

Featuring interviews with

**SAM BAKER
JACE EVERETT
DIANA JONES
JESS KLEIN
PHIL LEE
DAVID ONLEY
TERRY PENNEY
UNCLE MONK
THE WILDERS**

LONE SOME HIGHER WAY



I had become old
in the blink
of an eye.

SAM BAKER

Deafened and bedridden
with a broken memory

Sam, you mentioned that, having completed the three albums, you have no intention of doing a new album for awhile. Has it all been a pressure?

No I don't think so. More of a compulsion I think (which can appear as pressure but does not exert the same force). Also, it seems to take a while for my records to find their place in the world. For each record to find its own listeners and for listeners to find the record. "Mercy" and "Pretty World" took a while. It makes sense to let the music settle a bit. But saying that, I could change my mind by noon.

You're going to express yourself in painting, something you love, as a creative outlet how does it differ from music?

It doesn't differ. It is the same.

Prior to South America and what happened there, how involved were you in music growing up?

I grew up in a musical family. My mother was a sometimes church pianist and organist and there was music in the house. Always. Handel, Bach, Brownie McGee, Lightning Hopkins, "My Fair Lady".

It was a wonderful mix.

Aside from the obvious physical problems that are associated with that incident how did it change your worldview?

I was instantly older. An older world view. I had become old in the blink of an eye. Deafened and bedridden with a broken memory. I came out of it looking at the world as though it and I were seasoned. Older, more respectful of the past the present and even the future (which I then saw as something that will come to pass whether I was alert and conscious or not).

It was easier to be empathetic with people. Ordinary people living what appeared to be ordinary lives (which were in fact extraordinary lives of beauty, good humor, loyalty, kindness and bravery)

In terms of your songs and your approach to your music who were your influences?

There are so many. The Texas writers Clark, van Zandt, Hopkins, Jimmy Rogers (originally from Mississippi). Randy Newman, Cohen, Guthrie. Writers are too many to list. Borges, the blind Argentine, really the list could go on and on. Right now, Flannery O'Connor

You have spoken about the ringing that you hear in your head but does the music over-ride that?

If it is louder than the ringing. It is a tricky balance. Too loud is madness.

You maintain a positive outlook, which comes across onstage, Is your life force stronger now?

I am not sure what life force is. I am not sure what a positive outlook is either. I like people a lot. People who go to work, raise their kids, try to treat people fair and they hope for the best. I am inspired to be in their presence. That is what I felt at Seamus Ennis (Centre).

Is your music apart of the healing process? I think so. My instinctive response is that it made my torn world safe for healing.

With the hearing problems does that exclude you from the Harlan Howard aspect of picking up phrases and stories in public places?

Sometimes and sometimes not. I pick up a lot of cues visually. I see lips move and on my good days translate a story. That I think is why so many of my songs have a bit of a cinematic feel.

You have played solo, as a duo and with a band. Which combination do you prefer and is that dictated by finance?

I like all the combinations. I like to play music with my friends for my friends and listeners. Finance plays a part. Organization plays a part. If a machine has lots of parts, it becomes far more complex to operate. But saying that, I would love to tour with a band. But saying that again, I love to have a guitar and sing and talk to people - hear THEIR stories, and sing a few songs. Get a few laughs. One person. One guitar. Pretty simple.

Would you like to be playing into old age in the way that, say, Leonard Cohen has?

I would like to live into old age as Cohen has. Playing would be icing on the cake.

You obviously like words, who are your favourite writers and poets?

I think it is who ever I am reading now. Reading updikey now. Just finished a lot of flannery. Carver is always beautiful and intimidating.

Europe has become a second home. You'll be back again soon I hope?

I hope so too. I love Europe.

Do you now have any fear of travel or have you overcome any unease giving the way travel and terrorism is today?

