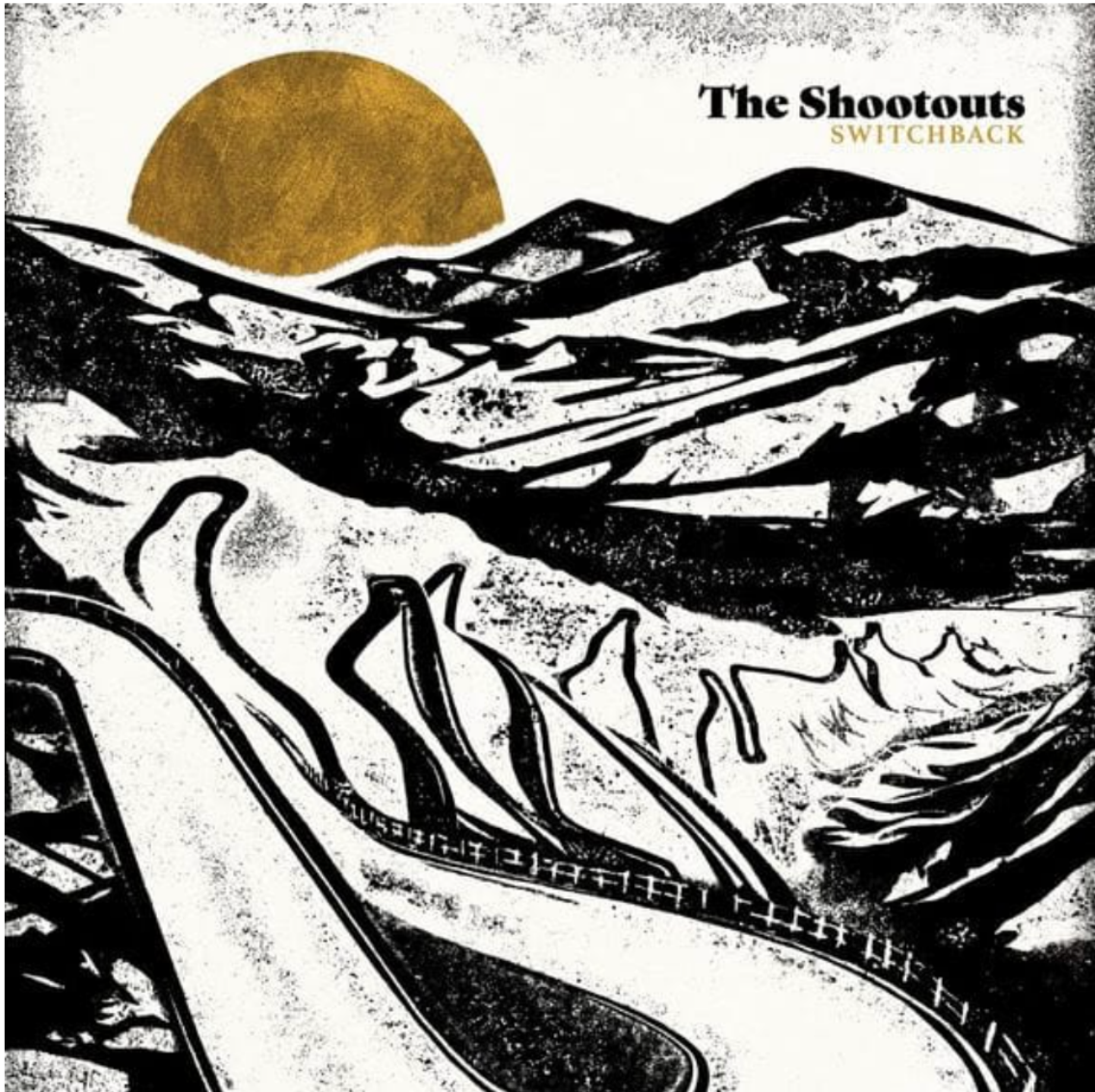


ALBUM REVIEWS

ALBUM REVIEW: The Shootouts' Switchback' is as Precise and Electric as Ever



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The Shootouts are as electric as ever on their latest album, *Switchback*. The title track is an instrumental interlude breaking up the band's most confident album yet. The rollicking guitars and buoyant trad country rhythm section take us back to matinee Westerns. While the band has always cultivated a retro profile, they've never stuck to it slavishly, and *Switchback* sees them growing into their own skin in many ways.

On *Switchback*, producer Dan Knobler (Bahamas, Allison Russell, Lake Street Dive) gives the band space to breathe into their many other influences, from punk to surf rock and beyond. The album's opener, "Trampoline," and "Just Another Sunday" find the Shootouts sliding into an intimate soul country groove, with Ryan Humbert's gentle twang floating among puffy guitars, elegant bass lines, and intricate drum lines.

But the Shootouts are more than a crackshot band. *Switchback* finds them transforming from guitar slingers to cowboy philosophers. On this album, the band takes a meditative approach to the time – and loves – that have passed them by. While the bright guitars and Humbert's made-for-Country-Gold-radio tenor lull us in with their old-school feel, the lyrics are much more complex than their source material.

"The Other Side of Life" is a pensive, post-modern realization of the narrator's role in a doomed relationship.

I had a knack for not knowing how I feel

And you had a knack for knowing this wasn't real.

Cursed the devil, cursed at you, cursed the things I didn't do

Hit the bottle, kicked the wind, changed the story so I win,

But blind spots show in time, and I know you had it right,

When I look back from the other side of my life

That 20/20 hindsight continues with "Only Good at Goodbye," a rueful examination of kicking off the same problematic cycle all over again:

I'm only good at goodbye.

I'm good at beating the odds, while I'm counting your flaws,

Good at bending the rules,

while I've got you fooled.

The Shootouts' precise approach to their music give these songs a bracing clarity. The narrator is neither a lovable scamp or a hopeless fuckup – a character we're used to in country music. Rather, this is a person who understands their shortcomings but is still working out how to overcome them.

The band leaves us with a resolution to that conflict. The album's closer, "Dancing With the Distance," shows us that with the hindsight of time – a switchback through memories and hope, the past and the future – there's some resolution:

From the way it is to the way it was

What it doesn't do to what it does

From where I am to where I'd rather be

I'm dancing with the distance in between

Here, our narrator remarks on how far they've come, remembering the "songs I used to sing, I'm glad you'll never hear," and their future potential: as a lover, but also as an artist. There's something disarming about the band's honesty here, something that forces us to consider our own hypocrisies and how what we can do to address them.



The Shootouts' *Switchback* is out May 30 via Transoceanic Records.