

## Profile: Bobby Long

If Bobby Long has learned one thing for sure in the course of his music career, it's that all things take time. He's reflecting philosophically on the making his forthcoming third album, entitled **ODE TO THINKING**, which is named for the first track on the new recording. "I have been cultivating these songs live for the last year, seeing how they stand up, changing them, dropping them, bringing them back," he explains, "so when I came into the studio with them, I was ready. Now that I can see the finish line ahead, I'm getting excited that people will finally be able to hear what I've worked so hard on and what I envisioned for these songs."

That vision has been percolating pretty much since he finished the writing process, perhaps because he's been performing many of the songs live since their completion. An extraordinarily prolific songwriter who has at times been compared to his heroes, among them Elliott Smith, Leonard Cohen and Bob Dylan, his newly written songs tend to undergo a metamorphosis during their live exposure. "With some songs," he says, "you have to play them out before you record them because they're not quite there yet. Playing them about 20 times in the right setting really helps, but you also don't want to overplay them because by the time you come to record them, you've lost whatever it was that excited you about them."

For his third album, he's returned to the basics, a guy and a guitar, recalling his heady early days on London's open mic circuit. In the studio this time around, he teamed with producer/musician Mark Hallman (Carole King, Ani DiFranco) with the songs sturdily built around Long's vocals and guitar. Hallman played bass guitar, drums, piano and organ on the recording and worked with Bobby to construct the background vocals and harmonies that complement his singularly plaintive voice. The creative process unfolded during a two-week period last fall at Hallman's Congress House Studios in Austin, Texas.

"It was great to be able to focus completely on the recording and nothing else, no distractions," he says. "Mark's approach to recording is to work on one song from start to finish before moving on to the next one. It was a very efficient process. We worked side by side in dressing the parts. There was one day we completely finished two songs and started to prep a third one. I even wrote one of the songs ("1985") while in the studio because all I was concentrating on was working. I had musical tunnel vision."

The end result is a solid collection of 11 original songs that suggest the intimacy of his live shows while the songwriting displays a hard-won maturity in its exploration of a variety of subjects. The title cut, a paean to global apathy and confusion, opens the recording with intricate finger-picking on the guitar. From there, the album traverses all manners of minefields of the heart ("Cold Hearted Lover of Mine," "Something Blue, Something Borrowed" and "Treat Me Like a Stranger") to the outer reaches of nostalgia and memory ("That Little Place I Once Knew," "1985"). The lyrics of "I'm Not Going Out Tonight" unfold like a movie in three acts, while "Kill Someone" has a story all its own (he tells it during his shows).

**ODE TO THINKING** was made possible by a hugely successful PledgeMusic campaign ([www.pledgemusic.com/bobbylong](http://www.pledgemusic.com/bobbylong)) that was launched in the summer of 2014, receiving support from nearly 800 pledgers (and counting). In addition to pledging for teeshirts,

posters, hand-written lyric sheets and other items, each pledger receives a download of the album upon its release. “It is incredibly gratifying that so many people wanted to help me make the new record,” Long says. “This community has been with me for every step of the journey to create this record, and it will be especially sweet for me to be able to deliver it directly into their hands.”

Born in Wigan, near Manchester in England’s industrial north, and raised in bucolic Wiltshire (Thomas Hardy’s Wessex), Bobby Long grew up surrounded by music. “My dad played guitar and was really into folk music: Peter, Paul and Mary, Bob Dylan, Pete Seeger, people like that, so I was brought up with that and, of course, The Beatles, but the blues was the first thing that I really remember loving. I used to put on blues records by myself when I was 10 or 11 and a lot of the early finger-picking guys like Mississippi John Hurt.”

Playing along to old blues records, Bobby, who had tried cello at an early age, fell in love with the guitar, “I’ve always loved music, but it didn’t start to hit me just how much until I was about 16 and was given a guitar and started writing my own songs,” he recalls.

At 18, he moved to the big city, enrolling at London Metropolitan University where he studied music for film and became a regular at the city’s open mic nights. He worked hard at developing his own unique guitar style (“When I went off to America for the first time, I got more press for playing the guitar than for anything else”) and learned how to sing while showcasing his finely-crafted, original songs. There he also fell in with a tightly-knit community of fellow musicians and actors who would become his close circle of friends. In 2008, he co-wrote a song with one of those friends, musician Marcus Foster, and it found its way into the first of the “Twilight” series of films. The global impact of the film focused attention on him and became the catalyst that brought him to America.

Armed with a homemade CD he called *Dirty Pond Songs*, Long arrived for showcases in New York, Nashville and Los Angeles in April, 2009. He would return to tour three more times that year by popular demand before deciding to make New York his home. This time brought with him his first real recording--produced by Grammy®-winner Liam Watson at his London studio—and he signed with independent ATO Records in 2010. The following year ATO released the highly-anticipated *A Winter Tale* to critical acclaim. The *Wall Street Journal* said of *A Winter Tale*, “the album announces that a promising talent has arrived and suggests he will have much more to say.”

On his second album, *Wishbone* (2013), produced in Los Angeles by Ted Hutt (Gaslight Anthem, Old Crow Medicine Show), he was backed by the players who toured with him in support of *A Winter Tale*. “That album was conceived as a band project,” he explains, “so those songs were approached with that in mind.” In between, he made a five-song EP in a New York church called *The Backing Singer* with producer Jesse Lautner. In between albums, he channeled his writing skills into a book of poetry entitled *Losing My Brotherhood* (2012) where he delved into themes of love, lust, desire and disappointment. He is working on a second volume that will also include short stories.

Now writing and touring are a way of life. Long headlines his own shows—known for their irreverent, self-deprecating humor in addition to the music—and has supported

major artists including Steve Winwood, Iron & Wine, Rodrigo y Gabriela and Brett Dennen, as well as playing high profile festivals like Bonnaroo, Austin City Limits, the Dave Matthews Caravan and Bamboozle. His music has taken him to more parts of America than many Americans will ever see, as well as Canada, Australia, Europe and his native England. He wants to visit them all in support of **ODE TO THINKING** as well as some places he's never played before (he has fans from South America to Southeast Asia). His music is featured in the short film *See Seven States From Rock City*, which is making the film festival rounds, and, of course, there are always new songs in the works.

"I guess I'm always writing," says Long, "but I write straight through. If I'm writing and I don't complete what I'm working on, I'll generally toss it to the side. I'll do everything in that one span of time. There might be a few changes I'll make later on, but I definitely don't live with it for too long like some people do. It's either there or it's not." There are exceptions however. "There's one song I've been working on for months that I keep coming back to, but it's never quite right. For a minute there, I gave it up on it entirely and was going to name the new album after it... but I quickly changed my mind about that one."

Now 29, Bobby Long is excited about the future and his ability to continue to do what he loves. "I feel like it's all really good," he said of his career. "I've been cultivating a fan base and evolving musically. I've always been pretty aware that for me to get anywhere near to the position of my heroes, it's going to take time." And time is on his side.

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