

VERNAM CIPHER

SLOW TO TAKE A HINT

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There's just no denying VERNAM CIPHER's "**Slow to Take a Hint.**" The Chicago-based songwriter squeezes a lifetime of wry observation into these 12 original tunes, which cross straight-on rock 'n' roll and retro-pop with folk ballads, saloon songs, spirituals and other influences.

The collection is available now on [all major streaming services](#), including [Bandcamp](#), Apple, Spotify, Amazon and YouTube. Among other stellar collaborators, Vernam's daughter CONNIE CIPHER adds vocals to half the tracks. Vernam produced the recordings, which were mastered by Brian Lucey (Elvis Costello, Dr. John, Black Keys). See the back album cover below for full credits.

"If you give these songs a listen, well, you're a friend of mine," Vernam says. "If you're already a friend, you know just what to do. And thanks in advance."

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ABOUT THE SONGS

When You Wake Up Wondering Where I Went. A close listen to the last verse reveals the lead character's fate is not so ambiguous as it might seem when he protests, "I don't know the place I'm bound for." Based loosely on a true story. That's BILL KAVANAGH rockin' the bass.

Rhyme v. Reason. This bit of tongue-in-cheek defiance was inspired by some people's odd combination of indifference and nosiness. This is among several tracks where ED BRECKENFELD contributes drumming that really shines.

My Thoughts Are No Longer My Own. A song for our times, when technology is making original ideas seem a thing of the past. It was something of an overstatement when first written, then AI came along.

Robert Ryan. Part of the lyric was lifted verbatim from "Crossfire," one of the actor's greatest films. But this was written after seeing "Billy Budd," in which Ryan proves he would've been the ideal on-screen Ahab.

—MORE—

As I Am. A tribute to Vernam's wife, but don't tell her, because she doesn't care a whole lot for songs written about her.

True Lover's Knot. CONNIE CIPHER sings co-lead as half of a star-crossed couple in this ballad that's meant to sound ancient though dating from the 21st century. Fiddle by MICHAEL CLEVELAND intertwines movingly with DAVE VAN ALLEN's pedal steel guitar.

Tatyana. Another song inspired by actual events, when Vernam visited Russia shortly after communism ended. Other forms of oppression unfortunately persist.

Tide Me Over. Just to interrupt this collection's unbroken streak of songs that dive into loneliness, this one is about merely *anticipating* abandonment. The arrangement is meant to reinforce that sense of being adrift, going under and — with any luck — surfacing at last.