Travel today is amazing. That I can get from Austin to Ireland in a day or from France to Austin in a day is breathtaking. But saying that, I am always uneasy at the start of a trip. And I don't think it fear of terrorism (from the incident in South America), it is more like the anticipation of a day of shuffling and being shuffled - the dislocation of the body. The movement across time zones. The many random encounters of people who are interesting, agitated, frightened, relieved. It is a lot to take in. I sometimes put on blinders so I don't see and feel it all. I wear dark glasses. As if there were too many suns. All so bright.





JACK EVERITT

BLOOD BROTHER

Following your stint at Sony and your first independent album you have just released a new album Red Revelations on Weston Boys. Tell us about that?

The Weston Boys label is brothers Dan and Matt Cohen. Dan is a really good guitar player who does session work in Nashville. He has made a couple of independent records on his own that have an Americana vibe. He was actually signed to Sony the same time that I was, he was with a band project. We met then and we randomly hooked up and decided to write a song a couple of years back. It turned out great. Dan had said "hey, we're starting this publishing company and you're getting out of your EMI deal so maybe you'd like to come along. So we signed a publishing deal. Then a couple of months later he said "maybe you should make a record as this True Blood thing is about to happen". So we did. It's been a really boutique, under the radar, thing. But it's by far the best business relationship that I've had.

Musically it seems to head more in the direction of where the song Bad Things was heading rather than some of the other songs on the first album.

The first album was made for country radio in America. I enjoyed some of that (album). Some of it I'm still proud of and some of the record I'd be embarrassed by, honestly. It was the best record that I could have made at that time though. I gave it my best shot. I've got no ill will towards Sony or anybody else. I'm a little too left of centre, I think, for that market. Once I accepted that I started to music exactly how I wanted to make it, knowing that it might fail miserably or it might succeed but to hell with it.

Do you think that as your first album was aimed at country radio that you are now associated with that market?

Over here they do. But most people in the States have no idea who I am. It still is kinda country. The song writing is still me in a room with guys like Dan or Chuck Prophet with two acoustic guitars. We still have that Nashville songcraft happening for us, I hope. There are a lot of great things about the Nashville country world that I want to retain. I'm not trying to go be a rock star or to be the "True Blood Guy" the rest of my life. That's not my goal. What I am trying to do is take the music some place different as opposed to trying to do a Kenny Chesney or Brad Paisley kind of record. I just want to make a Jace Everett kind of record. With my acoustic record Old New Borrowed Blues and with the new record I think I achieved that and I think that with this album I did that.

Any idea where the next one will go?

We've been writing a lot, particularly Dan and I and my wife Stephanie. We wrote half of *Red Revelations* and I guess

we may end up writing all this new record. Though I'll probably go out and write with Chuck some too. The songs are in the same vein but the production will probably be a little different. What I'm going to do is get my guys, the ones who played on this record, and go to a studio for 4 or 5 days and not look up until we're done. Then we can say "what does it sound like?". We're just trying to keep it as genuine and organic as possible.

How does budget affect that?

Well I have a ProTools rig at my house, as does Dan and one of my very best friends is Greg Droman who did *Bad Things* and he has one too so we can make an amazing album for \$15,000. Drums are the most expensive thing to record as you need good mikes and a great room. Plus a great player like Derek XX who played on my last record. It so much fun to play with sounds now and not be trying to get that commercial radio sound. That's expensive to get. We're not trying to do that anymore. The irony of that is we're selling more records now than we ever did. We make more money from now also as Dan and I own me and I trust him. It's nice (laughs).

The label is covering a lot of bases with the music you're putting out on Weston Boys.

Jace: We have Denitia Odigie. She's a singer/songwriter in her early twenties. A beautiful African/American girl she has a Jeff Buckley meets folk house vibe.

Dan: It has a neo-soul feel as well. It's very compelling.

Jace: She's doing real well and writes great songs, so were really excited about her. Our friend Matt King who is kind of associated with the label too. He has a record out called *Rube*. It's fantastic and we're hoping to come over and tour with him.

