

## Langhorne Slim - A biography

There is nothing like the challenges and camaraderie of the road to inspire a songwriter who thrives upon the emotional energy and exhilaration only travel can deliver. Some singers are devoted to the pursuit of perpetual motion, and Langhorne Slim releases his wild soul in ways that come out of the discipline of live performance.

The 13 songs that compose Langhorne Slim & The Law's new "The Way We Move" are road-tested, rollicking and very rock 'n' rolling tunes that the songwriter perfected with his loyal band, and come out of the kind of good times and bad experiences that songwriters of Langhorne's lofty stature can turn into life-affirming rock 'n' roll. You could also call what Langhorne Slim does folk music, but then there's his sly, charming and open-hearted feel for pop music -- those summertime melodies that nudge you into a grin even when the song is about something bad.

For Langhorne Slim -- Pennsylvania-born self-taught guitarist who moves to Brooklyn at 18, begins feeling out his place in a burgeoning punk-folk scene, wends his way to the West Coast, and finds himself celebrated from Newport to Portland as one of today's most original singers and songwriters -- "The Way We Move" represents the sound of a band devoted to living in the moment. Riding the success of his 2009 full-length *Be Set Free*, Langhorne went through some changes over the last three years -- he lost his beloved grandfather, who is the subject of the new record's moving "Song for Sid," and moved on from a relationship that had lasted five years.

And there was the physical moving -- the literal side of the record's title. Pulling up stakes from his home of two years, Portland, Ore., Langhorne also has been touring non-stop with The Law. As he says, "I'm in a bit of a transitional period -- currently, the road will be home. That's just kind of my spirit, to be slightly restless." Perfecting their rangy sound out on the endless grey ribbon, Langhorne and The Law -- bassist Jeff Ratner, drummer Malachi DeLorenzo and banjo player and keyboardist David Moore -- went down to rural Texas in the summer of 2011 to work on new material. With some 30 tunes to consider, the quartet soaked up the Lone Star sunshine and developed arrangements and approaches for Langhorne's latest batch of songs.

Jeff Ratner had joined the group at the time of *Be Set Free*, and brought on multi-instrumentalist David Moore not long after. Moore and Ratner go way back, having moved to New York around the same time, and they've played together in what Jeff estimates are 15 bands. Langhorne's association with Malachi is equally deep. As the group played together through tours with the Drive-By Truckers and the Avett Brothers, and made appearances at the Newport Folk Festival and Bonnaroo, their bond became ever stronger, their music more

confident. This is what you hear on "The Way We Move" -- forward motion meeting deep cohesion, all in the service of Langhorne's amazing songs and compelling vocals.

"We wanted Langhorne's songs to shine, and be as raw as the creatures that we are," Jeff says of the recording process. The band set up in the Catskill, N.Y. Old Soul Studio, a 100-year-old Greek Revival house retooled for recording. With studio owner Kenny Siegal co-producing, Langhorne & The Law fearlessly ran through an astounding 26 songs in four days, with Langhorne putting finishing touches on new tunes as they recorded. Langhorne says it was an intimate affair in Old Soul, with Moore's "banjo room" in a coatroom and the piano in the living room.

It comes through on "The Way We Move" -- the live feel of the sessions, which found Langhorne singing along with the band on every track. "Singing with the band that way, it's almost like I was performing on stage," he says. Cutting everything live to tape gave the band exactly what they'd been looking for: a super-charged evocation of their raucous, friendly stage performances. Langhorne and Jeff value in music for its rawness, and it doesn't matter whether that rawness -- the insurgent spirit that unites the Clash and Charlie Poole -- comes from in punk, country, soul or folk. Langhorne is a fan of Porter Wagoner, Jimmie Rodgers, Waylon Jennings, and early rock 'n' roll in general. But there's nothing referential or detached about the music Langhorne & The Law make. Langhorne writes songs that are yearning, sad, happy, defeated and optimistic, with hints of '50s rock 'n' roll balladry.

"We all love Wu-Tang Clan as much as we love Bowie, or Brazilian psychedelic pop," Langhorne says. On "The Way We Move," David's probing piano often provides focus for Langhorne's tales of love and loss. "On the Attack" begins with a delicate, watercolor section that turns into an ingenious variation on a classic soul ballad -- Solomon Burke meets punk blues in a smoky folk club. Langhorne addresses it to a current or past love. Similarly, "Past Lives" sports a piano introduction that gives way to a melancholy 6/8 ballad that perfectly supports lyrics about possible past lives and their interaction with the present.

It's a spirited, inspired slice of real rock 'n' roll -- exuberance meets hard-won experience in an explosive combination. David's banjo and Malachi's walloping drums add up to a new kind of folk music. The music drives, but there's no loss of subtlety. And when the group lays into the garage-rocking "Fire," with its funky electric piano and supremely callow lyrics about first kisses and the hot-burning passions of adolescence, it's clear Langhorne is one of the great rock 'n' rollers of our or any time.

Road-tested as the band is, the new music also shows just how far Langhorne

Slim has come as a singer. He croons, exults and sings the blues throughout "The Way We Move." And there are his lyrics, which are about strange dreams featuring women who want him dead even as he desires them, the pressures of small-town life, ambition, and how much he appreciates his mother's love and support. That's all Langhorne and his life -- his mother, he says, really was amazingly supportive of his ambitions to become a musician, as was the rest of his family.

It comes through as you listen to his virtuoso demonstration of a singing style that seems alive to every fleeting emotional shade of meaning. Langhorne puts you in mind of John Lennon's singing from time to time -- it's nothing exact, and Slim doesn't do much music that is very Lennon- or Beatle-esque, but it's something in the timbre, and the openness of his vocals. It's worth repeating here that Langhorne learned Nirvana songs as he began to explore the guitar and songwriting, and Kurt Cobain's intense singing is another reference point.

But these guys don't play the reference game, and like to keep it raw. The new record moves in ways that are fresh for Langhorne Slim & The Law, and demonstrates all the ways we can go forward while keeping an eye on the mirror. They're laying down the law. It's very American, and when Langhorne Slim contemplates whether or not he fits in to any narrow-cast definition of this country's music, he replies with a perfect, laconic joke: "I think we fit in most places that would take us."

- Ed Hurt, 2012  
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