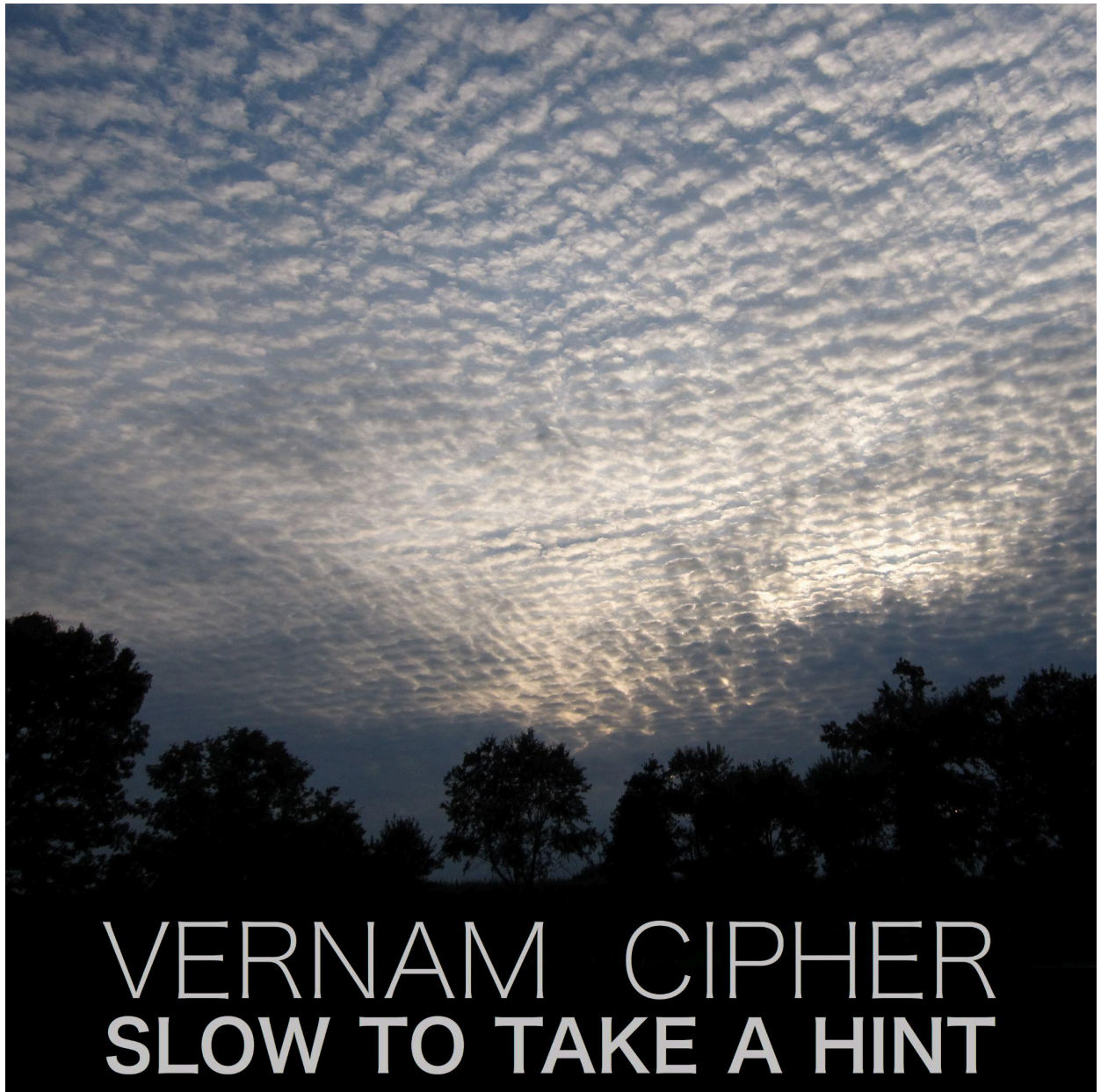
Still More Than You Deserve. This song is about that one person who always seems on the verge of leaving but never quite does, no matter how much good people encourage it. He's said to be especially sensitive to ridicule from women, who at least get the last laugh here.

Error of My Ways. A retro-pop ditty by way of Buddy Holly and Marty Stuart, with a side of existentialism.

Too Late to Pray. Try and imagine sitting next to this guy at a bar. Then, if you're able, please tell him to lighten up a little.

Jump in Glory. Connie again shares lead vocals on this song, which belies its immediate predecessor's pessimism. The optimism might ultimately be misplaced but is no less genuine for the error. Very late in the game, SCOTT MCKNIGHT interceded with sprightly bass, acoustic guitar and tambourine.

