



**STEVE EARLE & THE DUKES RETURN WITH *GHOSTS OF WEST VIRGINIA* MAY 22nd, 2020 VIA NEW WEST RECORDS**

**TO APPEAR IN *COAL COUNTRY* AT NEW YORK CITY'S PUBLIC THEATER  
NOW THROUGH MARCH 29th**

Steve Earle & The Dukes will release *Ghosts of West Virginia* on May 22nd, 2020 via New West Records. The album was produced by Steve Earle and engineered by Ray Kennedy at Jimi Hendrix's legendary Electric Lady Studios in New York City. The 10-song set is Earle's 20th studio album and was mixed entirely in mono, lending a sonic cohesion and punch. In recent years, Earle has experienced partial hearing loss in one ear and can no longer discern the separation that stereo is designed to produce. The recording features his latest incarnation of his backing band The Dukes; Chris Masterson on guitar, Eleanor Whitmore on fiddle & vocals, Ricky Ray Jackson on pedal steel, guitar & dobro, Brad Pemberton on drums & percussion, and Jeff Hill on acoustic & electric bass.

*Ghosts of West Virginia* centers on the Upper Big Branch coal mine explosion that killed twenty-nine men in that state in 2010, making it one of the worst mining disasters in American history. Investigations revealed hundreds of safety violations, as well as attempts to cover them up, and the mine's owners were forced to pay more than \$200 million in criminal liabilities.

Earle started working on the album after being approached by Jessica Blank and Erik Jensen, a playwright team that would create *Coal Country*, a theater piece about the Upper Big Branch disaster. They interviewed the surviving West Virginia miners, along with the families of the miners who died, and created monologues for their characters using those words. Working closely with Oskar Eustis, the Public Theater's Artistic Director, they workshopped the songs and text for nearly four years. Earle functions as "a Greek chorus with a guitar," in his words. He is on stage for the entire play and performs seven of the songs that lead *Ghosts of West Virginia*, including the powerful "It's About Blood," in which Earle blazons the names of all the men who died. "The actors don't relate directly with the audience," Earle explains. "I do. The actors don't

realize the audience is there. I do.” The songs provide personal, historical and social context for the testimony of the play’s characters. Currently in previews, *Coal Country* officially opens on March 3rd at The Public Theater and runs through March 29th. Tickets and more information can be found [HERE](#).

In ten deftly drawn, powerfully conveyed sonic portraits, Earle explores the historical role of coal in rural communities. With *Ghosts of West Virginia*, Earle says that he was interested in exploring a new approach to his songwriting. “I’ve already made the preaching-to-the-choir album,” he says, specifically alluding to his 2004 Grammy Award winning *The Revolution Starts...Now*. As anyone politically attuned as Earle understands, there are times when the faithful need music that will raise their spirits and toughen their resolve. But he came to believe that our times might also benefit from something that addresses a different audience, songs written from a point of view that he is particularly capable of rendering.

To be sure, Earle’s politics have not changed. He believes in sustainable energy sources and ending fossil fuels. “But that doesn’t mean a thing in West Virginia,” he says. You can’t begin communicating with people unless you understand the texture of their lives, the realities that provide significance to their days. That is the entire point of *Ghosts of West Virginia*.

“I thought that, given the way things are now, it was maybe my responsibility to make a record that spoke to and for people who didn’t vote the way that I did,” he says. “One of the dangers that we’re in is if people like me keep thinking that everyone who voted for Trump is a racist or an asshole, then we’re fucked, because it’s simply not true. So this is one move toward something that might take a generation to change. I wanted to do something where that dialogue could begin.” He adds, “I said I wanted to speak to people that didn’t necessarily vote the way that I did, but that doesn’t mean we don’t have anything in common. We need to learn how to communicate with each other. My involvement in this project is my little contribution to that effort. And the way to do that — and to do it impeccably — is simply to honor those guys who died at Upper Big Branch.”

