in the studio, laying down demos. It was a full-circle moment. That's where we're most at home—in the studio or on a stage."

Fortunately for fans, the sound they've forged through the years has made it intact to the CD.

"When people push play," says Matt, "they get The Dirt Drifters, guys who've traveled down the highway together. It's our stories, our lives."

"At the end of the day" adds Jeff, "we wanted to make a record we were proud of. And we're really proud of this record."