I think he did some work with Paul Deacon of the Mavericks.

Dan: Yeah, I think some of those tracks wound up on this. I've played with Paul some. They had worked with Jai Joyce on that project and he ended up producing Matt's solo. It's an incredible record. I'm not just saying that because I have three songs on it either (laughs).

Jace: He's very bluegrass, very hillbilly - but hillbilly as it would be if it came out in 2012. He had an album on Atlantic, a mainstream country album, a few years back but his writing has taken a different direction.

Dan: We also been scouting out since we've been here, looking for projects to produce. We want to find some young UK or Irish kids to work with.

Jace: We've done nine or so shows with the full band and then we're doing twelve that will just be the two

of us. It's economy related as Ireland got it's ass kicked just as the States did. And so did the UK and you can afford to bring a full band to a lot of places, you can afford to pay for that many hotel rooms. The cool thing is, over in this part of the world anyway, people will come out to see a stripped down version of it. Also I never understood those band who go out and try to emulate the album exactly as it is on the record. I think "why bother". Send over a picture and put on the CD. I wasn't touring much, maybe a couple of dates a month on average up until the *True Blood* thing happened and that, obviously, peaked some interest in me. It started to pick up a little bit, but the States don't have the kind of listening rooms you have in Europe. It's a much more vast country. Here we can play 18 to 20 dates in a month in rooms that are between 50 and 100 people and get the work done. It's tough to do that in the States as you have sometimes an eight hour drive between gigs. The difference between a pop star and a musician, who wants a long term career, is touring. What we are doing is physically difficult and mentally draining. But if you're not willing to do this then you don't really have a right to make records and expect people to give a damn. You have to take it to the people. We're very grateful that people will have us and we will keep coming back till they run us out. Which may happen (laughs).

How has the advent of digital been for you?

Jace: We do the iTunes and TuneCore and other digital mediums. We make better margins with digital sales but we also pressed vinyl on this album. We pressed a limited amount and we've sold it all. The digital thing and the internet is great but it also makes everything so expendable and I'm guilty of that too. I probably have 1000gs of music I've bought over the years on my hard drive but it doesn't call to me. If I look at vinyl albums or CDs I see something that I want to listen to. There's something about that tactile feeling. With an album you were engaged as mid way through you had to get up and go over and physically turn the album over to the other side. It forces you to take part.

Dan: Also you had to listen to the whole side as it was intended. Because we can spend an extraordinary amount of time planning out how the album will run, the track order and everything. As does everybody else. Where as now its just track three and then on to another record.

Jace: You see with the Sony record that was not me being able to make an album as an album it was some songs I wanted to cut and some songs the label wanted cut and then trying to piece them together. With *Red Revelations* I was able to only cut what I

wanted to do and sequence it like it was a movie that you were going to watch. We tacked on *Bad Things* at the end and we did that as a complete ploy to get to get people to buy the record and I'm not ashamed of that at all. They actually reprinted the Sony album now and put it back in the stores... bastards... but that's fine.

Maybe well start to to see package shows coming over like in he past?

Jace: Well that's how the Weston Boys want to do it. Dan has a band called The Levees who do this fantastic Louisiana swamp rock so we'd love to get Matt King and Denitia and myself together.

Dan: This is something that Robert Reynolds (The Mavericks) have talked about doing, getting a package tour of some of the Weston Boys artists. You try to save by having one drum kit, one drummer. But those guys are tired at the end of the night.

Is Europe a priority for you?

Very honestly it's my focus. My priority is Europe, UK and Ireland. My son lives in the South of France. I have a real love for the EU and I love being here and I could see myself living here at some point. I still want to plant my flag there in America. The audiences here have been accepting of me for a long time. They've been small but they've been fervent. I think that they're more interested here in hearing music as opposed of going to a show. It's a slightly more mature audience, which I like, as I'm not getting any younger. I don't write pop ditties where I scream at the top of my lungs because it might be a hit and I can't do that in ten years. So I try and write songs that I can play by myself if I have to. I learned that from Guy Clark, he taught me a few good lessons.