Steve Earle & The Dukes suffered a major loss when, not long before the band went into the studio, bassist Kelley Looney, who had played with Earle for thirty years, passed away. Beyond the death of a longstanding musical partner, Earle was faced with the prospect of finding someone who could share the telepathic musical communication so characteristic of the band. Happily, Jeff Hill, recently of the Chris Robinson Brotherhood, joined the band on bass. “Earle says, “Jeff stepped into the breach, but it

was hard. It was really hard.” In addition to the 29 miners killed at Upper Big Branch, *Ghosts of West Virginia* is dedicated to the memory of Kelley Looney.

Steve Earle’s *Ghosts of West Virginia* will be available across digital retailers, on compact disc, and standard black vinyl. A limited Yellow & Blue West Virginia Swirl colored LP edition will be available at Independent Retailers. An extremely limited to 500 Smoke/Coal Colored Vinyl Edition autographed by Steve Earle is available for pre-order now via [NEW WEST RECORDS](#).

Steve Earle is one of the most acclaimed singer-songwriters of his generation. A protege of legendary songwriters Townes Van Zandt and Guy Clark, he quickly became a master storyteller in his own right, with his songs being recorded by Johnny Cash, Waylon Jennings, Joan Baez, Emmylou Harris, The Pretenders, and countless others. 1986 saw the release of his debut record, *Guitar Town*, which shot to number one on the country charts and is now regarded as a classic of the Americana genre. Subsequent releases like *The Revolution Starts...Now* (2004), *Washington Square Serenade* (2007), and *TOWNES* (2009) received consecutive Grammy Awards. Restlessly creative across artistic disciplines, Earle has published both a novel and collection of short stories; produced albums for other artists such as Joan Baez and Ron Sexsmith; and acted in films, television (including David Simon’s acclaimed *The Wire*), and on the stage. He currently hosts a radio show for Sirius XM. In 2009, Earle appeared in the off-Broadway play *Samara*, for which he also wrote a score that The New York Times described as “exquisitely subliminal.” Each year, Earle organizes a benefit concert for The Keswell School, for which his son John Henry attends and which provides educational programs for children and young adults with autism. *Ghosts of West Virginia* is Steve Earle’s 20th studio album.

**Steve Earle *Ghosts of West Virginia* Track Listing:**

1. Heaven Ain’t Goin’ Nowhere
2. Union, God and Country
3. Devil Put The Coal In The Ground
4. John Henry Was A Steel Drivin’ Man
5. Time Is Never On Our Side
6. It’s About Blood
7. If I Could See Your Face Again (featuring Eleanor Whitmore)
8. Black Lung
9. Fastest Man Alive
10. The Mine

**Steve Earle & The Dukes On Tour (More Dates To Be Announced Soon):**

May 10th - North Charleston, WV Culture Center Theater / NPR Mountain Stage \* Solo

May 31st - Grand Prairie, TX The Theatre at Grand Prairie - The Lonestar Landfest

June 8th - Kent, OH The Kent Stage

June 9th - State College, PA State Theatre

June 10th - Phoenixville, PA Colonial Theatre

June 12th - East Greenwich, RI Greenwich Odeum

June 13th - North Turo, MA Payomet Performing Arts Center

June 14th - Riverhead, NY The Suffolk Theater

June 18th - Salisbury, MA Blue Ocean Music Hall

June 19th - Plymouth, NH Flying Monkey Performance Center

June 20th - Portland, ME Aura

July 4th - Enoch, AB River Cree Casino & Resort

July 26th - Paso Robles, CA California Mid-State Fair w/ Eric Church

August 7th - Burnaby, BC Burnaby Blues & Roots Fest

August 29th - Shipshewana, IN Blue Gate Theatre

September 8th - 11th - Big Indian, NY Steve Earle's Camp Copperhead

November 16th - 20th - Punta Cana, Dominican Republic All The Best Fest \* Solo

[SteveEarle.com](http://SteveEarle.com)

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