

With a new president, vaccines rolling out, and massive cultural changes underway, most of us are looking for a moment just to breathe. But not **Joe Troop**. As the GRAMMY-nominated bandleader for **Che Apalache**, Troop didn't stop even for a second as COVID ravaged a whole year's worth of performance dates. Instead he took to the rural roads of North Carolina and the American South, pushing to get out the vote among rural progressives and interviewing those most affected by Trump's horrific policies. After a year learning direct action from stalwart progressive organizers, he's channeling that energy into his first proper solo album. ***Borrowed Time***, out **August 20** on **Free Dirt Records**, may feature big names like **Béla Fleck** (who produced Che Apalache's GRAMMY-nominated album), **Abigail Washburn**, **Tim O'Brien**, and **Charlie Hunter**, but the powerful songwriting speaks for itself and is designed to push listeners out of their comfort zones. This is the kind of activism that got Pete Seeger blacklisted, and Troop's no stranger to controversy, having been chased off stages and threatened for his radical songs. But as an openly gay man growing up playing bluegrass in the South, Troop never had a choice, he had to stand up for what he believed in, no matter the consequences. With ***Borrowed Time***, Troop is doing much more than just bringing together a group of great musicians to embody songs of protest, he's building on his community of activists and organizers to tell his own story and the stories of those whose voices have been pushed down. "I'm just cutting my teeth as an organizer," Troop says, "but being in the presence of someone like my mentor **Presidente Baldemar Velasquez** of the **Farm Labor Organizing Committee** is an amazing honor and an opportunity to learn how to do this kind of work without demonizing the opposition, to leave an open door for dialogue."

In early 2020, Joe Troop was flying high. After a trip to the GRAMMYS in Los Angeles where **Che Apalache** was nominated for Best Folk Album, he had just embarked on a major US tour when COVID tore it all down. His bandmates were nearly trapped in the country and he watched as every gig collapsed. Instead of wallowing though, he threw himself into a year of direct action and protest by starting the "Pickin' for Progress" web series that helped get out the vote in rural America during the most important election of our lives. These videos introduced him to important mentors, like Velazquez and **Dreama Caldwell**, an impossibly brave Black woman who ran for county commissioner in Alamance County, North Carolina on a personal mission to reform cash bail. This work also taught Troop that true activism should last longer than the span of one terrible president. "Activism is not a thing you do just during an election cycle," Troop says. "It's a long haul orientation towards trying to envision a brighter future that is far greater than electoral politics." In that spirit, Troop's noticed throughout 2021 that the activists he knows and works with are all working harder than ever, even with a more progressive president. "The deeper you go," he says, "the more strategic you become, and the more you look towards the bigger picture. Now the organizers are laying the foundation for years to come." Moving beyond Trump, Troop's activism now is expressly tied to music and travel. He's collaborating with Indigenous filmmaker **Roderico Yool-Diaz** of **Iximche Media** to produce a documentary on Velazquez and to revisit the Arizona/Mexico borderlands that are ground zero for America's brutal treatment of immigrants. These upcoming films will also feature the work of popular videographers **GemsonVHS** and **WesternAF**. This work contextualizes the music of his new album, shows the roots of the music that inspires him, and amplifies the voices of those that created this music.

The songs and instrumentals on ***Borrowed Time*** are influenced both by Troop's many travels and time spent living abroad as well as his upbringing in rural North Carolina. Having lived in Argentina and South America for a decade, Troop's bilingualism allows him to write in both English and Spanish on the album. And though he explored the commonalities of Argentinean music and Southern bluegrass with his band Che Apalache, he can't resist heading back to Argentina for inspiration, drawing the rhythm of the bombo legüero into his songs like "Horizon" or "Prisionero" with the help of local Argentinean percussionist **Lionel Sanders**. "Sevilla" was inspired by Troop's college years in Spain, where he attended flamenco tablaos and was mesmerized by their polyrhythms. It's perhaps the only banjo composition that uses the flamenco bulería rhythm. Troop's never one to forget his own roots back home though, especially after spending this past year in rural North Carolina. "Red, White & Blues" masterfully lampoons American exceptionalism through the lens of his upbringing around bluegrass and mac 'n' cheese, and "Purdy Little Rainbows" is Troop's ode to the other rural queer folks trying to get by in red state America.

To make ***Borrowed Time***, **Joe Troop** drew together his most trusted musical companions for a series of sessions in Durham, NC and Nashville that he co-produced with renowned producer **Jason Richmond** (Avett Bros, Branford Marsalis, The Steep Canyon Rangers, Dom Flemons). The COVID logistics were tricky, requiring frequent testing and careful protocol throughout the recording process. Troop knew that he wanted to have his banjo mentor **Béla Fleck** on the album, and both Fleck and **Abigail Washburn** wanted to support the powerful message of "Mercy for Migrants," a song that Troop wrote after seeing a little white cross with sunglasses on it placed where the remains of a 16-year-old migrant boy were found in the Southern Arizona desert. Troop had been spending time jamming in Louisiana in 2020 with wunderkind fiddler **Nokosee Fields** so he brought him along as well to play with their hero **Tim O'Brien**, putting together a ripping trio for three key songs on the album. Joining this trio for "Hermano Migrante," Troop's Spanish language ode to migrants, is accordionist **Rolando Revilla**, a member of **Baldemar Velazquez's Aguila Negra** band. Also joining Troop are childhood friend and powerhouse percussionist **Brevan Hampden** and the great jazz guitarist **Charlie Hunter**, all-star bassist **Trey Boudreaux**, organist **Sam Fribush**, North Carolina friends **Violet Bell**, and very special guests the **Alamance Justice Choir** on Troop's song "The Rise of Dreama Caldwell." The choir is made up of residents of Alamance County, where Dreama Caldwell ran for office in 2020, in an inspiring campaign that Troop highlighted in his earlier "Pickin' for Progress" video series. "I'm really proud of the album and everybody who's on it," Troop says. "That's my community, those are my people."

Despite, or perhaps because of, a year lost to COVID, a year spent in deep activism, Troop remains hopeful for positive change. "What I've learned outside of the US bubble," he explains, "is that when things really go awry on a more massive scale, you have to lean on people, even people you don't know, like neighbors. What is generally lacking in this country is solidarity. The ruling elites chose to divide and conquer, they pitted us against each other. Ideologies wither fast when enough people realize they share a common oppressor. We don't have to convince

everyone to join us, just enough.” “Besides,” he says with a wry smile, “music with a good cause is way more fun.”