

The first-ever collaborative album from Samantha Fish and Jesse Dayton, *Death Wish Blues* is a body of work born from a shared passion for pushing the limits of blues music. As one of the most dynamic forces in the blues world today, Fish has made her name as a multi-award-winning festival headliner who captivates crowds with her explosive yet elegant guitar work, delivering an unbridled form of blues-rock that defies all genre boundaries. Dayton, meanwhile, boasts an extraordinary background that includes recording with the likes of Johnny Cash and Waylon Jennings, touring as a guitarist for seminal punk band X, working with Rob Zombie on the soundtracks for his iconic horror films, and releasing a series of acclaimed solo albums. Produced by the legendary Jon Spencer of Jon Spencer Blues Explosion, *Death Wish Blues* ultimately melds their eclectic sensibilities into a batch of songs both emotionally potent and wildly combustible.

As Fish reveals, the making of *Death Wish Blues* marked the culmination of a musical connection forged in her hometown of Kansas City over a decade ago. “It was always a big deal when Jesse came through town to play a show—we first met when I was 20, and I kept up with him through the years,” Fish says of the Beaumont, Texas-bred musician. “I’d been wanting to do a collaborative project for a while and went to see Jesse perform in New Orleans, and right away I knew he was the guy. We got together and had this vision of making something of an alt-blues record, but it turned out to be so much more exciting and layered than I ever imagined.”

The follow-up to Fish and Dayton’s 2022 EP *Stardust Sessions*—a three-song effort featuring covers of classic tracks like Townes Van Zandt’s “I’ll Be Here In The Morning”—*Death Wish Blues* took shape at Applehead Recording & Production in Woodstock, a studio situated on a 17-acre farm once home to The Band’s Rick Danko. Over the course of 10 frenetic days, the two musicians joined forces with bassist Kendall Wind, keyboardist Mickey Finn, and drummer Aaron Johnston, cutting most of the album live and unleashing a bold collision of blues, soul, punk, funk, and fantastically greasy rock-and-roll. With Fish and Dayton sharing vocal and guitar duties, the sonic power of each track is exponentially magnified by Spencer’s production work, endlessly tapping into the rule-breaking ingenuity that’s made him a cult hero. “Jon’s indie-rock royalty and he’s always been ahead of the game as far as moving the blues forward,” says Dayton. “For this album we wanted to keep everything blues-based, with a lot of inspiration from people like Albert King and Magic Sam on the lead-guitar parts, but we also wanted to have fun with that and take it somewhere new and different and way outside our wheelhouse.”

One of the first songs that Fish and Dayton wrote together, the album-opening “Death Wish” immediately established the free-flowing nature of their collaboration. “Samantha sent me that melody and I went into my writing room and started coming up with some lyrics inspired by all these true-crime documentaries I’d been watching,” Dayton recalls. “It turned into a song about men taking advantage of women, and I knew that Samantha could really chew on those lyrics and sing them with a lot of attitude.” Anchored by a hot-tempered vocal performance from Fish, the result is a prime introduction to *Death Wish Blues*’ incendiary sound, at turns gritty, exhilarating, and indelibly hypnotic. Later, on “Riders,” Fish and Dayton offer up a ferociously groove-heavy track built on their fiery vocal back-and-forth, reaching a majestic frenzy in the song’s final moments. “‘Riders’ is about being musicians and troubadours and having one-night stands with whatever city you happen to be in,” says Fish. “Every city is personified as a love interest or partner, and in the end you just move on to whatever adventure is coming up next.”

Although *Death Wish Blues* serves up plenty of swagger and bravado, much of the album embodies a powerfully raw sensitivity. “As we were writing some of the love songs you hear on the record, I

really had to open up my heart to Samantha to get to the core of what we wanted to express,” says Dayton. “It was good for me to allow myself to be that vulnerable, and I don’t know if it’s something I would’ve been able to do when I was younger.” On “Trauma,” Fish and Dayton spin a strangely thrilling portrait of heartbreak, taking on a furious momentum as Dayton lays his pain and frustration exquisitely bare. Building a heady tension between its slow-burning verses and hard-hitting chorus, “Settle for Less” unfolds as an achingly moving meditation on self-worth. “The sentiment of that song is that if you settle for anything short of what you deserve, that’s exactly what you’re going to get,” says Fish, who co-wrote the track with her frequent collaborator Jim McCormick (Tim McGraw, Trisha Yearwood). And on “No Apology,” *Death Wish Blues* slips into a moment of heavy-hearted outpouring, with Fish’s graceful yet gut-punching vocals riding the line between tender longing and unapologetic self-possession. “‘No Apology’ is about fighting with the one you love and wanting to push through and make everything okay again,” says Fish. “It’s a love song but sort of twisted, because that’s the only kind of love song I write.”

Another irresistibly soulful track, “You Know My Heart” closes out *Death Wish Blues* with a spellbinding duet illuminating the pure magic of their musical chemistry. “That’s the first song that Jesse and I finished together,” Fish points out. “He sent it to me one morning and told me he’d woken up the night before with that melody in his head, and we started singing it together and fleshing out the verses. It turned into a song about being far from your loved one and maybe things aren’t going the way you want, but you know they’ll love you through your worst and see your better intentions through it all. I thought that was a really beautiful way to end the record.”

Throughout *Death Wish Blues*, Fish and Dayton let their more lighthearted side shine on tracks like “Supadupabad,” a gloriously carefree piece of blues-funk complete with references to sipping Courvoisier from crystal cups. “That song was way out of my comfort zone, but it felt good to get sort of silly and just have fun with it,” says Fish. “It’s like a two-minute party, and I don’t think I could’ve ever come up with something like that on my own.” Thanks in part to Spencer’s direction, the recording sessions for *Death Wish Blues* also included such unexpected moments as building the off-kilter beat of “Dangerous People” by banging on beer cans gathered from the backyard. “What I loved about working with Jon is that we brought in a bunch of songs that we’d demoed on acoustic guitar, and he’d go in and find a way to add all these unique parts that I never would’ve envisioned,” says Fish. “Sometimes it was jarring at first, but everything ended up fitting so perfectly.” Looking back on the album-making process, Fish also notes that Spencer helped to uncover certain facets of her voice that she’d never explored before. “Jon records vocals with character; it’s about attitude rather than perfection,” she says. “I learned a lot about taking on the character of the song, and about singing with different inflections to really get the emotion across.”

For both Fish and Dayton, the making of *Death Wish Blues* helped fulfill their longtime mission of opening up the blues genre to entirely new audiences. “I’ve played all kinds of music in my life, punk and country and Americana and so much else, and for me this was another wonderful rabbit hole to fall down,” says Dayton. “I love that it’s coming at a moment when we’re starting to see the resurgence of rock guitar for the first time in a long time, and I think it’s going to turn a lot of people on to a kind of music they’ve never experienced before.” Fish adds: “The main reason why I make music has always been the connection it creates with others. It’s a way to communicate with the world around me, to tell stories that people can then take and apply to their own lives and maybe feel more understood. We had such a fun time making this album, and I hope that it leaves everyone with the same feeling of joy that we all felt in the studio.”