Jace Everett and Dan Cohen



Diana Jones

"I WRITE ORIGINAL MUSIC
BUT IT'S INFLUENCED BY
APPALACHIAN AND OLD-TIME MUSIC"

When you record do you do it and then license the finished material or are you working with a particular label?

With the last two albums I made them and then found someone to distribute them. The album I did with Jonathan (Byrd) is something we did together and we sell that off the stage and off my website (that album is Byrd Jones "Radio Soul"). The next album I recorded myself and Proper Records in London offered me a deal with it in the UK and US. Now I'm with them and we're doing the next record together. Which is nice because now I don't have to do it and wonder and it's a much more comfortable place to be.

You produced both of your albums, is that a part of the process you enjoy?

I can't imagine making a record without, at least, being a co-producer. You never say never. I mean the right producer could come along who I felt I wanted to throw myself into their hands. But, at the moment, I feel so attached about taking a song through the process and so much becomes apparent as you do that. It's kind of like painting on a blank canvas, you never know what things will happen to you while your doing it. So I love being in that process with someone, or on my own, because when the unexpected happens you can grab it and it feels right. Whereas if someone said "I want to put a big dobro part on that" that might not be how I see it.

When you have written a song to you know how you want it to sound or do you approach it with an open mind?

I think that I probably have something in the back of my mind but when I'm writing I'm very focused on the story and how to tell it in a way that feels true to me. So I'm focused so much on that that I'm not really thinking of instrumentation per se, until after.

Where do you find the raw material for those story songs?

Well *Pony* came from reading books about that time when Native-American kids were put in settlement schools. So I was actually reading a lot about that when I was writing the song. Not because I wanted to write a song but because I was actually interested in the subject. A couple of months later the song came out. Sometimes I'll just hear a story from a person, catch a snippet, you know. I look for those little nuggets of things that are undeniably true. A word or two together that make me think I can't live without that phrase.

The Harlan Howard approved method...

Yeah, God bless Harlan, what a writer.

You're currently living in Nashville, are you a part of that East Nashville music community?

I love that part of the town. I'm always discovering new people there which is cool. I'm not there very often but I find that when I am it's a place that treats me well. I moved there after being in Austin, Texas for awhile and I was a little nervous as Austin really is a musicians town. It's not a label town or a business town, it's about the song and the music. So I moved to Nashville with a little bit of trepidation. Thinking "I don't know if this is my kind of place" but there so much there. You could be a Christian writer and move there and have a career. Or old-timey stuff, or contemporary, or country or rock. It much more diverse that people realise. The old-time community is very alive. Gillian Welch and David Rawlings have open their studio. Ketch Secor and Old Crow Medicine Show guys they're always around. You never know who you're going to get to see and that's wonderful. I've become friends with Ketch and we've done some stuff together. There's a place called the Five Spot and on Wednesdays they have an old-time session which start out very old-timey, the old guard, you know that bring an instrument that's not appropriate then the jazz guys came and honky-tonk stuff got played and, so, you never knew who you find playing.

Like the Station Inn nights?

Exactly.

Ronnie: I really want to see the Time Jumpers there. Man. have you not seen them? They're just so good. And that's also an evening when you don't know who might just show up. I've been there many a Monday.

Duke Levine has worked with you on your two albums, he appears to be a key part of the sound.

He's amazing. We just let him set up all of his instruments... I remember the first day recording with him and I got there at about 9 in the morning, pretty early for a musician, and he'd been there since 7.30 ...had every instrument you could imagine, it looked like a music store. They were on stands and perfectly lined up. We just played him tracks, and while I had an idea in my head, you really can't do any better than he does as he's such a maestro. He'll say "how about a little banjo or a little mandola on this". He just grabs things and adds something really beautiful.

