

## Soundtrack to *Don't Skip Out on Me*

Finished books will include a download code for the soundtrack. Additional CDs are available for booksellers on request.

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### THE STORY BEHIND THE SONGS

From the beginning, I imagined a soundtrack accompanying this novel. It's landscape as well as its characters, particularly Horace Hopper and Mr. Reese, have felt like music from the very first sentence. Even when I was just sketching out ideas for the novel, the songs came. Richmond Fontaine's *Whitey and Me*, *Don't Skip Out on Me*, and *The Blind Horse*, being a few. As I worked on the first draft I began to notice that I was taking longer and longer breaks to write instrumentals for the characters. Songs like *Meeting Billy in El Paso*, *Mr. Reese's Place in La Jolla*, and *Night out with Diego* began to show up. With each draft of the book came more and more songs. After the novel was in working shape I met with the guys in Richmond Fontaine, showed them the tunes, and we decided to make the record. And what a fun record it was to make. For such a barren and high desert sounding collection of songs, it was recorded in a two-day snow storm at Flora Recording and Playback in Portland, Oregon.

I want to thank the guys in the band for reading early drafts of *Don't Skip Out on Me* and for being so damn kind to do the session and all the practices that went along with developing the songs. Richmond Fontaine are the coolest guys I know: Paul Brainard, Dan Eccles, Sean Oldham, and Freddy Trujillo.

I'd also like to thank John Morgan Askew, who engineered and produced the record, Joe Powers for his great harmonica playing, and Cory Gary for his keyboard work.

## **DON'T SKIP OUT ON ME**

- 1) **Horace Hopper:** An introduction into the world of *Don't Skip Out on Me* and to Horace Hopper, a ranch hand on the isolated high desert Little Reese ranch in central Nevada. Horace is lonely and scarred but also hopeful and ambitious. We wanted to get all those emotions as well as the landscape of the ranch across in this song.
- 2) **Victor Gets on the Bus:** Horace is watching the failed sheep herder, Víctor, get on a bus to Las Vegas. It's early morning in Tonopah, the sun is just coming up, and no one is on the streets. Victor, who speaks no real English or Spanish, is leaving by himself hoping, eventually, to get to Los Angeles.
- 3) **The Dream of the City and the City Itself:**  
*Part one: The Dream of the City:* On the ranch, in the safety of isolation, Horace fantasizes about what he'll be when he gets to Tucson: first a Golden Gloves champion, then a world champion professional boxer, and then, finally, he'll come back to the Little Reese ranch a savior. The song is fast and upbeat because in the privacy of his own mind

Horace is full of swagger and success and ambition.

*Part two: The City Itself:* This section is the reality. Horace arrives by bus and sees, from the outskirts, the size and sprawl of Tucson. He's lived on a ranch for the last seven years and before that, seven years in the small town of Tonopah. He's overwhelmed by what he sees, and his confidence begins to fade the closer he gets to the city.

- 4) **Living Where You're Not Wanted:** Horace stays in his aunt's guesthouse, an aunt who is, at best, indifferent towards him. He moves from the ranch and the love of Mr. and Mrs. Reese, to the loneliness and isolation of a city he doesn't know and a home where he knows he's not wanted.
- 5) **Horace and the Trophy:** The image that inspired this song was of Horace leaning against the back wall of the Mesa Convention Center after he becomes the Arizona Golden Gloves state champion. The trophy is next to him. He's won! He closes his eyes and feels his old life fading. He's no longer a failure or an outcast. Finally, after so many years he's leaving Horace Hopper and his old identity behind him. He's becoming his dream, the future Mexican boxing champion, Hector Hidalgo.
- 6) **Rescue and Defeat in Salt Lake City:** Horace is overwhelmed when he arrives at the Golden Gloves national tournament in Salt Lake City. As he goes to the Salt Palace to check-in, all his ambition and self-confidence crumble. He sits by himself looking at the other boxers from all over the country and he knows he's nothing. He knows he'll lose. Mr. Reese arrives unannounced and finds him. A friend to the rescue. He gets Horace back on track and Horace wins his first bout but then loses his second.

