

In The Studio: Chuck Ragan

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Right after his stint opening Social Distortion's February tour, **Chuck Ragan** headed to Silverlake, California, to record a new album at Fireside Sound Studios with **Blind Melon's Chris Thorn**. Fireside is located at Thorn's house, so it's no surprise that Ragan describes the studio as "cozy" and "warm." (He's also pleased that it's full of energy, thanks in part to the producer's active son.)

Working with Thorn was a no-brainer for Ragan. Introduced by mutual friend (and SideOneDummy co-founder) Bill Armstrong, the two men immediately clicked. "We went and met him and in all honesty, it was about five minutes into the conversation where I just knew I couldn't picture doing [the album] with anybody else," Ragan says. "That's a great feeling, when you connect with anybody that you're going to do any kind of work with."

Ragan and his band—upright bassist **Joe Ginsberg** and fiddler **Jon Gaunt**—tracked for about a week-and-a-half with Thorn, before the latter had to break for some shows of his own. Although Ragan says that a lot of the music isn't "a super-far stretch from the last record—or any of my stuff," he wanted to make an album that would easily translate live. "Since nowadays most of the time I'm out on the road just playing as a three-piece, I wanted to do a record that was just extremely stripped-down, very organic, very simplified," he explains. "When folks do come out and they see these shows, they're hearing what they heard on the record."

"They wouldn't be sitting back waiting for that one part that's not going to come because the horn player's not up there onstage," he adds, laughing. "It's all simple songs—just straightforward, working-class Americana folk music, whatever you want to call it."

That doesn't mean there won't be guest stars; Ragan says that **Rick Steff** and **Todd Beene** from **Lucero** will "probably lay some things down" and he notes they have "a few friends in mind that we'd love to get in to sing a little bit," such as S1D labelmate **Audra Mae**. "We'll see," Ragan says. "We have a few ideas."

Lyricaly, the collection is mostly "road songs"—which inspired the album's tentative title, *Covering Ground*. "We've been on the road non-stop, or at least it feels like it," Ragan says. "And a lot of these songs, the majority of these songs, are just about covering ground, and doing everything that you love to do, and doing your best to hold everything together while you're out and about living a nomadic lifestyle." The impact of that nomadic lifestyle is also something he addresses in the form of love songs.

"My biggest inspiration is my wife," he says. "The past couple years, ever since we got our dog, she hasn't been traveling as much with me as she used to. We used to just travel together. To me that's about the toughest thing there is, being away from your loved ones, your partner. For me, it's my wife and my dog—that's my little family.

"Like I've said before, writing is to me is more or less a therapy," Ragan continues. "Or just another way to help me figure things out or help me look at my life from an outside perspective—to see where I'm wrong, see where I'm right [or] see where I can be a better man, better husband, better friend."

Ragan & Co. will be putting the finishing touches on *Covering Ground* before the next round of Social D dates starts in late April. Up next later in the year (specifically, September and October) is a Revival Tour in the Europe and the U.K.—although Ragan says kindred spirit Frank Turner is *not* a part of this trek, contrary to what you might have read. The next U.S. Revival Tour is already in the works as well; look for it sometime in 2012.

Ragan also says he's been working on new **Hot Water Music** tunes "here and there." The biggest obstacle? Finding the time to squeeze that band in between everything else going on. "I love the fellas to death and we've all wanted to do a new record for a long time," Ragan says. "Mercy, the timing has just been the hardest thing to deal with. If I'm not doing whatever I'm doing, Chris [Wollard] is doing something. George [Rebelo] was playing in Against Me! for a long time [and] Jason [Black]'s in Senses Fail. Everybody's just in completely different directions. We'll get there, sooner or later. Right now, my main focus is just to get everything that we have going on kind of in line and directed, and then I'll be able to have some time to play with the boys." **alt**