Ronnie: Where do people slot you in in terms of genre?

I say that I write original music but it's influenced

by Appalachian and old-time music. My direct influences are people that no one has ever heard of. The Lomax recordings, recorded in their living rooms, on porches or in prison. I'm a huge fan of that. Playing and singing because you have to, because it defines your life. Which is why I do it whether I ever step on a stage or not. I'd still do it.

You're mainly a person who writes on your own?

I find that I'm a stronger writer mostly on my own, but every now and then I'll find a co-writer, someone that it makes sense to write a particular song with. But I'm not a Music Row type of writer. I haven't tried to be that. That's not why I'm doing it. I maybe could get talked into it at some point if it seemed to make sense but it doesn't now. My songs are the way I make sense of my own existence. It's what I see and what I hear. *Soldier Girl* is an example. When so many were going and coming back from Iraq nobody was dealing with the woman, it was about the men. No one was talking about it so in my small way I wanted to shine a light on something like that, even just for myself. Getting three verse and a chorus that would help me understand it in my own way. That was interesting as I did get some e-mails from women in Iraq who the song had made it to and some thanked me for giving them a voice. It's a small thing that's not going to change the world but it shines a light on compassion.

Would performing a song like that be more difficult in the Bush era?

God no. I'd have done it with more conviction. It was tough being in Europe at that time, having to explain that I didn't vote for him and my friends didn't vote for him. On my first solo tour in the UK. It was my first time and I was a little nervous and my booking agent said "all you have to do is mention Obama and you'll be fine". So he was in the audience and I did and the whole audience applauded (laughs).

You usually play solo but do you also do gigs with a full band when you can?

I used to travel with Bo Stapelton and he guitar mandolin and he sang. That was really fun and I have had different band configuration when I've played in Nashville. I played with Bernie Marsden, of Whitesnake, the other night in Buckingham and that was fun. I have a little 1930 tenor guitar that I play and that changes the guitar sound so that it's not just one thing all night. With this last album *Better Things Will Come* so many of the songs were character driven and were stories so that it was nice to have that intimate

feeling and when someone else is on stage with me the attention is not as direct. It's more the attention and the feeling that works.

Have you compiled songs your next album yet?

I have a lot of songs, yeah. They're not recorded yet and I'm going to take some time to write and they look at recording around May for a February release next year. I'll be writing to see if there's anything else that I can shake out. I love those old records where people created a world and you stepped into it and you were sure of it. First step to the end. You knew where you were. I think that there's a way of putting songs together that can do that. I love it when it happens. I have a lot of songs but it's how they exist together as a group of eleven or so songs that make it happen. That's what I'm looking for rather than any particular song has to get recorded. A song might fit the next record rather than his one.

This gig in Whelans is your first time playing in Dublin although you were living here a while back.

I came here for a month once to listen. I went to every session I could go to. I think we only took one night off. I was dead when I got home but it was great. Dublin has a special place in my heart because at that time I was making jewellery which was a little business that I had that did really well but I hated doing it. No, I didn't hate it but it wasn't my calling. I was doing it at that point halfway and I was doing the music halfway because I need the jewellery to fund the music. But after coming to Dublin and after those four weeks I went back home and never made another piece of jewellery. I had decided that I had to throw myself into this wholeheartedly. It's amazing when you do that how you will get gigs. You will make ends meet. Because you have to. It pushed me to a different level. So it's really nice to be back here and to play.

Ronnie: Any particular Irish artists you admire?

Sinead O'Connor, I've always loved her. I love her own songs and also the old traditional songs that she did and made her own. My heart's in that because I love to do that myself with some of the old ballads. That resonates for me a lot. Christy Moore is incredible. Luka Bloom too. I met him when I was here. The Chieftains, Clannad. Over the years there has been many.

