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FEATURE

Three songs from Graham Lindsey's brand new album, *The Next Best Thing*

Heather Kitching | September 4, 2020



When a trad artist tells you they've written a song about "how life used to be," you typically imagine lyrics about a simpler time when people lived close to the land and were connected to their communities.

But Graham Lindsey wrote the title track to his new album, *The Next Best Thing*, in April. So when he says that the song is about "how life used to be," he means it's about being busy.

You know, all that travelling and working we used to do in pursuit of that "next best thing" – the stuff that came grinding to a halt in the spring?

Graham, who recorded his debut solo album, *TradHead*, last year, didn't foresee himself making another album so quickly, but, like so many artists, he found himself with some time on his hands because of the pandemic, and he managed to assemble a veritable who's who of trad artists in Canada and beyond to collaborate with him from a distance.

The new album features Juno nominees The Small Glories and April Verch, Leonard Podolak of the Grammy-nominated Dukes and Rachel Davis and Darren McMullen of the Juno

of the Grammy-nominated Dunks and Rachel Davis and Darren McManis of the Juno-nominated trio Coig. It also features Doris Folkens, Megan Bergeron, Joe Phillips, Carole Bestavater of Youngtree and the Blooms, and Swedish-based musicians Simon Nyberg and Markus Rasanen.

Try pulling off that line-up in a pre-pandemic summer when everyone's on tour!

As it happens, Graham has a series of skills that one does not stereotypically associate with trad musicians: he's a digital communicator, web designer, video editor and general tech guru, who knows how to set up technology for remote recording.

He ended up showing a number of the artists, including April, how to record into their computers using audio interfaces – so thanks to Graham, not only does he have an amazing new album, but a bunch of other trad acts are set up to work remotely.

In fact, Graham ended up with far less time on his hands during the pandemic than he imaged at the start; between producing the Canadian Folk Music Awards' streaming ceremony, serving on Zoom panels about how to live stream and helping Home Routes with their virtual concerts, Graham has actually become very busy! So we sure are glad he found the time to finish this beautiful project.

I asked Graham to choose three songs for us to feature and to tell us a bit about them. So here they are in Graham's own words.

“Fractions”

This is anything but your standard track. It's called “Fractions” because the time signatures of the tune oscillate between 9/8 and 10/8 in the first half, and then in the second half, it's 9/8, 10/8, 9/8, 12/8. It came to me very quickly one night in January as I sat down with an instrument and watched an outtake video from *The Carol Burnett Show* online. I got about a minute in, had the first part of the tune, and had to turn off the video because I realized I'd created something new, different, and cool ... or perhaps lame. Carole Bestvater (NL) and Jesse Périard (PEI) came up with the overall structure for the arrangement, and then I recorded my part on tenor mandolin. Next I took it to Leonard Podolak (MB), and we recorded him playing banjo on his computer, and I was his recording engineer: I could only hear him via video chat, but I was controlling his computer using screen sharing software, then [I] sent the audio back to myself.

“Let's do it again”, he said... and I created a new track in Audacity, hit record, and we were off and running. In mixing, I worked with mix engineer Rob Heaney (QC), as he live-streamed the audio coming out of his computer to me... so we'd tweak all the sounds, and I decided to abandon the “trad” nature of the first album and add a sweeping EQ at the top, which opens up the album and I still love. This is, hands down, the finest example of remote production I've experienced.

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“The Next Best Thing”

It was such a great experience writing it with Jordan Coaker (of Quote the Raven). When I approached Cara Luft about singing on it, and asking JD Edwards if he'd join (their band is The Small Glories, who played my house concert series before they had a band name), I knew the track would be bigger than I had previously thought possible! I've loved their albums since the beginning, and they're friends, so that just made it that much more special.

I approached April Verch (fiddler extraordinaire) about playing fiddle, and she was in too –

and it just kept getting better! And I've had Joe Phillips as the bassist on every track for the past two albums, because he's the best out there.

When the idea was forming, I reached out to Ian Foster, producer and musician from St. John's, NL, to produce the track. That meant going back and forth about what I wanted for the track, his ideas, what pieces there were to assemble – and then he added keyboard and [gave] it an outstanding sound that I definitely wouldn't have been able to bring to the table. Ian's production work is outstanding, and he really made the track.

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“Shack Wacky”

This is a “traditional” set of three original tunes I recorded with Carole Bestvater (NL), and when Carole and I were on tour this January in Sweden, we were paired up with Simon Nyberg (Sweden) and Markus Räsänen (Sweden/Finland). We had a great time playing with them, and Carole and I were immediately planning to record with them for some upcoming project that we'd figure out later. Simon has played across the world, and Canadians might know him from touring with Jaron Freeman Fox. Markus hasn't been here yet, but he (like Simon) is a young player (in his 30s) who in Scandinavia is very much in demand.

The three tunes in this set are “The Almonte Celfest Jig” (written for my home town festival that was cancelled this year due to COVID, though I was able to edit and stream the virtual edition of the festival), “Starting from Scratch” (written for my colleagues at Home Routes, who approached me to work on streaming content in the first weeks of the pandemic), and “Shack Wacky” (because we're all a little “shack wacky” from being stuck in our homes for so long – with thanks to Anita MacDonald (Cape Breton fiddler) for texting to say “hi” and check in and using that phrase to ask how I was keeping.

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