

Youâ€™ve heard of suffering for your art? Woody Guthrie witnessed suffering during the Great Depression. Songs he wrote about those experiences became tracks on his most successful album, â€œDust Bowl Ballads.â€• Released in 1940, â€œDust Bowl Balladsâ€• is regarded as historic not just because it was Guthrieâ€™s initial album, but because it is regarded as one of the first concept albums â€” an album where the songs spring from a single theme. Guthrie, born in Okemah in 1912, was a teen when the Great Depression began. He was in his 20s when a human-spurred ecological disaster, the Dust Bowl, â€œpiled onâ€• and caused Oklahomans to abandon ravaged farms and head to California in search of better lives. â€œOkiesâ€• found that life in migrant camps was the opposite of happily ever after. Guthrie, who was enmeshed among those California-bound Okies, wove together actual and fictional vignettes when crafting songs that appeared on â€œDust Bowl Ballads.â€• Now, 81 years later, itâ€™s time for a fresh dusting. With the endorsement of the Guthrie estate, a cross-genre collective of modern artists have re-imagined songs from â€œDust Bowl Balladsâ€• for a new album (â€œHome In This World: Woody Guthrieâ€™s Dust Bowl Balladsâ€•) set to be released Sept. 10 by Elektra Records. The album can be pre-ordered [here](#). Among music artists contributing are Grammy winners Lee Ann Womack and John Paul White, grunge poet laureate Mark Lanegan, rising country and Americana star Lillie Mae, the husband and wife folk duo Shovels & Rope, Canadian cowboy Colter Wall and the bluegrass group Watkins Family Hour. Batting clean-up with the last track on the album is, fittingly, an Oklahoman. â€œI felt really honored to be asked to provide a song,â€• Purcellâ€™s Parker Millsap said. â€œWoody Guthrie is a hero for a bunch of different reasons.â€• Millsap was familiar with Guthrieâ€™s â€œDust Bowl Balladsâ€• album before enlisting for the collaborative album. He bought a copy of â€œDust Bowl Balladsâ€• while in high school. â€œI was loosely aware of Woody Guthrie just being from Oklahoma and learning â€œThis Land is Your Landâ€™ in school,â€• he said. â€œBut when I got into high school and a little bit later, I started going to the Blue

Door in Oklahoma City pretty regularly and they would have yearly Woody Guthrie tributes.

After seeing one of those, I really realized the magnitude of who Woody Guthrie

was, so I bought some of those Smithsonian recordings and “Dust Bowl Ballads” as

well. In fact, I used to cover “Dust Pneumonia Blues” for quite a few

years when I first started touring. With song titles like that one and “I

Ain’t Got No Home In This World Anymore,” you can safely assume the “Dust

Bowl Ballads” album is heavy stuff. “Being from Oklahoma, my grandparents and great-grandparents were

in Oklahoma during the Dust Bowl and I heard some stories from them,” Millsap

said. “It’s part of Oklahoma’s identity and culture, so I think it just really

hit home for me. Even the first time hearing those songs, I got it.”

Can you imagine what was in Guthrie’s mind when he was writing those songs?

“I think he was just looking at the world around him and trying to

process it,” Millsap said. “There was a lot of chaos and despair during the

Great Depression. He traveled with people. He traveled and saw people working hard and

saw the injustice happening in the world. The way he knew to fight it

was with song.” The curator of the new album, Grammy-winning music supervisor and producer

Randall Poster, said “Dust Bowl Ballads” is as relevant as ever. “While profiteers exploit

our natural resources, there is a growing sensitivity to the harsh farming practices that

put our well-being at risk and a concerted movement toward regenerative agriculture that can

reinvigorate the soil and push back on climate change,” Poster said in a news

release. “I asked some of my favorite artists to help render these songs, hoping

that this collection will reinforce the enduring power and prescience of Guthrie’s music and

reveal the power of song. I tried to think of these songs as the

soundtrack to a movie, building a narrative, a story where the world wakes up

to the climate threats and unite to combat it successfully. It’s a great movie.”

Millsap said Poster contacted his manager and asked him to take part in the

recording of the new album. Response? “Absolutely.” Millsap, asked if he got to pick the song he covered, said he was sent a list of songs. Other artists had apparently called dibs on all but about two or three selections by the time the list got to him. He chose “Vigilante Man,” which he said would have been a high contender regardless because it’s such a great song. “I love that song,” he said. “Really, that song is scary to me. It’s about bullies. Specifically, that one is about train bullies is what they called them. They kicked people off the train who were trying to get a ride to the next town and often beat the heck out of them while they were at it.”

An allmusic.com review of “Vigilante Man” said the song was written about hired thugs who smashed Dust Bowl labor movements and those who forcibly chased away folks arriving in California. A verse mentions the death of Preacher Casy from the book/film “The Grapes of Wrath,” which debuted in movie theaters shortly before “Dust Bowl Ballads” was released. You’ll hear different names “ Breonna Taylor, George Floyd ” in Millsap’s version of “Vigilante Man.” “I wrote a couple of new verses for it because that’s what Woody would do,” he said. “He was always rewriting stuff to fit the modern moment.” Among artists who previously covered “Vigilante Man:” Ry Cooder, Nazareth, Bruce Springsteen, Aerosmith’s Joe Perry, Ray LaMontagne and the Australian rock band Feedtime. Millsap said, like a good folk song, “Vigilante Man” lends itself to being sung many different ways and anybody can make it their own. Millsap said “Vigilante Man” asks big questions (Why does a vigilante man carry that sawed off shotgun in his hand? Would he shoot his brother and sister down?) and the questions came from a small-town Oklahoman named Woody Guthrie. “That’s one reason he’s such an inspiration for me,” Millsap said. “He showed you can be from the middle of nowhere and make a difference and use your voice to lift people up.” Millsap was asked if he hopes his contribution to the new album would make Guthrie proud. “I hope so,”

he said. "I think that he would like that these songs are still living.

I haven't been able to hear any of the other artists' covers yet, but

I'm assuming that some of them also updated some lyrics to make it fit

the present moment. I think that's what he was all about was using songs

(in that way). I love that quote of his. ... It's a folk singer's

job to comfort disturbed people and to disturb comfortable people. I love it and

I think that's a great mantra for any artist to kind of keep in

the back of their mind when they are working, you know? Let's uplift the

people that need uplifting and keep those who need to be kept in check,

in check. • "Home In This World" is being released in partnership with Kiss The

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