The mighty king of love

PRILL
LILL

SO LONG, IT'S BEEN GOOD TO KNOW YOU

Can you tell us a little about your background as the website doesn't say to much?

That's all bullshit anyway. Ok where do I start?

Tom: Start with your first professional gig.

"Oh you mean when I was Carolina's youngest male escort?". It was all down hill after that anyway.

Well, I started out on a tennis racquet like everybody else. The baby sitters used to bring Buddy Holly records over, we're going back to 1957 here.

Once I saw The Beatles the tennis racquet went as I wasn't to gone on the tennis racquet so I switched to drums. Then I got a gig on television as Eddie Munster. No. It was with Clyde Moody/Homer Briarhopper. Her was a child star too. He had had a record out in the '30s "I Am What I Am", he was one of the Briarhoppers. You might know those guys? Try and keep up as this is important stuff! (laughs). I'd go down before school and we'd play all the country classics, basically the tail end of the '60s, before country music took a wrong, wrong turn. Ronnie Milsap is the father of that - well according to Robbie Fulks anyway. So playing drums was my first professional gig at \$65 a week I think. We played everything, Homer would sing and Cylde would do the hits, he had actual hits - "The Shenandoah Waltz" was one we did. Everything was going great then I bought a Jimi Hendrix record - jesus christ, that was it, my career came to a screeching halt. One disaster after another until I put out this new record, my first post-humous release (laughs) "So Long It's Been Good To Know Ya". Now me and young Tom (Mason) over there we're getting the girls, the money. People are even calling us back on the telephone. But having Richard Bennett there in our corner, that helps. He's like "lets get Gillian Welch and David Rawlings, my dear friends, over for this, they'll be over Tuesday for Checkers". Then there they are and they came in a sang on the song "Three Faces In The Window" then went on their merry way.

"The Might King Of Love". That's a fairly ironic title - but if you want to believe it!

The first two records were alright too. I was on Shenachie Records, a great label. We're still talking to each other.

Tom: What about the missing years between 17 and the first release?

Phil: I was writing all these Phil Lee songs as the set list hasn't changed that much since 1972. Then those Knack guys with the skinny tie came in and when I was wearing a cowboy hat. I was playing every juke joint, playing everywhere. I made one record as a drummer, on a fly by night label, that was released in Germany - didn't do so well. I was flopping around like a flounder out of water. Then we started to make the first album and Richard (Bennett) came along and said "Just stop, before you hurt yourselves", let me get involved. So we started recording with my money, which ran out and then Richard who is notoriously wise with money was in too deep so he said "Jeez, we can't stop now. So he started paying for it and he first record cost about \$7,000 to finish. We sent it around to all the labels and nobody wanted to touch it. Bloodshoot said it wasn't Bloodshot enough, the big labels said " You got to be kidding". But Shenachie said that it was fine. The put it out and they gave us our money. They gave us a three record deal and they've put out two records. Randall Grass said that "we like what you do and that's why we hired you". But it got to the point where they said if I was dead sales would be better. The numbers don't lie. I said get off my back I'm doing the best I can (much laughter). Everytime I asked for tour support they'd say "we gave an old man a record deal, shut the hell up, you're not getting any more money out of us". So after two records they said that the Americana thing is not working for us, they also had a friend of mine Kevin Gordon on the label,

so they went back to what they had been doing, which was old blues and easy listening.

On the new album there is the song Sonny George, which while it's not about the artist of that name was it inspired by him in any way?