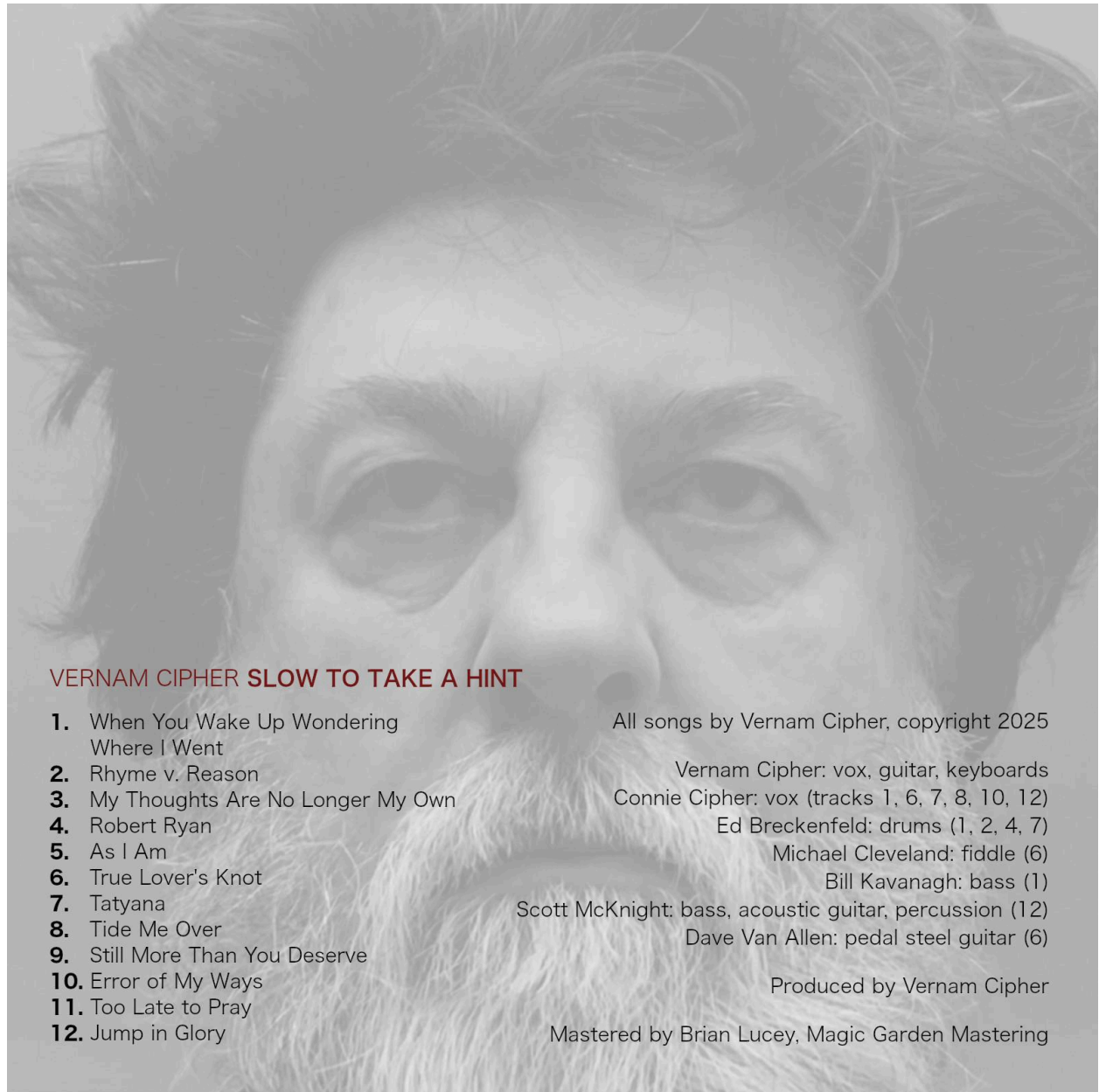
COVER ART: FRONT



VERNAM CIPHER SLOW TO TAKE A HINT

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COVER ART: BACK



VERNAM CIPHER **SLOW TO TAKE A HINT**

1. When You Wake Up Wondering
Where I Went
2. Rhyme v. Reason
3. My Thoughts Are No Longer My Own
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7. Tatyana
8. Tide Me Over
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10. Error of My Ways
11. Too Late to Pray
12. Jump in Glory

All songs by Vernam Cipher, copyright 2025

Vernam Cipher: vox, guitar, keyboards

Connie Cipher: vox (tracks 1, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12)

Ed Breckenfeld: drums (1, 2, 4, 7)

Michael Cleveland: fiddle (6)

Bill Kavanagh: bass (1)

Scott McKnight: bass, acoustic guitar, percussion (12)

Dave Van Allen: pedal steel guitar (6)

Produced by Vernam Cipher

Mastered by Brian Lucey, Magic Garden Mastering

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LYRICS

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When You Wake Up Wondering Where I Went

Through our blinds a breeze is blowing
I hear it whine just like a train
The bedroom clock says it's time I'm going
And there's a note to tell you why I couldn't stay

You abandoned me without ever leaving
But I was slow to take a hint
So let's say we call it even
When you wake up wondering where I went

We both got real good at pretending
We could be everything we weren't
That worked for a while, but in the end, dear
We both turned into something that was worse

CHORUS

As I step down from the platform
I can feel that engine's roar
I don't know the place I'm bound for
But I'm damn sure I won't be back no more

CHORUS

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Rhyme v. Reason

Sometimes there's no rhyme or reason for the things I say and do
There's no pleasing some people, so I offer no excuse
You can draw your own conclusions, and when the day is through
For all your messing in my business

and all your second guessing
You're no nearer to the truth

It's a lack of attention: You notice now and then
Your poor imagination fails you yet again
Now it's just a question of exactly where and when
You'll remember these words
and they might seem absurd
or they might make perfect sense

Sometimes there's no rhyme or reason, etc.

