

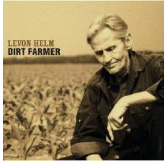
## Levon Helm - Dirt Farmer (2007)

Written by bluesever

Monday, 23 November 2015 16:49 - Last Updated Monday, 18 June 2018 12:10

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*01. False Hearted Lover Blues 02. Poor Old Dirt Farmer 03. The Mountain 04. Little Birds 05. The Girl Left Behind 06. Calvary 07. Anna Lee 08. Got Me a Woman 09. A Train Robbery 10. Single Girl, Married Girl 11. Blind Child 12. Feelin' Good 13. Wide River to Cross* Amy Helm – mandolin, percussion, piano, drums, vocals, harmony vocals, mandola Larry Campbell – dulcimer, guitar, fiddle, mandolin, percussion, background vocals, guitar Levon Helm – acoustic guitar, mandolin, drums, vocals Byron Isaacs – bass, percussion, background vocals Buddy Miller – harmony vocals Julie Miller – harmony vocals Brian John Mitchell – piano, accordion, background vocals Glenn Patscha – pump organ George Receli – percussion Teresa Williams – background vocals, harmony vocals

Levon Helm's first record in more than a decade, *Dirt Farmer*, will be released to the public on October 30, through Dirt Farmer Music LLC in conjunction with Vanguard Records. Levon sings and plays drums, guitar and mandolin on the CD, accompanied by Larry Campbell on guitars and fiddle, and the voices of Amy Helm and Teresa Williams. The record explores songs Levon learned as a boy in Arkansas and others in that style.

"Growing up on a cotton farm in the Arkansas Delta, *Dirt Farmer* rings true to home," Levon said. "Amy encouraged me to go all the way back and try to record some of the family songs from home that we always loved best."

The record reveals the essential beauty of traditional songs like "Little Birds" and the Stanley Brothers' "False Hearted Lover Blues," and takes a new look at Paul Kennerley's "A Train Robbery," Buddy and Julie Miller's "Wide River To Cross" and another sentimental favorite, Lauralyn Dossett's "Anna Lee."

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Levon said: "'The Girl Left Behind' was one of the first songs my parents taught me as a child, along with 'Little Birds' and 'Blind Child.' 'The Poor Old Dirt Farmer' is a song that my wood-carver musician friend Michael Copus and I learned together when we worked with Jane Fonda on The Dollmaker down in Tennessee. 'Single Girl, Married Girl' is one of my favorite songs of the whole session. It gave us the chance to address a traditional standard with the entire rhythm section using non-electric instruments and a full set of drums. It also gave us the chance to monkey up the rhythm of a traditional country beat."

The tracks are elevated by the musicianship of Brian Mitchell on piano and accordion, Byron Isaacs on bass, Glenn Patscha on pump organ and George Receli's percussion. Buddy and Julie Miller contribute backing vocals on Steve Earle's "The Mountain." ---Levon Helm Studios, August 2007, theband.hiof.no

During the Band's original run (from 1968 to 1976), Robbie Robertson may have been the group's strongest songwriter and the idea man behind most of their best work, but Levon Helm was truly the group's heart and soul with his tough, sinewy Arkansas vocals and his indomitable, loosely tight drumming. Robertson's solo work since leaving the Band has been the product of a man whose lofty ambitions outstrip his ability to make them interesting, but Helm's music has been the greater disappointment; with the exception of 1980's *American Son*, most of his solo recordings have been thoroughly disposable, offering plenty of good-time boogie but none of the gravity one might hope for from the man who made "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down" come to such compelling life years ago. Which is why *Dirt Farmer* is such a pleasant surprise; it's easily Helm's best recorded work since *American Son*, and an absorbing look back at his roots as the son of a farm family in the rural South.

*Dirt Farmer* was produced by Larry Campbell, a session guitarist and member of Bob Dylan's road band, in collaboration with Amy Helm, Levon's daughter, and they've assembled a solid but clutter-free acoustic band for these sessions, and the simple but iron-strong backdrops and superb songs are just what was needed to bring out the best in Levon. Helm survived a bout with throat cancer that was diagnosed in 1998, and his voice is noticeably more weathered than it once was, but in many respects the additional nooks and crannies suit this material beautifully; his interpretations of traditional rural folk songs like "Poor Old Dirt Farmer," "Little Birds," and "False Hearted Lover Blues" sound thoroughly authentic but with a bracing sense of force and commitment in Helm's vocals, and if Steve Earle's "The Mountain" and Buddy & Julie Miller's "Wide River to Cross" aren't venerable classics, they sound like they should be once Levon's done with them. Though Helm adds a touch of boogie to "Got Me a Woman" and a

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jumped-up interpretation of the Carter Family's "Single Girl, Married Girl," in this context they add some welcome spice to the stew, and Helm's drumming remains superb. Dirt Farmer is a hard-edged but compassionate and full-hearted set of roots music from a master of the form, and it's a welcome, inspiring return to form for Levon Helm after a long stretch of professional and personal setbacks. --- Mark Deming, Rovi

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