- 7) **Horace Decides to Go Pro:** In a motel room Horace tells Mr. Reese he's turning pro, that he can't come back to the ranch until he's made something of himself, until he's proven to everyone that he is a somebody, a champion.
- 8) **Mr. Reese's Place in La Jolla:** We wanted a romantic ocean feel for this one. A melancholic La Jolla beach tune, both in melody and tempo. Mr. Reese's song. A song that he could live inside and reminisce about a life and a woman he once had in La Jolla. A life and love that were taken from him when he was forced to go back to the Little Reese ranch after his father's death.
- 9) **Hector Hidalgo:** Hector is Horace's dream-self, a Mexican boxing champion. A man who is never scared, who never backs down, and who never stops fighting. We made the song fast and tough and strong in tribute to Hector. Only towards the end do you see hints of Horace's melancholy when the band breaks down. But soon enough Hector is back and the song sprints to the finish.
- 10) **Meeting Billy in El Paso:** Horace meets the homeless man, Billy, late at night on the streets of El Paso. Billy's humor and bleak situation go alongside Horace's excitement that he won his fight and the sadness that he'd been swindled by Ruiz. All around them the night carries on and Billy tells him of his life and the story of Ernie "Indian Red" Lopez.
- 11) **Night out with Diego:** Horace wins his fight in Tijuana and Diego takes him out to celebrate. But Horace is scared of the city, unsure of the food, and unable to understand Spanish. The streets are wild and unruly. The song starts with the idea that Horace is seeing the city from the outside, an observer. The music is clean and upbeat and full of adrenaline. Slowly, however, the city seeps into him. He stops looking at it from the

outside and becomes a part of it. He eats local food, gets drunk, and visits a prostitute. The mariachi influenced ending is drunken and a bit off, and finally, collapsing, like Horace at the end of the night.

12) **Waking up with Broken Ribs:** The morning after Horace wins the fight in Monterey, Mexico he wakes up at dawn in a small hotel. The sun is coming through thin yellow curtains. Horace is so beat up he's unable to get out of bed. He takes codeine tablets and tries to go back to sleep. There's the yellow light, the dreaminess of codeine, the warmth of the early morning sun, and again Horace's relief that he's won. But that morning there is also a growing sense of loneliness and isolation. Does he really want to be a professional boxer? And why if he wants to Mexican, does Mexico scare him so much?

13) **The Fight with Raymundo Figueroa:** This is full on old-school Richmond Fontaine. The band, in its early days, was faster and half-crazed, both country and punk and full of odd and weird stops and starts. That's what we have here. The first section is the build up to the fight and then into the first rounds when Raymundo Figueroa overwhelms Horace and lands dozens and dozens of brutal punches. The following melody lines are when Horace comes back - his resilience and toughness and strength - maybe he could really win. The song goes back and forth, the up and down of the fight. The end, however, is when Horace loses and realizes he won't fight again. His life as a boxer is over. The music, like his life, is crumbling and in pain. It's angry and brooding and lost.

14) **Horses in Las Vegas:** A young cowboy kid trailering horses to Reno gets off the highway in Las Vegas to see the Strip. While he's there a tire on his horse trailer blows out. He's on the side of road in Old Town trying to put on a spare when Horace sees him and helps. Afterward the cowboy kid offers him money but Horace only asks if he can

pet one of the horses. While he does the horse looks out the trailer door, both nervous and curious, at the lights of the casinos and the people walking by. We went for a cinematic feel to this one. A lonely and simple tune set to the image of a ranch horse seeing the spectacle of Las Vegas.

15) **Finding Horace on the Street:** Mr. Reese sees Horace sitting against a wall. He's found him! After months of looking and worrying he walks across the street to him. The old man sits down with Horace and tries desperately to get him to come back to the ranch.

16) **We'll be Cattleman:** In a parking lot in Las Vegas, Horace is in a sleeping bag in the back of the truck. He's beat up, weak, and hurt. He thanks Mr. Reese for coming to get him. Horace says, "We'll be cattleman, huh?" It's the idea that he and Mr. Reese will again run the ranch. Horace is coming home.

17) **Back of the Pickup:** Mr. Reese gets Horace back to Tonopah. It's night. No clouds are in the sky, only stars. The music reflects Horace's life, all its heartache and pain. His quest to become a champion is over, his dream of changing his identity has collapsed, leaving only himself and the old man in the back of the pickup.

It's not my intent that you listen while you read. I wrote the music so that when you hear it you might be, for a few minutes, transported to the Little Reese ranch, to Tonopah, Tucson, El Paso, Tijuana, Monterrey, and into the world of *Don't Skip Out on Me*.