



photo credit: Don Van Cleave

# Brent Cobb

## *Providence Canyon*

With a Grammy-nominated album under his belt, Brent Cobb spent most of 2017 on the road, touring behind his major label debut, *Shine On Rainy Day*. It was a hard time to not be inspired. Anchored by southern storytelling and swampy, country-soul swagger, *Shine On Rainy Day* had become a critical and commercial hit, earning Cobb a long string of shows with artists like Chris Stapleton and Margo Price. He embraced the road-warrior lifestyle, picking up ideas for new songs every time his band hit the highway.

Somewhere between the whirl of shows, hotels, and truck stops, *Providence Canyon* began taking shape. During breaks in the band's schedule, Cobb would return to Nashville—his hometown for a decade, ever since he left his childhood stomping grounds of rural Georgia—and head over to RCA Studio A. There, in an historic studio run by his cousin, producer Dave Cobb, he brewed up a sound that nodded to his previous material while still pushing forward. The

songs were faster. More upbeat. More personal, too. Together, they formed his sophomore album, 2018's *Providence Canyon*.

Named after a Georgian gully that Cobb often visited as a teenager, *Providence Canyon* is an evocative, electrified album about a life lived on the run. There are road songs, half-lit drinking tunes, tributes to friends and family, and nostalgic nods to one's younger years. There are songs about returning home and songs about getting the hell out of dodge. Gluing everything together is the unforced country croon and sharp songwriting of Brent Cobb, who credits his recent touring history for inspiring the album's quicker pace.

"I've always liked the funkier side of country and the funkier side of rock," he explains. "Those influences have been a part of me for years, but they're really coming to the forefront now. When you're touring with Chris Stapleton, and you're performing to a crowd of 10,000 people before he hits the stage, you find yourself wanting to play something upbeat."

If *Shine On Rainy Day* felt like a laidback country album for front-porch picking sessions, then *Providence Canyon* is built for something bigger. This is music for juke joints, pool halls, and roadhouses, filled with electric guitar (performed by Cobb's touring bandmate, Mike Harris), B3 organ, percussive groove, and co-ed harmonies. And while the album's recording sessions were spread out across an entire year, each song was captured in a small number of takes, with Brent and Dave Cobb relying on instinct and spur-of-the-moment ideas. The two cousins may have grown up on opposite sides of Georgia, but they share similar backgrounds and musical instincts—two qualities that lend an earthy authenticity to these 11 songs of the south.

"It's in the blood," Brent says of his connection to his cousin—who, in addition to producing *Shine on Rainy Day*, has also overseen award-winning records for Jason Isbell, Sturgill Simpson, and Chris Stapleton. "We didn't grow up together, but we're so similar in our approaches. It's important to me to do this with him, because these songs are about the places I'm from, the places I've visited, and the people who've taken me there. My family is all over these songs."

Songs like "Loreen" and "Come Home Soon" were partially inspired by Cobb's daughter, while "King of Alabama" was written in honor of a close family friend, songwriter Wayne Mills, who passed away in 2013. "I keep his chain in my pocket, his son in my prayers / Every stage I'm on, I can feel him there," Cobb sings during the latter song, which pays tribute not only to Mills' life, but also to the struggle of road-bound musicians everywhere. During the final chorus, Cobb promises to honor Mills' legacy by doing the very thing Mills did best: creating real, raw music. He urges his audience to do the same. "Honky-tonk's the trick," he sings. "Get a guitar and grab a pick / Let the old tunes possess you, and play."

On the drawling, guitar-driven "Mornin's Gonna Come" and "Sucker for a Good Time," Cobb battles against the temptations of the road, where the drinks are free and the nights are long. He doubles down on his commitment to his wife and daughter with "Ain't a Road Too Long," whose mix of Bible Belt boogie-woogie and Southern rock channels influences like the Band. Then, on the album's breezy title track, he casts his mind back to his teenage years, when a trip to *Providence Canyon*—a 150-foot gorge in the sandy clay of southwest Georgia, less than an hour's drive from Cobb's hometown—was enough to remind him of life's fleeting, precious nature. "The night won't last forever, after all," he sings during the song's chorus, while pedal steel and acoustic guitars chime in the background.

Technically one of the oldest songs in Brent Cobb's catalog, "Providence Canyon" (like the album that borrows its name) glorifies the thrill of hitting the open road, while also pining for the comfort and safety of home. Those themes permeate the album. For Cobb—a longtime touring musician who'd already logged years on the road before *Shine on Rainy Day*'s success—there's never been a better time to explore the interlocking worlds of family, work, home, the highway, and wanderlust. *Providence Canyon* is the soundtrack to that journey.

"Growing up, I didn't know the definition of 'providence,'" he admits. "I looked it up in my early 20s, and the definition is something like 'the protective power of God—or nature—as a spiritual power.' When I read that, it inspired the whole song. I was 23 at the time, and I missed the old days and the freedom of youth. Years later, I still try to keep my music honest and somehow sacred, which is why *Providence Canyon* felt like the appropriate title for this collection of songs. Maybe it's got something to do with the recurring feeling of me wanting to get home all the time, even while I'm enjoying my shows more than ever. Maybe home is a providence canyon in itself."

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**For more information, please contact Asha Goodman 615.320.7753 or Carla Sacks 212.741.1000 at Sacks & Co., [asha.goodman@sacksco.com](mailto:asha.goodman@sacksco.com) or [carla@sacksco.com](mailto:carla@sacksco.com).**