

## = Phases and Stages =

Phases and Stages is a 1974 album by Willie Nelson , which followed the moderate success of his first Atlantic Records release , Shotgun Willie . Nelson met producer Jerry Wexler at a party where Nelson sang songs from an unreleased album he had recorded in 1972 . The single " Phases and Stages " was originally recorded the same year . Nelson re @-@ recorded the album at Muscle Shoals Sound Studios in two days and Wexler produced it .

The album narrates the story of a divorce . Side one tells the woman 's story and side two the man 's . Released on March 1974 , the album peaked at number 34 on Billboard 's Top Country Albums and the single " Bloody Mary Morning " reached number 17 on Billboard 's Country singles . Despite the chart positions attained by the album , and its singles , Atlantic Records closed their Country music division in September 1974 .

## = = Background and Recording = =

In 1972 , Nelson signed a recording contract with the Country Music division of Atlantic Records and Jerry Wexler , who gave him greater creative control than his previous contract . Nelson met Wexler at a party in Harlan Howard 's house , where he sang the songs he wrote for an album . Nelson recorded his first album for Atlantic Records , Shotgun Willie , in 1972 . Shotgun Willie , produced by Arif Mardin and Wexler , marked a change of style in Nelson 's music . Nelson stated that recording the album had " ... cleared his throat " .

The single " Phases and Stages " was first released in 1972 . Nelson had previously recorded the album Phases and Stages in Nashville , Tennessee . In 1973 , Nelson re @-@ recorded the songs in two days at Muscle Shoals Sound Studio for Atlantic Records with musicians Fred Carter , Jr . , David Hood , Barry Beckett , Jimmy Johnson , Pete Carr and Roger Hawkins . Atlantic Records ' executives criticized Wexler 's decision to record in Muscle Shoals instead of Nashville , Tennessee . Wexler later stated : " They said Muscle Shoals was too R & B for Willie . I said Willie was too R & B for Nashville . "

## = = Concept = =

The album became one of the first concept albums in country music . The theme of the songs centers in divorce , narrated from both viewpoints . The one of the woman is narrated on side one ; while the man 's on side two . The recurrent song " Phases and Stages " is repeated throughout the album , introducing several other songs .

The album begins with " Phases and Stages / Washing the Dishes " , with the woman tired of caring for her unfaithful husband , emphasizing her domestic chores . This is followed by " Phases and Stages / Walkin ' " where , after consideration , she leaves her husband at night , saying " Walkin ' is better than runnin ' away , and crawlin ' ain 't no good at all " . In " Pretend I Never Happened " , she advises him to forget her and continue with his life . In " Sister 's Coming Home / Down at the Corner Beer Joint " , her younger sister describes the woman moving back home and sleeping late . Eventually , she overcomes her grief and begins a social life at the corner beer joint , representing her liberation with the lyrics " ( she 's ) dancin ' on a hardwood floor , her jeans fit a little bit tighter than they did before " . The final song of side one depicts the woman falling in love again but reluctant to admit it because she fears that her story will be repeated .

The second side of the album begins with " Bloody Mary Morning " , with the male narrator ordering drinks on a flight from Los Angeles , California to Houston , Texas after his wife unexpectedly left him , with " the smog and haze reminding me of how I feel " . In " Phases and Stages / No Love Around " he recalls dragging in at sunrise after another night of carousing : " I come home last Saturday morning , I come home and found you gone . " In the sad " I Still Can 't Believe You 're Gone " , the man realizes the vast impact on his life of her leaving . " It 's Not Supposed to Be That Way " reflects his inability to accept the situation and his grief , but still in a self @-@ centered way . In " Heaven and Hell " , the man expresses his ambivalence about living without his wife , with the

lyric : " Sometimes it 's heaven , sometimes it 's hell , and sometimes I don 't even know . " The final track is " Phases and Stages / Pick Up the Tempo / Phases and Stages " , in which the man reveals his inability to change his character , and accepts his nature and its consequences .

= = Release and reception = =

The album was released in March 1974 . It peaked at number 34 in Billboard 's Top Country Albums and number 187 in Billboard 's Top LPs & Tapes . The single " Bloody Mary Morning " peaked at number 17 , and its follow @-@ up , " I Still Can 't Believe You 're Gone " , peaked at number 51 in Billboard 's Country singles . Despite the moderate success of Nelson 's singles , Atlantic Records ' executives were unhappy with Nelson 's style , and closed their Country Music division in September 1974 . Wexler protested to Ahmet and Nesuhi Ertegun , arguing that Atlantic had Willie Nelson . The Ertegun brothers replied " Willie Who ? Go ahead and close it . " Following the division 's closure , Wexler resigned . The album sold 400 @,@ 000 copies , and Nelson was released from his Atlantic contract , prompting Columbia Records ' executives to offer Nelson a contract giving him complete creative control of his works . Wexler later described Phases and Stages and Shotgun Willie as " ... generally viewed as having set Willie on a new path ... it was the coalescing of his audience , where the rednecks and the hippies came together . And to this day , that 's Willie 's audience . "

Rolling Stone wrote : " ( Nelson ) seems to understand an unloved woman better than any dozen articles from Ms. ( magazine ) . The fact that Nelson can fashion a believable scenario with such sparseness is a tribute to his ability to turn experience into good music . Phases And Stages , his best work to date , now seems to call out for the filmmaker who can turn good music into good cinema " . Texas Monthly described the album as : " ... a compassionate account of dissolution of marriage , which gave extremely sensitive male and female viewpoints " .

Billboard wrote : " Nelson 's unfettered voice honestly portrays his songs of love and lament " . Critic Robert Christgau wrote : " Nelson 's combination of soft @-@ spoken off @-@ key and battered honky @-@ tonk matches the bare , responsive country music Jerry Wexler has gotten out of the Muscle Shoals regulars . " Newsweek wrote : " In Phases and stages ( Nelson ) looked far beyond country music 's traditional shore of self pity toward a clear vision of real life country divorce " .

Stephen Thomas Erlewine wrote for Allmusic : " ... the deceptively relaxed arrangements , including the occasional strings , not only highlight Nelson 's clever eclecticism , but they also heighten the emotional impact of the album . [ ... ] As a result , this is not just one of Willie Nelson 's best records , but one of the great concept albums overall " .

= = LP track listing = =

All songs written by Willie Nelson .

= = Personnel = =

The musicians and recording personnel included :

= = Chart positions = =

= = = Album = = =

= = = Singles = = =