

John Baumann

There is a place on Interstate 10, somewhere east of El Paso, where the road dips so far south that America starts to fade. In the hours past midnight, the radio dial is mostly static, sliding in and out of signal. What gets through is haunting, like the sound of an old Victrola playing songs about broken hearts in broken Spanish. In the autumn, the winds toss 18-wheelers from shoulder to median and it's still 100 degrees in the dark. There's heat lightning in the distance, maybe from a storm 200 miles away at the next exit. The light at the end of the tunnel is an old town called San Antonio, offering salvation in the sweetness of its *pan de muerto* and the cool of its slow, shallow river. If that road – in all of its chaos and its quiet – had a soundtrack, it would be John Baumann's *Border Radio*.

Baumann takes a cue from storytelling greats like Townes Van Zant, Guy Clark and Lyle Lovett, Adam Carroll, John Prine, Jackson Browne, James McMurtry, Nanci Griffith, leaning more into observation than experience in his writing, preferring to inhabit stories that are not his own. And on *Border Radio*, his sixth album out October 6, the stories range from a man's love for his "Gold El Camino" to falling in love in the red light glow of "Boy's Town." On each track, it's clear the Austin-based Baumann is at the top of his songwriting game. "Saturday Night Comes Once a Week" could easily be a country radio hit, while the lyrical deftness and timelessness of "The Night Before the Day of the Dead" and "Turning Gold" rival the best of his heroes' work.

Those great storytelling songwriters were the ones that brought Texas to Nashville, and it's a path that Baumann finds himself increasingly taking – with a nudge from Kenny Chesney, who recently recorded a version of Baumann's song "Gulf Moon". But, as a fifth generation Texan and a self-proclaimed geographical songwriter, Baumann will always see the Lone Star State as the ideal canvas for his writing. In fact, he says *Border Radio* is simply a collection of "colors and vignettes from San Antonio and Hill Country down to the border. Like Steinbeck said, Texas is 'rich, poor, panhandle, gulf, city, country, Texas is the obsession, the proper study'.

"My pleasure as a songwriter is to be somebody else for three and a half minutes," he continued. "I'm not the hunting and fishing guy in 'South Texas Tradition' and I'm not falling in love on the border. The record is a journey of someone's experiences through a certain place in the world – south Texas. And discreetly it's a love story. It's all the highs and lows of love. And there's real character in the border region, there's some controversy to it, but I wanted to get away from the news about the border walls and instead focus on it as a beautiful, interesting and mysterious part of the state."

The album rolls from dance hall tempos to lonely ballad and back again, honoring both place and love as the two ultimate experiences. It's a journey through those border ghost lands to a neon-lit bar and back again. It's a quest for love and a life well-lived.

“I hope the listener can transport themselves out of their lives and go somewhere else in a cinematic way,” he said. “I hope listening to this album is like going to the movies. This album is about experiencing something else, somewhere else.”