



Lucinda Williams - *World's Gone Wrong*

"My dad, as a poet, always told me to never censor myself – that's one of his cardinal rules of creative writing," says multiple-Grammy-winning singer-songwriter Lucinda Williams. "That became my motto which I've stuck by all these years." Miller Williams' advice clearly is born out on Lucinda's powerful eighteenth studio album, the provocative *World's Gone Wrong*. "I felt a sense of urgency in making this record," she adds.

Filled with gut-wrenching topical songs, the album's ten tracks were written and recorded in a blast of collaborative creativity as Lucinda and her cowriters – primarily husband/manager/co-producer Tom Overby and guitarist Doug Pettibone – grappled with events transpiring during the spring of 2025. A whole other album had been in the works, but that "urgency" to address our current cataclysmic situation motivated Lucinda and company to cut *World's Gone Wrong* in direct response. "Music is a powerful weapon," she points out. "I want this record to make people aware, wake them up. I like to push people's buttons."

Lucinda, Pettibone, and Overby returned to co-producer Ray Kennedy's Room & Board Studio in Nashville to cut the tracks with her newly configured band: guitarist Marc Ford (Black Crowes), drummer Brady Blade (Emmylou Harris), and her longtime bassist David Sutton. On the gripping title track, they're joined by guest vocalist Brittney Spencer and keyboardist Rob Burger on Hammond B3. Its title inspired by the 1931 Mississippi Sheiks song (repurposed by Dylan in '93), the lyrics give voice to the lives of baffled everyday Americans: a nurse and a car salesman "workin' long hours" and "lookin' for comfort in a song."

Throughout the album, Lucinda is at her most direct, not mincing words via those distinctive, one-of-a-kind vocals. The ominous "Something's Gotta Give" (also featuring Spencer) is punctuated by Pettibone's and Ford's fiery two-guitar interplay – a clarion call that "evil has come to play/you can feel it everywhere." On the country-blues "Lowlife," Mickey Raphael's dulcet harmonica livens up this ode to a juke joint where weary souls find relief. Lucinda and her band played the song onstage with Raphael during Willie Nelson's Outlaw Fest, and "audiences really responded to that one," Lucinda recalls. After their August 2 tour stop in Saratoga Springs, they reconvened with Raphael at New York's iconic Electric Lady Studio to cut the vibrant track.

The blues-rockin' "Sing Unburied Sing," inspired by Jesmyn Ward's 2017 award-winning novel of a haunted South, offers soaring background vocals by Maureen Murphy and Siobhan Kennedy. A gutbucket blues, "Black Tears" features Reese Wynan's Hammond B3 accenting a down-and-dirty dual guitar attack. Accompanied by a serpentine slide guitar, "Punchline" eviscerates "false gods and deceivers/playin' on our deepest fears"

and “people being taught to hate.” Personifying the voice of liberty itself, in “Freedom Speaks” Lucinda reminds us that “apathy will blind you,” urging us to “stand up and fight.” The punk-blues “How Much Did You Get for Your Soul?” is a sequel of sorts to the piercing “Man Without a Soul,” from Lucinda’s critically acclaimed *Good Souls Better Angels* (2020). Backed by Murphy’s churchy vocals, Lucinda paraphrases biblical scripture, delivering a bit of fire-and-brimstone that’s sorely needed.

The sole cover song on the album, Bob Marley’s formidable “So Much Trouble in the World,” features the inimitable vocals of national treasure Mavis Staples. “It’s the first time I’ve cut a Bob Marley song,” says Lucinda, who’s released a series of albums of songs by the Fab Four (2024’s *Lucinda Williams Sings the Beatles from Abbey Road*) and Tom Petty (2020’s *Runnin’ Down the Dream*), as well as blues and country classics. “I was self-conscious about it at first, because the song is so great and it had already been recorded the best it’s ever going to be. But then when Mavis Staples came in to do vocals....” Together, they nailed it.

The hymnlike “We’ve Come Too Far to Turn Around,” featuring Norah Jones on piano and harmonies, is a heartbreaking closer, yet there is an aspirational quality too. “Norah’s voice lifts the song up,” says Lucinda. “Her part is subtle, kind of quiet, but it adds a whole level of *something* to the song.” That “something” permeates the entirety of *World’s Gone Wrong*, giving courage to listeners who are – as the title track says – “lookin’ for comfort in a song.”

And that’s what Lucinda fans have come to depend on over the past 45 years – since her sophomore effort comprised of originals, *Happy Woman Blues*, in 1980. With a back catalog of remarkable albums, including 1998’s game-changing *Car Wheels on a Gravel Road*, three Grammy awards and countless accolades, including *Time Magazine* naming her America’s Best Songwriter in 2001, Williams is one of our most revered artists, beloved for her singular vocals and extraordinary songs. And in these troubling times, we need the light she shines on *World’s Gone Wrong* more than ever before.

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