

BILL & the BELLES



**Bill
& the
Belles**
(happy again)



RELEASE DATE
MAY 21

Happy Again isn't exactly happy. But the delightfully deadpan new album from roots mainstays **Bill and the Belles** is full of life, humor, and tongue-in-cheek explorations of love and loss. Out **May 21, 2021** on Ditty Boom Records (distribution and promotion by Free Dirt Service Co.), *Happy Again* marks a new chapter for the group by featuring eleven all-original songs penned by founding member **Kris Truelsen**. There's no dancing around it: this album is about his divorce. But the group has a knack for saying sad things with a bit of an ironic smirk, pairing painful topics with a sense of release and relief. Anyone who's been to one of their shows can attest that you leave feeling lighter and refreshed. The band often jokes that their setlists appear mournful and angry, but if you don't listen to the words, you wouldn't know it. "One of the darkest times of my life turned out to be one of the most creative," says Truelsen. "I realized, 'My life is chaos. I need to write about this shit.'" This personal loss turned out to be a creative boon for the band. Many of the songs were cranked out in just a few months, two were even written the night before they were recorded. This raw songcraft, along with the deft production touch of **Teddy Thompson**, son of Linda and Richard Thompson, who encouraged using only first or second takes, gives *Happy Again* an emotional punch that deepens with each listen.

The core of *Happy Again* is the foundational Bill and the Belles quartet sound featuring Truelsen on guitar, fiddler **Kalia Yeagle**, bassist **Andrew Small**, and banjo/banjo-uke player Helena Hunt, recently replaced by **Aidan VanSuetendael**. The album is also gently supported by **Nick Falk** on electric guitar and percussion and **Don Eanes** on piano and B3 Hammond. Early fans of the band were hooked by their singing, and *Happy Again* continues to deliver stellar vocal trio arrangements, honed by Yeagle, that nod toward groups like the Ronettes and The Shangri-Las. The band began as a project to explore the sounds between rural and urban music, between vaudeville and down home roots, but they've arrived somewhere wholly their own. They revel in the in-between: deeply engaged with the stringband tradition and eager to stretch those influences to contemporary settings. *Happy Again* is the latest chapter of that ongoing story: what happens when a stringband from East Tennessee lays down a session at Motown. It's a welcome evolution that feels familiar and timeless.

With all their tongue-in-cheek quips, you'd think **Bill and the Belles** avoids the tough stuff, however, that's far from the truth. "Never Be Happy Again" is a laundry list of existential woes, and "People Gonna Talk" profiles some of the frustrations of small-town living. "Make It Look Easy" is both an anthem for apathy and a proper "fuck off" to those who've got something to say about your life choices. And of course there's "Sobbin' the Blues," Truelsen's homage to the 'talking blues' numbers of the past, neatly tied up with a moral-of-the-story twist. Tucked in amongst the grief and jubilation of *Happy Again* are some noteworthy oddballs, including two songs that began their lives as jingles on Farm and Fun Time (the band's live variety radio show now syndicated on PBS, reaching over 20 million homes): "Bye Bye Bill" (a tale about a pale ale drinking whale) and the "The Corn Shuckin' Song" (make of it what you will). The band presents these themes simply and playfully, inviting listeners to reframe their own burdens and look to the future. "This was one of the first times I felt like I was writing country songs like my heroes that were actually from my own perspective," says Truelsen. "I quickly realized it made sense for us to break the rules." The group subverts expectations for a stringband, taking a page from some of the finest early country and rock songwriters that drifted happily between genres. Truelsen describes the band's mission: "One of my ultimate goals is to write songs that are hard to classify in a certain time period. To transcend the now."

TRACKLIST

1. Happy Again (I'll Never Be)2:44
2. Make It Look Easy3:18
3. Taking Back My Yesterday 2:50
4. That'll Be Just Fine3:37
5. The Corn Shucking Song1:38
6. Bye Bye Bill2:57
7. People Gonna Talk3:13
8. Blue So Blue 3:59
9. Sobbing the Blues2:10
10. Get Up and Give It One More Try3:00
11. Good Friends Are Hard To Find2:59

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