Should we tell the truth here? I love Sonny George. I had told Sonny that I was using his name on a truckin' song. He's a great, solid guy and I love him. I was doing a show with Jerry Phillips, Sam Phillips son, and he had said to me "have you talked to Sonny lately" and I said yeah, I spoke to him a couple of months ago and Jerry said that "Sonny has lost his mind". I mean we used to go out for hamburgers and Sonny would be with us and he go get a head of cabbage and sit and eat it. Now they tell me that he's let his hair grow and that he's dangerous, they tell me 'cus I'm afraid to go and see him. I don't think I had anything to do with it but he might be thinking "I killed these kids". (In the song the trucker, of the same name, in the song loses control of his rig and ends up killing some school children). Eddie Angel was the last one of our friends to talk to him. We were all going to go over en masse, with Eddie and George (Brad fute) to see him but our friend Jimmy Lester said "if we going over to see him he'll shoot us". Sonny was a good looking guy but he's really let himself go. All he does now is watch evangelical television and eat chocolate Snickers bars. That's what I've heard. I get e-mails from place like France saying "that you for clearing up the mystery" and I think "should I tell them?". I just named the song after him, he was a truck driver, but I don't think he was happy about me using the name. We'll its a good explanation but it's not true. I make things up all the time in songs even if they're real people. They don't do any of this

stuff - I don't think. It sad because Sonny always seem a stable kind of guy, he was bitter or depressed sometimes, like the rest of us. He's thought that the deal with Knox and Jerry Phillips was going be something, and it could have been but... We had always intended to do some stuff together.

You draw from a lot of different sources for your music, did you want it to be so diverse?

Everything. On this new record I have this kinda Jimmy Durante song. We were doing "I See Lovers Everyplace" which was in your regular run-of-the-mill A minor and he showed me how to make this chord and it changed my life. It makes me seem like someone with real talent instead of the hack I am. A demented. We got a show tune on there. I've never been big on show tunes I gotta tell you, but it's a cheatin' shanty. I'm not doing something big like redefining country music with a cheatin' shanty but it has yet to catch on in a big way...

I mention the "Rogue's Gallery" an album of shanty and pirate songs...

Those bastards, maybe it did catch on.

Everywhere I can draw from is ok, because I'm not on the clock, rather I'm sorta racing against the clock. I mean I didn't get a record deal until I was 50 so I was by that time I was off the hook because "making it" was a prepostorus idea, it's never going to happen. So it was more "great God almighty, I'm free at last". So I quit listening to people and taking advice. and just did what I bloody well pleased. I think this'll work and then it's up to Richard to make it all flow as one thing. The great Richard Bennett - I can't say enough good things about him.

Do you play locally at all in Nashville?

More so since the record came out and I've got

a manager who forces me into these little situations. You can go to Chicago and make 500 bucks or Norm's River Roadhouse and have some fun, Norm's is a good place for me to play. Douglas Corner is another place. But career moves are not to be had for people like me, though I was on the cover of Nashville Scene. The cover they used was with throwing knives and an inflatable doll. I was thinking "they won't use that picture, and it was the cover!"

So the careers gone?

No, in Nashville they think I'm through. They say "man, I thought he was out of the picture".

Were do you live in Nashville?

East Nashville. Dangerous part of town, you might get hit by a flying drumstick or some wretched folk singer might come up and say "I've got one you might consider" (laughs). Now it's trendy. George Bradfute was really the pioneer there. He was over there when it was "what the hell are you doing over here". I live on the river, as does Tom. I have a river boat in my backyard. Tom lives on a golf course. So we look like we're doing ok. The Family Wash is the current place to go. I don't go much as I like to be working as much as I can.

When you record do you have to do it over an extended period of time?

This time thanks to Peter Barbour, the owner of Phil Lee Enterprises we were able to catch Richard, George Bradfute and his Tone Chaparral studio and some money at the same time. We got it all done quickly, as we have all worked together so much, though in the last week or so Richard had to go out on the road with Mark Knopfler. George was doing the mixing anyway so that was ok. It was seamless this time. The last album Richard

had to go away in the middle and we carried on but it worked out ok, but I wouldn't want to go into the studio without those two guys, they're a great combination. They're like enablers in that anything I imagine they can do. It's like two George Martins. I'd say do you remember Telstar and George would reach over a hit a button. I didn't bring any



guitars they'd just hand me something and get the right sound.

