



Photo by Mox Gandy



Released 2012

Credits

Pierce Edens: vocals, guitar, banjo,
percussion
Ron Clearfield: cello
Jesse James Hongisto: bass
Lady Lane: backup vocals
Nicky Sanders: violin
Matt Smith: lap steel, pedal steel, slide,
lead guitar
Matthew Nielsen: additional percussion,
sequencing
Adam Johnson: engineering, mastering
v

PIERCE EDENS

Plank by Plank

The house Pierce grew up in sat in Madison County, not far from Marshall, in the same river valley that runs through nearly every part of his story. By 2012, his parents had moved on to a new place, and he took over the mortgage, inheriting a structure that was intact but that he stripped down to the bone. The walls stood. The rooms were open. The interior smelled like old wood and work waiting to be done.

He renovated it the only way he knew how — slowly, between runs on the road, spending the hours that weren't claimed by the van with tools in his hands. He had always liked building things. There was a discipline to it that made sense to him. Measure. Cut. Level. Secure. At the end of the day you could step back and see what had changed. The road didn't offer that. You played a set, you drove home, and the room you played in reset itself the next night as if you'd never been there.

The house was different. It remembered.

When the renovation was far enough along to hold equipment without sawdust drifting into everything, it became a recording space — not by plan but by proximity. The tools didn't move out. The mics moved in around them. This was not a metaphor. A circular saw might lean against the wall in the same room where Adam was running cable. Lumber stacked in corners beside mic stands. The bathroom Pierce had half-tiled became the vocal booth not because it was ideal but because the hard surfaces gave it a life of their own. "We'll just set up mics in this shell of a bathroom," Pierce recalls. "That'll be the vocal booth. We'll set the guitar amps out in the yard. Maybe that sounds interesting. Just run the wires under the door."

The record that came out of that space was *Pierce Edens*, a self-titled solo venture. It sounded different from what had come before — not dramatically, but unmistakably. The Dirty Work were still in the frame. The bar-room weight was still there. But Pierce was reaching toward something he couldn't yet fully name. Not experimenting so much as following instinct down an unfamiliar corridor, one hand on the wall, unsure of the floor plan.

He brought in a string section. Background vocals. A cellist. He layered parts the touring lineup could not easily reproduce and stopped asking whether they should. "Not even worrying about it needing to sound like we do when we're gigging," he says. "What would it just sound like if it was just making an album? The sounds like I hear in my head." The strings widened the arrangements the way pedal steel had widened them earlier, but from a different direction — less country, more open. More searching.

The songs on *Pierce Edens* searched openly. *Montana* reached outward, toward the kind of distance that Madison County doesn't offer. *Wandering Man* turned that distance inward. *Mighty Mighty* carried the raw grit alongside something heavier underneath. And tucked into the sequence was *Wayfaring Stranger* — that oldest of Appalachian hymns, the one that asks only for the road to lead somewhere worth going. That Pierce chose to record it here, on a self-titled album made inside a half-finished house in the county he had grown up in, was not an accident. It was a locating device. This is where I come from. This is the tradition I'm working inside.

The house gave the record a character no studio could have manufactured. The unfinished walls reflected sound in ways a treated room never would. The bathroom's hard tile added edge and unpredictability. The amps in the yard picked up the air as much as the notes — wind, distance, something living outside the frame. None of it was polished. The point was not polish. The point was truth about the space.

Pierce's marriage to Jane had ended by this time. He was spending more time at home, rebuilding rooms during the day and tracking parts at night. He does not talk about it at length. It is there the way certain things are there in a person's life — present in the texture of the work without being named in it. The self-titled record has that texture. It is not a breakup record. It is something more diffuse than that: a record made by a man who was rebuilding, in both the literal and the other sense, at the same time.

The Dirty Work kept working, but the band's configuration had loosened considerably. People had other commitments. Rehearsal schedules were hard to line up. Musicians rotated through as availability allowed. "It became sort of a rotating cast of different hired guns as to who was going to be The Dirty Work each night," Pierce says. Jesse James Hongisto had stepped into the

bass role with an upright bass, pulling the sound closer to the Appalachian textures that had always lived underneath the bar-room surface. Jesse was reliable, close by, invested. He gave the rhythm section a steadiness that mattered. But even with that anchor, the larger problem remained.

The problem was not any one player. It was accumulative. Pierce would count off a song he had played a hundred times and feel the arrangement lean somewhere unexpected. A verse that had held tension the week before would open up too early. A breakdown that once landed tight might stretch and blur. The audience rarely noticed. He did, every time. "What the song sounded like would change so much from night to night," he says, "in a way that was often pretty frustrating to me." He knew what the songs were. The shifting cast made that feeling harder to deliver consistently.

