

## **Tessy Lou Williams**

Tessy Lou Williams was born to sing. Her parents, Kenny and Claudia Williams started the band Montana Rose and nurtured a love of making and performing music into a family business of sorts for their three children.

“I continue to play music because there's literally nothing else in the entire world I'd rather do,” Tessy Lou says. “It's tough, it's trying, it has its loneliness and isolation from the rest of the world, but it's also incredible. This world is the only one I know and the only way I know how to exist.”

As Tessy Lou prepares for the release of her first solo album, after a lifetime of songwriting and a decade of performing professionally, it's important to note the journey to get here—the rural roots, the paralyzing case of stage fright she once had, the move across the country to find her own place in the world and make her own music. The heartbreak that inspired this batch of 10 songs. It all culminates in her solo debut, a self-titled effort that introduces her sound to a new group of listeners: deeply rooted in traditional influences, with her spin on western culture. These are the kind of songs you'd want to be playing on a dancehall stage when you walk in or emanating from the jukebox when the band isn't there. It's the perfect soundtrack for a two-step or a waltz just the same—or simply sitting back and enjoying well-crafted country music.

“These songs are country as hell, they're each unique, personal and embody heartbreak that we can all relate to,” she says.

Written primarily in Nashville, and recorded at Station West, also in Nashville, Tessy Lou and producer Luke Wooten collaborated with an ace band including Bryan Sutton (acoustic guitar, electric guitar, banjo, mandolin), Mike Johnson (pedal steel, dobro, pedalbro), Aubrey Haney (fiddle), Ashley Campbell (banjo), and background vocals from Carl Jackson, Jerry Salley, Jon Randall, Wes Hightower and Brennen Leigh, just to name a few.

“As the list of songs grew larger and we were playing these songs live, people kept asking when they would be available. I had been wanting to do a new album and knew the transition from the band to my solo career was in the near future. The more time I spent going between Texas and Nashville, the more clear the idea became to me. I knew I wanted Luke Wooten to produce it because I knew he could truly bring these songs I love to life.”

The album begins with “Your Forever Will Never Say Goodbye,” a tried-and-true country tune with Tessy Lou joined by legendary bluegrass instrumentalist and songwriter Carl Jackson on background vocals, followed closely by “Why Do I Still Want You” which wrestles with a goodbye—looking to biblical advice that can seem a little foggy in context.

“Mountain Time in Memphis” marks Tessy Lou's first Nashville co-write, with Jerry Salley. “I quickly realized how amazing co-writing could be, and I'm endlessly grateful that my first

experience in a blind co-write was with Jerry. I'm absolutely in love with this song and its encapsulation of how hard choosing between love and life can be."

"Busy Counting Bridges," another co-write with Salley, offers another up-tempo take on heartbreak, finding the narrator "busy counting bridges that I've burned."

"Pathway of Teardrops" featuring Jon Randall on background vocals, offers Tessy Lou's adaptation of the Webb Pierce classic.

"I first truly fell in love with this song while listening to Val Storey, Carl Jackson, Larry Cordle and the New Mondays crew at the Station Inn in Nashville. Their version of this song can genuinely bring you to tears. I was there with Luke [Wooten] one night and we just looked at each other, immediately agreeing this song should go on the record. It's one of those true heartbreak songs that I could listen to over and over again and never grow tired of it. It's beautiful, it's sad. It's the epitome of what I love about country music."

While most of the songs on the album have a decidedly Nashville connection, one is deeply rooted in Tessy Lou's adopted home of Austin, "Somebody's Drinking About You."

"Brennen Leigh is one of the reasons I moved to Austin. She was the first woman (other than my mom) I'd seen who truly exuded a genuine, traditional country feel. The first time I heard her on my first night, on my first visit to Austin, I was awestruck and just knew I needed to be in a place wherever people like Brennen Leigh existed. We became not only peers in the music scene but friends. Our mutual love of traditional country and heartbreak songs is made very clear in this song."

Tessy Lou's love of traditional country music spans decades—her whole life. She grew up in Montana, the daughter of two musicians who relocated to the small town of Willow Creek (population: 210) from Nashville. Their three kids traveled with them often, experiencing life on the road surrounded by talented musicians and top-notch songwriting.

After overcoming a paralyzing case of stage fright, Tessy Lou began performing at the historic Pony Bar. Soon after, Tessy Lou and the Shotgun Stars were born, and the trio, including Bryan Paugh (fiddle) and her dad, Kenny Williams (bass), built a following around her home state. The band moved to Austin, Texas, and were discovered by Warehouse Records at Poodie's Roadhouse, a fitting place for the stars to align for someone whose love of honky-tonks runs deep. The trio released two albums together.

With a lifetime of experience, almost a decade under her belt in the Austin music scene and a new project as a solo artist, one thing is unmistakably clear: lovers of country music should keep their eyes on Tessy Lou Williams. It's in her blood, after all.