



Photo: Chad Edwards

**Will Kimbrough | 2026 Alabama Humanities Fellow**

# FROM A PIECE OF WORK TO A WORK OF PEACE

**By Kate Campbell**

I first met Will Kimbrough in 2003, when I recorded *Twang on a Wire*, an album of country songs first made famous by women artists of the 1960s and 1970s. My friend in England, John Graveling, had suggested a stellar group of session players for the project: Jeff Finlin on drums, Kevin Gordon and Pat Buchanan on guitars, Dave Jacques on bass, and Will Kimbrough — who seemed able to bring the right sound to almost anything he touched. On that record, Will added guitar, dobro, mandolin, piano, accordion, Wurlitzer, banjo, and backing vocals. He also joined me for a duet on

Emmylou Harris' "Boulder to Birmingham," a fitting choice since Will is also from Alabama.

After *Twang on a Wire*, Will became far more than a gifted player on one of my records. He became a friend, colleague, songwriting partner, and the producer of four of my albums. His role in shaping *The Portable Kate Campbell* was so central that I put his name on the front cover — a small acknowledgment of the depth of his influence and the trust I had come to place in his musical judgment.

In one of his songs later recorded by Jimmy Buffett, Will unabashedly declares, “I’m a piece of work.” The phrase, borrowed from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, began as a meditation on the wonder and complexity of human creation, long before it became a modern idiom for someone difficult or exasperating. In Will’s case, the older meaning feels especially true. His songs are full of that delicate tension between beauty and brokenness, grace and grit, mystery and mischief. He writes as someone who understands that human beings are rarely one thing at a time.

Whether he is writing about the futility and tragedy of war or composing songs alongside veterans, Will does not turn away from what James Carr once called “the dark end of the street.” He is willing to stand in the hard places — where grief, memory, and moral uncertainty gather — and listen long enough for a song to emerge. Yet his music never settles for despair. Again and again, he reminds us that “there is good in this world we can see,” if only we open our eyes and our hearts to it.

As I reflect on our years of friendship and songwriting, two songs in particular come to mind.

The first is “Alabama Department of Corrections Meditation Blues,” inspired by inmates who discovered peace through the practice of meditation. Being an Alabamian himself, Will knew the phrase “Alabama, here we rest” — a familiar translation of the state’s historical motto, rooted in a Choctaw expression. That understanding helped shape the song’s closing lines:

*Alabama, here we rest,  
Live in light and peacefulness.*

The second song grew from a few spare lines by Emily Dickinson:

*It’s all I have to bring today—  
This, and my heart beside—*

Will was raised in Mobile in a home filled with books and literary conversation, especially the works of Southern writers whose cadences and storytelling traditions helped shape his own narrative songwriting. I knew he would be the ideal collaborator for a song that began with Dickinson’s spare offering of the heart:

Together, we allowed her words to open into a meditation for peace:

*Peace be still, Lord, come what may  
In this I will abide  
Rock of Ages, help me please  
Shine a little light*

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That is what Will Kimbrough does. Through his life and art, he shines a little light. From the Alabama coast to the quiet beauty of Chimayó, just beyond Santa Fe, to the rolling hills of Tennessee and every road in between, Will gives voice to the deep longing for peace we carry in our hearts, even amid struggle. His songs embrace both the wound and the blessing, the frailty of the human condition and the hope that endures beyond it. In doing so, he has become more than a piece of work. He has become a work of peace.

And like a prayerful benediction, his music sends us onward with a simple, luminous wish:

“Peace come to all who hear.”

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Kate Campbell is an acclaimed singer-songwriter known for mixing Southern history, culture, faith, and humor. Born in New Orleans, raised in the Mississippi Delta and Nashville, and daughter of a Baptist preacher, she has spent plenty of time in Alabama, recording albums at FAME Studios in Muscle Shoals and earning degrees from Samford University and Auburn University.