The self-titled record clarified something by separating the problem from the solution. In the studio, with time and a half-finished house and no touring lineup to accommodate, the songs could be what they were. Strings could appear and not need to be explained to a drummer. A cello line could sit in the mix without anyone asking how to replicate it live. For the first time, the recording was not a document of the band. It was a document of the songs.

The result was the broadest thing he had made — and also, honestly, not quite right. He knows it. "I was never fully invested in the sound," he says of this period. "I was never completely happy with it." He does not say it with bitterness. It sounds more like diagnosis. The instinct had been correct. The execution had been partial. The band instability he'd been working around had left its fingerprints on the record — not in any single moment, but in the overall frame. The songs were ready. The structure around them was still finding itself.

What the self-titled album did was clarify the question. The answer would take a little longer.

The house continued to take shape, room by room, each space made usable one at a time. Outside, Madison County moved through its seasons the way it always had — the French Broad running its ancient course, indifferent to the work being done in the valley above it. Pierce kept renovating, kept writing, kept leading whatever version of The Dirty Work was available that weekend. The road kept calling and he kept answering. But something had shifted in the asking. The songs were beginning to pull in a direction the band could not always follow. He could hear where they wanted to go. He just hadn't yet built the structure that would let them stay there.

MONTANA

Well, two angels came to me the other night in my dreams
And told me this whole town is going under
Ohh you and me, oh we'd be free to go
So as long as we never look back over our shoulders
So with you by my side, we can go for a ride
We can strike a match and not wait to watch it burn
We can go running, We can go flying.
I hear they got a great big sky out there
Give me your head and I'll give you the world

Chorus: Yeah, we can move to Montana.

Yeah, we could drop this hammer
We could drive the back roads the whole way
And when we get there we can trade my truck for some horses
Tear down any fence in our way
Just be happy, lonesome and free
Just be happy, lonesome and free
You and me

See I ain't all that surprised, It's been coming for awhile
And you and I, we have always played for keeps
So we could keep on playing. Darling, you know what I'm saying
Its a great big world and I like your company
So don't speak and don't think, just take my hand and come with me
we can work the details later if we work them out at all
You pick the music, I'll start driving.
I heard they got a great big sky out there
We can learn to fly before long.
Yeah, we can learn to fly there long before we fall

Chorus

It's the story old as the hills and here it come again
We played this thing. We played it to the hilt
It was a beautiful line, but if I hear it one more time
I swear to God, I'm just gonna have to shoot someone

We've been beat so down. Yeah, we painted this whole town red
So many times, I believe it soaked in
But I can hear it, so can you
there is a great big ole' sky out there
inviting us to go swimming in it
Yeah, you and I, we gonna go swimming in it

LONELY

Lonely little candle on a lonely dinner table
And a lonely set of flowers wilted looking feeble
And a lonely attempt to cross a dotted line
But the line it just gets longer most every time
She had eyes that looked like taillights in a car packed full
Because objects look closer in the rearview
Where she thinks she's headed is anybody's guess
It just confirms that other people are the biggest wilderness

Chorus: Get lonely, lonely, lonely, alone
Ain't nothing like a woman gonna make you feel so lonesome
Lonely, lonely, lonely, alone
Ain't nothing like a woman gonna make you feel so lonely

A lonely conversation on the telephone
When the lonely family members get political again
Lonely attempt try to share some blood
But it gets awfully lonely when the blood is all you got
Because a house is not a home until you share a room
And until you do you ain't gonna have nowhere you can run to
'cause it don't take much to make a family

Chorus

Ain't it awful funny that the closest ones we got
Are often times the hardest ones there are to talk to
We all make the same faces while we make the same mistakes
It's a vicious circle come around and bite you
'Cause there ain't no trouble like a child or a lover
It's a trouble rooted deep as you can breathe
It's the world's biggest gamble with the world's highest stakes
You can stay and play or leave.