It's a cautionary tale for the wayward among us
Sometimes the shortest path becomes the longest
Sometimes the weakest hunch becomes the strongest

If there's a simple explanation, chances are it's wrong
Just an honest misunderstanding, I assumed you'd miss me when I'm gone
If there's no point to my exclamations, at least it's not the same old song
Getting stuck in your head
'til you're wishing you're dead
for fear you'll start to sing along

Sometimes there's no rhyme or reason, etc.

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My Thoughts Are No Longer My Own

People say wisdom gets handed down
If that's so, take a good look around
There's precious little of it to be found
My thoughts are no longer my own

Ponder each belief man ever had
Consider all the good and the bad
Then ask yourself what you'd have to add
If your thoughts are no longer your own

My thoughts are no longer my own
They're here one minute and then they're gone
My thoughts are no longer my own

Once each idea seemed heaven sent
Every word I spoke was intent
But I woke one day wondering just what it all meant
And my thoughts were no longer my own

I listened so closely to all that you said
Though my ideas made more sense instead
It's yours that keep running 'round in my head
'Til my thoughts are no longer my own

CHORUS

If you steal somebody's, what are you surprised for
When somebody decides to steal yours?

I wonder whose fault all this could be
Those who lived long ago, or you and me
For as far as the human eye can see
My thoughts are no longer my own
My thoughts are no longer my own

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Robert Ryan

He's got eyes like two little bits of coal
Dark smudges on the windows to his soul
And there's something smoldering just below
He's got eyes like two little bits of coal

Now he's in one of his Robert Ryan moods
One more drink, oh man, I wish you would
Don't try talking sense, 'cause it won't do any good
When he's in one of his Robert Ryan moods

He knows it's wrong, and that just makes it worse
Has a way with words, and knows how to make them hurt
Even when he says a prayer, it sounds more like a curse
He knows it's wrong, and that just makes it worse

Did two hitches back in the second war
Those SOBs never knew what they were in for
He's not the type to tell you what he saw
when he was fighting in the second war

So he's out getting stinko with some friends
If he ever bothers coming home again
He'll be reeking of cheap gin and trying to make amends
When he's finished getting stinko with his friends

He's a hot head, there's no use to deny it
He'll promise next time he's really gonna try
Do you believe it? Well, it's a lie

He's a hot head, and there's no use to deny it

He doesn't mean to take it out on you
But he's in one of his Robert Ryan moods
You don't know how he's tried, how it tears him up inside
Every time he takes it out on you

He has his bad days, he has his good
Just watch out for those Robert Ryan moods

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As I Am

If how I've been behaving
Tempts you to try and change me
I wouldn't blame you if you blamed me
for being as I am

Yet you're so undemanding
When life isn't how we planned it
You never dwell on how I can be
so much different than I am

There's no burden I won't bear
I'll pay any price
There's not one thing I won't do
but take my own advice

I know you're my one and only
But if you're not here to hold me
Then just let the earth enfold me
For being as I am

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True Lover's Knot

Good people, they all said Frank Shea wasn't brought up right
His future was unsure as young Lucy Tate's was bright
When they exchanged vows, not one soul bothered to attend
She gave him a fragile bow and a painted card that read

Not too loose, not too tight
That'll do it, just about right
True Lover's Knot

But tales spread house to house of awful quarrels that occurred
And when Lucy Shea dropped from sight without a word

Though just a dozen days had past, dark suspicions people nursed
For of proud Frank Shea they were quick to think the worst

That'll do it just about right
Not too loose, and not too tight
True Lover's Knot

Just before they strung him up, the crowd all paused to bow their heads
But Frank's eyes were fixed, and not a word he said
When they cut him down, clutched in his useless hand
The undertaker found another card and unraveled strand

Frank, I long to hold you tight
I'll be home soon, in a fortnight
True Lover's Knot

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Tatyana

She said her name meant to dance
But she never had a chance
Some things never make sense
No matter how old you get

Why don't she smile?
While she's making you wonder — what's underneath that mask
What she's holding back — all you gotta do is ask
Why she don't smile

For all the lies they told
They'll never shrink her soul
Tonight we'll be made whole
Welcomed to the fold

CHORUS

She tried living for the church
She tried living for the state
She's gonna live for herself now
If it's not too late

She thought the world was a tree-lined street
and the strong cared for the weak

It's more than she can face
Like 13 flowers in a vase
So she learned to betray

No pleasure, nerves, or dismay

CHORUS

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Tide Me Over

Washed up though I may be, you ain't seen the last of me
Just tide me over

I'm gonna be gone so long, but I'm not gonna do you wrong
Just tide me over

Deeper than Nemo or Cousteau, 30,000 leagues below
So tide me over

I'm slipping off without a tether
Sinking soft as a feather through the air
Through the air

