

# civilians Joe Henry


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## Idgy Vaughn

Origin Story  
Fallen Woman  
2006  
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Like an unexpected brush fire sweeping across the Texas scrub, Idgy Vaughn's self-released debut album *Origin Story* is a scorching, startling rush of warm American country that will leave its mark long after it's extinguished. As a former truck-stop waitress, farmer's daughter, and single mother, Idgy has lived a life perfectly tailored for country music and turns every rough-and-tumble experience into inspiration for this impressive collection of songs.

*Origin Story* is the product of blood, sweat, tears, determination, and more than a little luck. Working at a truck stop through her twenties to support herself and her young daughter, Idgy happened to befriend (and ultimately care for) an older regular who won a million-dollar jackpot in the Texas Two Step lottery. With the financial backing of her friend and a big win in the Kerryville Folk Festival's "New Folk Competition," Idgy began to compile the words and music that would become her debut.

Vaughn proves herself to be a capable and versatile songwriter, able to weave together tales of heartbreak and tragedy with light, humorous touches and endearing, twangy turns of phrase. "Redbone Hound" is a perfect example, opening the album with a wry meditation on lost love that finds the protagonist replacing her dog of a boyfriend with a real dog, and hooting and howling along with him. "I'm just a simple girl," she sings, "living in a much too complicated world / I got a simple heart," and it's hard to imagine any audience could be immune to the winking lilt that punctuates the lyric. Behind the resilient and steady image, there's still plenty of fire and emotion, as displayed on her very own murder ballad, "Dragging the River." It's a familiar trope, the scorned woman exacting her vengeance, and yet Idgy manages to not only make it work but still seem alluring as she shoves her lover off the bridge. That spark resurfaces on "Mister Wrong," (co-written with Pauline Reese), where she watches her smooth-talking suitor drive away as she remains on the wrong side of the tracks. It's a bouncy, honky-tonk track and fantastic classic-country homage. Musically, *Origin Story* is impeccable, able to switch from quiet folk to rockabilly and Texas-flavored country-and-western. Vaughn's backing-band of experienced Austin musicians provides her with plenty of support and a strong foundation on which to build.

The most stunning track on *Origin Story* is "Saint Francis Fire," based on a real-life tragedy in Quincy, Illinois in 1899. Vaughn lived in Quincy as a child, and became acquainted with the gravestones of twelve young girls killed in a fire that tore through a Christmas pageant and cast an indelible sorrow over the town even decades later. Idgy assumes the point-of-view of one of those girls and creates a remarkably poignant and affecting memorial to their short lives. "Saint Francis Fire" is at once gorgeous in design and emotionally devastating, and as Vaughn runs through the names of the twelve girls and gives them a new life in the ears of her listeners, it's hard not to be completely smitten with her talent and presence.

The autobiographical aspects of *Origin Story* cannot be ignored, and it's clear that many of these songs are the result of hard-won experience and personal struggle. "Truckstop Waitress," "Small Town Girls," and "Midwestern Biography" are touching still-life pieces, recounting a past that is both painful and proud, and rightfully so. The latter song evokes Woody Guthrie with lamentations of foreclosed farms and sold-off livestock; the precipitous fall of heartland casualties whose rootlessness metastasized into an even more devastating estrangement. The suite of loosely connected tracks reaches its climax on "Good Enough," a soaring ballad that confronts these issues head on. It's a pure and unmitigated airing of Vaughn's inner thoughts and feelings, and while it may seem impolite to gawk, her sincerity is magnetic. In a way, it's unusual to hear her sullenly resign herself to never being good enough when her voice resonating in the speakers is telling quite a different story. The music speaks for itself, and proves her to be a strong, talented artist worthy of great things.



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