Chorus

CHAMPAGNE

Honey baby crying on wedding days
Sitting outside alone and sipping on whiskey
And wedding makeup rolling down her face
And a lost appetite from a stale wedding cake

A means to an end, but the end it already came
Lord, it came as soon as the wedding bells rang
Lord, life is too long to live that way
It's hard enough to deal with those loving pains
And to try to love somebody when the love is gone
A year's too short and a day too long
This ain't no white wedding. It's a pale shade of gray
That's what you get from sipping on that flat, that flat champagne

Honey baby, take off that wedding gown. No it never suited you anyhow
You can see the truth if you look around
You ain't got to settle for settling down.
You'll never heal unless you feel some pain
And you never will unless you let it sting
Lord, don't make no handcuff out of that wedding ring
And don't go around here sipping on that flat, that flat champagne

Don't you give me no woman can't stand in the rain
Shiver through the winter then flower in the spring
I don't want her in the summer if she can't stand the storm
I don't want her in the autumn if she can't hang on
She can have soft skin if she's got some real hard bones
Ain't no good for standing with if she can't stand alone
I don't ask so much, just the best she's got
Give it like coffee bitter strong and hot
Sweet strong and bitter, bitter, strong and sweet
I don't want her if she don't want the same thing as me
No, mama don't allow. Papa don't tolerate
Don't you give me no woman
Who'll take on that flat, that flat champagne

TRAIN TRACKS

See, I thought I saw your face once down by the train tracks
So I walked down and waited for you to come back
And I thought I heard your voice, it was singing through the rails
There were miles of ties and spikes and every one of them was wailing

And I thought heard your breath rising up through the gravel
Mixing with the breeze and waiving in the trees above me
And I thought I felt you coming closer like a train
As I lay there listening to the squealing of the brakes
I swear I saw your face

See, I thought I caught your scent once down by the river
So I walked down to the water and I waded in
I thought I heard you laughing. You were lapping at the banks
And you were splashing in the waves and you were soaking into my clothes
And pulling me in closer the further I went. I swear I caught your scent

See, I thought I felt your hand holding me on the ridge
Lift me up to the cliffs and I got right up to the edge
When I felt you let me go and left there alone
I was standing on my own and I was just breathing in
When I watched you catch a leaf. Pulling from the trees
Raise it up in the air while I was standing there
And I swear I thought it could be me rising up through the sky
Leaving this old world behind. I'd be just dancing on the wind
And that's when I felt your hand holding me again

See, I thought I saw your face once down by the train tracks
So I walked down and waited for you to come back

DARLIN'

Well, it seems to me that we had it once. Did we let it go?
Did we let it rust? Did we let it jump like a spark out of a fire?
Lord, they look so good shining out against the night
It's so hard to remember they're just dying
It's so hard to remember they're all dying

I hit a bird with my windshield as I was driving down the highway
Watched him hit the road in my rearview
Yeah, he got up once but the wind was too much
I watched him go down between those yellow lines
And I was thinking about me and you
Yeah, I'm always thinking about me and you

Darlin'

Signed a paper today that said that you and I were a mistake
We both made underneath that walnut tree in June
And I wouldn't take it back if I could but I can't
So I'll just thank you. I suppose that's all there's left for me to do
Yeah, I suppose that's all there's left for me to do

I believe that regret is just a stain of mistakes we make
And I got so many now left on my hands
You asked me for nothing when we started and I'm sorry
It seems that's all I gave you in the end
I'm so sorry that's all that I gave you in the end

Darlin'

THIEF

No, I never was a thief before I was a gambler
I bet all my life on stolen odds
Ain't nothing worth building that ain't worth tearing down
And there ain't nothing in my hands now
No, there's nothing in my hands now

My life has become one long shot gamble
I've mortgaged all I have for things I can't own
I had a life full of steady living
Now, I won't be happy 'til I've burnt it all
Won't be happy 'til I've burnt it all

Chorus: I will take my hand and play it
Play until I fall down
Take this book of matches
Lord, and I will watch it burn down to the ground

Have you ever struck a match on a deck of cards
And watched all the faces take the flames?
See, first they turn orange, then blue, then black
Then all those numbers look the same
Yeah, you can win with any given hand

Yeah, I wish that I was sorry for not being stronger
I wish that I wanted to change my name
I wish that I believed there was something else better
But I learned all that I know from this game
Yeah, I learned all that I know from this game

Chorus

No, I never was a thief before I was a gambler
I bet all my life on stolen odds
Ain't nothing worth building that ain't worth tearing down
Ain't nothing in my hands now
Nothing in my hands now

WAYFARING STRANGER

Traditional

I am a poor wayfaring stranger
Traveling through this world below
But there's no sickness, no toil or danger
In this bright world to which I go

I'm going there to meet my father
I'm going there no more to roam
I'm just going over Jordan
I'm just going over home

I know dark clouds they'll gather 'round me
I know my way is rough and steep
But beautiful fields lie just beyond me
Where God's redeemed their vigils keep

I'm going there to meet my mother
Said she'd meet me when I come
I'm just going over Jordan
I'm just going, I'm going, I'm going home

I'll soon be free from earthly trials.
My body asleep in the old church yard
I'll drive that cross of self denial
And enter on my, my great reward.

