

Nathan Salsburg

Hard For To Win and Can't Be Won

no
QUARTER

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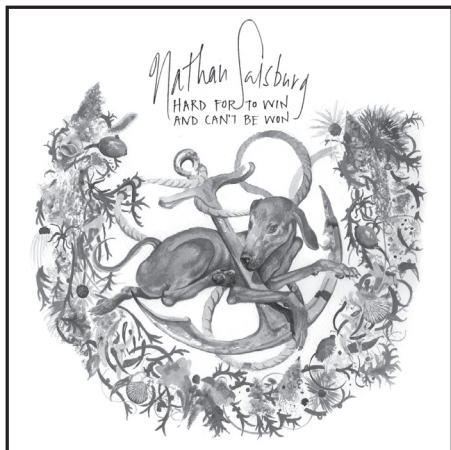
Release Date: **September 17th, 2013**

CD / Boxlot **30**

LP / Boxlot **24**

"Likely to become one of those names we all associate with American folk guitar."

-NPR Music



Tracklisting:

First Field Path
Mrs. Gristle's Reel
Paraffin & Turpentine
Coll Mackensie
Concessions
Dog At Bay
Chief Wants
To Welcome The Travelers Home
What Can't Be Won

I suppose it's not terribly difficult to play a guitar – to hold the thing in your arms, to move your hands across its body in all the prescribed and proven ways, to coax a little melody into being.

But what Nathan Salsburg – an acoustic guitarist and the curator of the Alan Lomax archive, a Pennsylvania-born Kentuckian who has logged good time in coastal Maine – does with his instrument is singular, nearly mystic: his are agile, engaging compositions, songs that feel desirous and questioning and vital, as if they weren't just channeled into being, but demanded revelation.

Nathan's 2011 solo debut, *Affirmed*, directly addressed a trio of thoroughbreds – *Affirmed*, *Eight Belles*, and *Bold Ruler* – which also made it at least in part about Salsburg's Kentucky: the land that sustained and nurtured those horses, the ancient traditions that anointed and sometimes undid them. Its follow-up, *Hard For To Win and Can't Be Won*, is also a record about place, although its landscapes are less specific. Some of them are memories, even: spaces that were real once, but have to be conjured now, willed to or from mind. Most of the album's songs are instrumental, save two re-workings of older material: "Coll Mackenzie," written and first performed by Archie Fisher, and "To Welcome the Travelers Home," a composite of two traditional nineteenth-century pieces; one sacred, one less so. Both songs concern homecomings, what it feels like to be enveloped by a place that you know will sustain you, will nurture what needs nurturing.

Musically, Nathan has emerged from a venerable tradition that includes Lena Hughes and Frank Hutchison, John Fahey and Ry Cooder. I'm reluctant to make too much of his virtuosity – and he is virtuosic, a staggering craftsman – because he is also in the unique position of having that be the least interesting thing about his playing. There are moments in Nathan's pieces – these nimble rhythmic shifts, steps from one place to another – that make my knees quiver. Listening to him play, it's hard not to feel subsumed by gratitude.

I'm just as hesitant to frame his work as subversive, and yet – he is such a remarkably courageous writer and musician, and *Hard For To Win and Can't Be Won* is so matchless a document, so inimitable in its moves. This is the sort of record that could change the course of your year. It certainly changed mine. **–Amanda Petrusich**



LP



CD



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