



Langhorne Slim

THE FOLK SINGER ON GETTING SOBER AND FINDING HOME

BY DARGAN THOMPSON



Two years ago, on his 33rd birthday, Langhorne Slim decided to get sober.

He had struggled with drugs and alcohol since he was a teenager, but he realized it wasn't just bad for his health, but also for his music.

"I had created a certain type of environment for myself, which was fueled by alcohol and drugs for many, many years," he explains. "A regular ritual would be

for me to drink and then get a guitar or sit down at the piano. I don't know that that pushed out any more music. In fact, I think I pushed out less music."

Slim describes the process of going sober as "terrifying." He wasn't sure he would be the same person—or the same musician—without a bottle of alcohol by his side. But he found it was actually empowering.

"I had a lot more energy," he says. "When you're able to keep going without a crutch, it makes you feel a lot stronger. It's not something you even needed for that long."

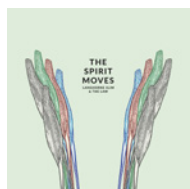
SLIMMING DOWN

Langhorne Slim (otherwise known as Sean Scolnick) has been an important part of the folk-rock scene for more than a decade. He was mixing banjos and big, foot-stomping choruses well before Mumford & Sons brought them into the mainstream.

Along with his backing band, The Law, Slim has hit all the major milestones of musical success. He's toured with the likes of The Avett Brothers, Josh Ritter and The Lumineers. His songs have found homes on soundtracks and corporate advertisements.



L-R: Langhorne Slim
& The Law: David
Moore, Sean Scolnick,
Malachi DeLorenzo,
Jeff Ratner



THE SPIRIT MOVES
Critics have hailed
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fifth release as his
most reflective yet.

He's done the late-night rounds. (In fact, Conan O'Brien confessed to being an "instant, almost obsessive fan" and even performed as a surprise guest at one of Slim's shows in Hollywood.)

A *Guardian* reviewer called Langhorne Slim "one of the greatest live acts I've ever seen." And *Rolling Stone* said his 2012 release, *The Way We Move*, was "near perfect."

But Slim's fifth album, *The Spirit Moves*, has been hailed by critics as his most reflective yet. Sobriety hasn't changed the essence of his sound, but it has made his lyrics all the more powerful.

Slim insists that he isn't trying to convey a particular message through the album, he's just trying "to be open to all the experiences that I have in life and propel them musically in a deeply felt form."

Along with songs about love and loss, *The Spirit Moves* addresses the idea that showing vulnerability can actually be incredibly brave.

"I know some people who are so smart/Yet they build pillars around their hearts" Slim sings on "Wolves." He follows this up with the chorus: "I'm tough enough to run with the boys/Yet I'm too gentle to live amongst wolves."

To Slim, honesty and vulnerability are keys to songwriting. Growing up in Langhorne, Pennsylvania, he listened to Nirvana, Bob Dylan and Otis Redding, and then dove deeper into various musical genres.

"All those forms of music kind of hit me in a similar place: raw and dirty and real in a way I connect to," he says.

The power of great music and art, he says, is that even as an artist shares something deeply personal, they reveal feelings and experiences we all have in common.

"That's why I think we're so drawn to beautiful art and music," he says. "We can find ourselves in all of these various mediums. I'm just trying to dig deep and be there for my own personal expression of creativity. But I certainly think my

experience isn't deeply different to yours or anyone else's."

A TRANSIENT PERSON

Though his stage name is attached to a place, Langhorne Slim himself admits that for a long time, he never felt fully at home anywhere.

"I felt very much like an outsider growing up in Pennsylvania," he recalls. "I always felt like I would feel a bit more comfortable or hit my stride when I was older."

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At 18, Slim left home to attend music school. After graduation, he moved to Brooklyn, hoping to make it big.

"I've always wanted people to know the songs I wrote and for them to sing with me," he says. "Not everybody that paints a painting or writes a song wants a bunch of people to know about it, but I've always had that sort of sickness."

That drive led him to be a "transient person" who visited plenty of cities on tour, but never settled anywhere. He spent time living in Northern California and Portland, Oregon. Then, a visit to Nashville prompted yet another move. But this time, it felt different.

"So much of life, I suppose, is timing—with relationships, with places and people and things," he reflects. "It was a great time for me to come here. It kind of struck me as 'This must be the place for me when I'm off the road.'"

He ended up buying a "magical," bright pink house in East Nashville. Finally, he had a place that felt like home.

"I've spent most of my money ... and a few folks have even advised me to paint it," he wrote in a post on his website, "but I kept dreaming the dream, and now I'm living in it. As Kenny Siegal once told

me, 'Go where the love is, kid.' I've since discovered that when you get there, you're home."

The move also brought the opportunity to record at The Bomb Shelter with Andrija Tokic, who has produced the likes of Alabama Shakes and Hurray for the Riff Raff. Slim co-produced *The Spirit Moves* himself. He did his best to follow his creative muses while writing and recording, he says, but the creative process behind the

album is hard to put into words.

"There's more truths in the unsayable than there are in [definitions]," he says. "I suppose the spirit would be the thing that moves one, so it's difficult to put that into words."

THE SEARCH CONTINUES

Two years sober and more settled than ever before, Slim sounds content. He's tamed his demons and found out he's stronger than he knew. But he and his band are not ready to stop yet.

"The main success with this record and the records going forward is that they're real to us," he says. "They are true extensions of ourselves and our souls. I continue to get into that deeper each and every time. That's what keeps me going. I'm never satisfied. I feel like there's gotta be more."

"Nothing exteriorly can solve any man or woman's quest for anything greater. It really has to come from within, some kind of artwork or music. The greatest thing any of us can do is to be real and true and please ourselves, and then hopefully people connect to it." 

DARGAN THOMPSON is
RELEVANT's associate editor. Find
her on Twitter @darganthompson.