I'm going there to meet my savior
To sing his praises forever more
I'm just going over Jordan
I'm just going, I'm going,
I'm going home

LILLY

She was a beautiful dream just as bright as the moon
Distant as a star and as blue
She was warm to the touch, but man, she was cool
So I took that one step forward, she took one step back
I took one to the side and she turned
She was always smiling, she was always hiding
I never saw what she held behind her

Lord, she could smell as sweet as a honeysuckle vine
She was lonesome as a laurel bloom in spring
She could run like water, she could blush like wine
But she was hollow as a river cane
Lord, hollow as a river cane

I never saw behind her it was rot and splinters
It was mold garbage and decay
She was as dark as the wrong side of a crescent moon
With all of the silver on display
And look at the fool that she made

Oh, Lilly.

So if I was broken now I suppose that
I was only ever made out of clay
So I can return to the ground while you
Go out and spread your wings
Or will you just spread your legs?
Oh, will you go flying now out into the night
Like a screech owl singing, singing, singing

Lilly

WANDERING MAN

He's a wandering man. He's got a lit cigarette burning in one hand.
He's got a truck. He likes driving, he likes driving it 'cause
It's got one rusty spot but runs well enough
To keep that back door open wide
He's got damn bright blue eyes. Invite inside if you're so inclined
But don't you walk in, don't you walk in smiling
'Cause there are some things you don't ever leave behind

Chorus: And I watched you run
You made it all the way across the country
And I watched you run
You made look like that there was something chasing
I don't owe you nothing, but it feels like I'm in your debt
And this world it don't owe you nothing
But it might just hurt you less
And side stepping all of your fancy dancing
You feel like a brother to me
And now whether or not that's better or worse
Well, you don't get to choose your family
So, I watched you go 'cause I can recognize what I don't know
And I watched you go 'cause I hope someday
You'll find that home you're looking for

He's a wandering man. He likes that driving
He likes that highway
He likes that old saying about that rolling stone
How it ain't got nothing to own
And it ain't got nothing owning it
No, lord, he ain't got nothing
Until he slows down or quits

Chorus

ROCK AND ROLL SONG

They say the way to make God laugh... Tell him all the things you're after
So, I'm gonna light up this town. Work in the sun 'til my skin turns brown
Work as hard as any man's seen. Yeah, I'm gonna earn me a name for me
Work as hard as any man's seen. Yeah, I'm gonna earn me a name for me

Yeah, I'm gonna let it go and I'm gonna sing a little rock 'n roll
Yeah, I'm gonna let it go and I'm gonna sing a little rock 'n roll
Yeah, I'm gonna let it go and I'm gonna sing a little rock 'n roll
Yeah, I'm gonna let it go and I'm gonna sing a little rock 'n roll

They say the way to make God laugh. Tell him all the things you're after
Say the way to to make him mad... Wish for things that you already had
So, I'm gonna sit around all the day. Watch the world just pass by me
I'm gonna sit around all the day. Watch the world just pass by me

Yeah, I'm gonna let it go and I'm gonna sing a little rock 'n roll (x4)

Every day we'll toil up a hill. Every morning hit the bottom again
Always see Heaven but never get close
A heavier weight laid on the shoulder
I thought I was being punished, Lord
I thought the world was gonna bring me down
Until the one day when the clouds opened up and I figured it out

I don't mind at all. I get to sing a little rock 'n roll
I don't mind at all. I get to sing a little rock 'n roll
I don't mind at all. I get to sing a little rock 'n roll
I don't mind at all. I get to sing a little rock 'n roll

MIGHTY, MIGHTY

See I thought my hand was a mighty hand
As mighty as any flesh and bone
And I thought my hand was a mighty hand
'Cause it worked in concrete, steel and stone
And they were my hands that shaped the concrete
They were my hands that bent the steel
And they were my hands that made the city rise upon the riverside
And it was my hand that built the wall
To defend the city when the water come up and
My concrete was hard my steel was strong
But in the end the water won

Chorus: In a mighty mighty, mighty river
In a mighty mighty, mighty rain
In a mighty mighty, mighty river
In a mighty mighty mighty mighty rain

See God he once he told a man
To build your house on the stone if you are wise
If you are a foolish man
You can build your house wherever the view is
Now God He told that Pharaoh, He will turn this river to blood
And Pharaoh said "my hand is a mighty hand"
Then he watched the river run red

Chorus

Forty days and forty nights Noah prayed
While there came down rain and
Forty days and forty nights God warned him
Forty days and forty nights Noah prayed
While there came down rain and
Forty days and forty nights God warned him
Said there's gonna be a fire next time

Chorus