Won't you extend your hand? Pull me to dry land
And tide me over

I'm caught in your undertow, it's all ebb and no flow
So tide me over

In the cold and inky deep — guess that's where I'll sleep
If you don't tide me over

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Still More Than You Deserve

Shouldn't something happen when I feel like this?
Shouldn't someone notice it's kinda hard to miss?
These days all I have to give's advice that no one heeds
And all you ever have for me is answers I don't need

Is it less than you expected? That's what I heard
Well if it's less than you expected, it's still more than you deserve

Most folks plainly see through how desperately you've lied
How could one soul believe you have God on your side?
When you can't recall just what it was you had to get off of your chest
May the thought left unexpressed become the one you most regret

CHORUS

I suppose that there are far worse things you could've done
Lord knows, right now I can't think of even one
Did you gaze upon each good deed ever done
And decide that you'd try to undo each and every one?

CHORUS

They say the end approaches, not soon enough for me
As reality encroaches, how are you still walking free?
I'd take back everything I did to be rid of you again
I could forgive some things you said, but not the one you can't

CHORUS

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Error of My Ways

Far be it from me to be the one to keep you here
Though I may not be much fun, at least I'm not insincere
I've been misled all along, everything I've done is wrong
But I'm trying to see the error of my ways

I swear it's just a shame we couldn't tear this place down twice
Maybe once for all who lived here then, and again for all who might
There's lesson that I've learned, could be the best for all concerned
So I'm trying to see the error of my ways

You forgave an awful lot, you gave much better than you got
You don't need me anymore, I know what you don't need me for
We just frittered time, I guess (Dumb luck or providence)
Love's inconvenient at best (It's all the same in the end)
So I'm trying to see the (Since I'm trying to see the) error of my ways

Someday light won't prevail and we'll all lose our way
You might feel like you failed, but the dark must have its say
Though it's long, long overdue, ain't no getting over you
I'm trying to see the error
Trying to see the error
Trying to see the error of my ways

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Too Late to Pray

It's way too late to pray
Way too late
I ought to sleep but some thoughts won't keep
When it's way too late to pray

It's way too late to pray
Way too late
I'd rather believe than to understand
And it's way too late to pray

When I hit my knees at night
Trying hard to see what's right
Might as well be wanderin' 'round
inside a darkened house

It's way too late to pray
Way too late
At last I see how simple life could be
But it's way too late to pray

Everything I done is wrong
I believe, you've known that all along
So please try not to be
too disappointed in me

It's way too late to pray
Way, way too late

I know what I know and I don't care what I don't
It's way too late to pray

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Jump in Glory

I'm gonna jump in glory one of these days
I'm gonna jump in glory one of these days
No more hard luck stories, I'm gonna be victorious
Yes, I'm gonna jump in glory one of these days

I'm gonna stand straight up and shout it one of these days
I'm gonna stand and shout it one of these days
Nothing could make me doubt it, gotta tell the whole world about it
Gonna stand straight up and shout it one of these days

One of these days, one of these days
I'm gonna jump in glory one of these days
No more hard luck stories, I'm gonna be victorious
I'm gonna jump in glory one of these days

I'm gonna see my father one of these days
I'm gonna see my father one of these days

I'll break bread with my brother, wrap my arms 'round my mother
I'm gonna see my father one of these days

I'm gonna live forever one of these days
Said I'm gonna live forever one of these days
Just take me down to the river, it's better late than never
I'm gonna live forever one of these days

CHORUS

There'll be no more trouble or sorrow one of these days
No more trouble or sorrow one of these days
Starting first thing tomorrow, I'm gonna follow the straight and narrow
There'll be no more trouble or sorrow one of these days

CHORUS

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ABOUT VERNAM

VERNAM CIPHER has been writing and performing songs since returning from various points south to his native Chicagoland in 2002. Issued in April 2025, SLOW TO TAKE A HINT is his first full-length release, following a six-song SWEET SCIENCE CD that was praised by Illinois Entertainer magazine as "a pleasing mix of honky-tonk storytelling and Southern folk instrumentation." SLOW TO TAKE A HINT can be purchased on [Bandcamp](#) or streamed on Apple Music, Spotify, YouTube Music, Amazon and all other major services. Visit www.cipherdom.com/vernam for samples and contact the artist at vernam@gmail.com.

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