On Dec. 24, 2013, Matthew E. White returned to his parents' home in Virginia Beach for the holidays. During the previous 18 months, the Richmond singer, bandleader and modern soul visionary had toured Europe and America extensively, played Primavera and Glastonbury, performed at The Hollywood Bowl and the Sydney Opera House, and even staged a live rendition of his surprise-hit debut, *Big Inner*, with a band of 30 members. *Big Inner* earned five stars in *The Guardian* and a spot on its year-end list, plus those of Pitchfork, eMusic and Consequence of Sound. But White hadn't rested or seen his family very much. At last, he was excited to do both.

To backtrack, briefly: In 2009, White and a cadre of friends developed the idea of Spacebomb Records, an old-fashioned label and production house meant to turn the tunes of songwriters they liked into grandiose, graceful statements. They had in-house strings and horns and a choir at their behest, too. Collectively, the musicians possessed a wide, working knowledge that could pivot from the gusto of New Orleans to the verve of Detroit, from tube-amp rock to hi-fi pop. To demonstrate the Spacebomb ideal, White and his wide cast recorded a few songs he'd pieced together, hoping mostly to show other songwriters how the system would work. But those cuts became *Big Inner*, the record that *Uncut* termed "one of the great albums of modern Americana" and caused Paste to proclaim that White was one of music's "best new bands."

If the first album had been serendipity, every step of the second one was to be deliberate, from his co-writing sessions with longtime friend and former bandmate Andy Jenkins to his steady arrangement brainstorms with the trusted Spacebomb house band—bassist Cameron Ralston, drummer Pinson Chanselle and guitarist Trey Pollard, who co-produced the subsequent recording sessions with White. There were timelines and deadlines, detailed discussions about who would mix the music (New York staple Patrick Dillett) and the many stories the songs would share. The result is the audacious, confident and masterful *Fresh Blood*, a record that feels like the brilliant bloom to *Big Inner*'s striking bud.