

Sherman Holmes of The Holmes Brothers To Release 1st Solo Recording

The Richmond Sessions Coming July 21

Special Guests Include Joan Osborne, Rob Ickes & Sammy Shelor

On July 21, 2017, Sherman Holmes will release his first solo recording in his 50+ year career. ***The Richmond Sessions*** by The Sherman Holmes Project carries on the spirit of the Holmes Brothers by reimagining songs and making them their own. The record will be released by **M.C. Records** and maintains a bluegrass/gospel vibe throughout that surprises and delights.

The release of Sherman Holmes' solo debut can't help being a milestone: It's the esteemed singer and bassists' first recording since the passing of his brother and musical partners, Wendell Holmes and Popsy Dixon, both in 2015. But his solo debut, dedicated to the memories of Wendell and Popsy, is no somber affair. The blend of bluegrass, gritty rock & roll and joyful gospel will be familiar from Holmes Brothers days. And with some of his strongest vocals on record, the album shows Sherman is still an artist in his prime.

"Sounds pretty good for a 77-year-old, doesn't it?" Holmes laughs. "I was overjoyed to do this, because I didn't know how I was going to restart my career. We chose a good collection of songs that we wanted to do—We got some gospel in there, and some bluegrass. It's a good mix of the Americana music, as I like to call it."

Produced by Jon Lohman, Virginia State Folklorist and Director of the Virginia Folklife Program at the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, the album draws from Holmes' longstanding Virginia roots. Its origins go back to 2014-15, when all three of the Holmes Brothers took part in a state-sponsored apprenticeship program, sharing their expertise with young musicians. Wendell and Popsy both took ill before it could be completed, but Sherman stayed on to complete his mentorship. "I think that really helped him emotionally to get through it," Lohman recalls. Sherman performed with his apprentice, a young singer named Whitney Nelson at the finale show; he was then persuaded to take to the piano for a solo version of "I Want Jesus"—a gospel tune he'd sung in church as a child. "I was so moved by that, and went up to him right afterward and said 'We should really do a Sherman Holmes record,'" Lohman recalls.

Long beloved in the roots music world and beyond, the Holmes Brothers formed as a group in 1979, though the members had all been playing for decades by then; Sherman played behind the likes of Jerry Butler and John Lee Hooker in the early '60s. The Brothers didn't make an album together until 1980's *In the Spirit*, but word spread fast after that. Their fans were as diverse as Peter Gabriel (who not only signed them to his Real World label but had them back him on solo tracks) and Bill Clinton who had them play a Presidential gala. They racked up numerous Blues Music Awards and did further guest shots with Willie Nelson, Van Morrison and Odetta. After their last album together, 2014's *Brotherhood*, they were honored with an NEA National Heritage Fellowship.

Producer Lohman made the new album a Virginia-style family affair, bringing in guests like the Ingramettes—Richmond’s “first family of gospel” of 50 years standing—and instrumentalists like dobro master Rob Ickes, twice nominated for Grammy Awards; and Sammy Shelor, multi-time IBMA banjoist of the year. Manning the B3 was Devon Harris (aka “DJ Harrison”), whose roots are in hip-hop and who’s sat in with Questlove and the Roots. “The Holmes Brothers were always a group that transgressed boundaries,” Lohman explains. “They weren’t concerned with genre, they loved it all. We wanted to honor that on this album. It’s not a blues album per se, or a bluegrass or a folk album. But to me that’s an advantage, and people who loved the Holmes Brothers should really get into it. It was important to me to give Sherman his due, and jump start a new chapter for him.”

Another notable guest is Joan Osborne, who duets with Holmes on the Dan Penn penned, James Carr classic, “Dark End of the Street.” As Holmes explains, “I knew her before she even started singing. She came to New York to study film and one night she walks past Dan Lynch’s, the club we always used to play—we kind of put that place on the map. She heard our voices outside and walked in; she was almost afraid to say hello because you know, we were a little rough. But we’ve been friends ever since.”

Some of the song choices may be more surprising, like Ben Harper’s “Homeless Child,” Marvin Gaye’s “Don’t Do It” (nodding to The Band’s famous cover) and “Liza Jane,” the Vince Gill hit that Sherman says he’s wanted to sing ever since he first heard it on the radio. He’s loved the Creedence Clearwater Revival classic “Green River” even longer—In fact it was one of the last songs the Holmes Brothers worked on together. Sherman’s version features a fresh arrangement, with Ickes’ dobro talking the famous guitar lick.

The gospel tracks also come from the heart, including a version of the childhood church favorite “I Want Jesus.” Especially notable is “Rock of Ages” which he performed with Rev. Almeta Ingram-Miller, who’s taken over for her late mother Maggie (the song’s author) as the leader of the Ingramettes. Explains Lohman, “What she sings in that song is what she experienced, with the loss of her mother. It was a really powerful moment.” Holmes’ assessment is more modest: “I had to sound like a real gospel singer on that one, and I never knew I could do that.”

With the album in the stores, Sherman plans to hit the road for his first tour as a solo artist. “I’m really looking forward to getting out there,” he says. “That’s my life, man.”