Did you try to approach different labels this time?

Not this time. We had our own record label Palookaville and it was almost like the movie The Producers, we'd said "this is never going to work" but all of a sudden it's working. We're like shoveling coal on the Titanic, it's like I got some bad news "we got another record deal"! There's been so many launch parties for this record and we're not done yet. Tanzania is interested

in the record (laughs). The last one came out around 9/11 which sort of finished it off. We were playing gigs round then and like the hillbillies we are we went down there and there was still dust in the air. It was like walking on the moon. The funny aspect of it was the bassist and drummer, who will go unnamed, and the drummer said that he'd gotten "the anthrax". "I got it man" I told he didn't have it but then the other guy said that he'd got it too. So one guy had "the anthrax" for three days. It was bizarre, but there was laughter and it was like a "Night Of The Living Dead" thing.

You mentioned wearing skinny ties earlier but before that were you a punk fan?

I loved punk. But did it effect me? No. I worked with Jack Nitzsche on a soundtrack with The Germs and Darby Crash used to sit on a banana seat bicycle with flat tires. I was such an anomaly at that point as that was before alt.country. I was just doing what I did and I had a small deal with Casablanca Records, who had Donna Summers and Kiss, it was a production deal. But it didn't work. So it slowly came round and now were doing Americana, which is something I can latch onto. But were folk rock this week (laughs).

Tom: But during the punk days we put on shows we ever we could and this is not a lot different what were doing now, playing house concerts and everywhere we can. As regards energy I saw Waylon Jennings at Max's Kansas City and that was the rock-ingist think. All the hipsters were thinking "who is this greasy dangerous looking dude". It's about honesty.

Phil: Honesty eh. Jeez, hold on I got to go write some songs (laughs). I thought it was about bullshit and making some money (more laughs).



Tom: Were you around for that California country thing?

Phil: I left the day that started. I moved to North Carolina and started doing shows for the Hell's Angels, which were extremely lucrative at the time. But it was like one grisly gig after another. Now we have a niche and I'm always telling people that the economic crisis has turned us into folk singers. The new record was going to be folky as that's what we set out to do.

Tom: It's a good showcase for the songs as you can hear the lyrics. No drums to fight against.

Phil: It's a good time, a good time for older people.

Ron: Who do you currently listen to?

People give me CDs and I say if you put Dean Martin's picture on it you stand a chance of me listening to it. I'll say I like track three the best of all. I was going to say Tom Mason but what he does is total crap (laughs). Everyone's liking his record and I like to give the young guys a step-up but... I like jug band music.

I
play
music
to
connect
with
people

**JESS
KLEIN**



Your move to Austin seems to be a positive one on many counts. Do you plan to live there now for a while and why do you find it better than the other towns you have lived in?

My plan is to stay in Austin for the time being. When I moved here, it was either gonna be Austin or Ireland, and I couldn't afford Ireland. But to me they are similar places. Both share a love of live music - that's what drew me to Austin - I went to see a show at the Saxon Pub, and everyone was up dancing - they were so into it. It was a band of Austin-based all-stars, called the Resentments. The Saxon is packed every week, and every week people get up and dance. I wanted to live somewhere where that happened.

Over the years you have lived in different places, including Jamaica, how have these moves affected your writing?

I do often need a change of scene to get my writing going. I'm a very visual person. I'm hoping ultimately to live in Texas during the winters and Ireland during the summers, so I'll never get bored.

On this tour you spent some time in Ireland, how was that?

I always try to get a little extra time off in Ireland - it's the only place in the world where I want to stay up all night just to talk to people, because the stories are so great. It really feeds me as a writer, and as a human. Being in Ireland puts me more in touch with my own humanity.

Your schemes to help you to do what you do including borrowing or renting a car to tour in the States and your "Levels of Love" program has interesting ways to help maintain the musicians life. Have they been effective?

The "Show the Love" plan actually funded my entire autumn tour this year. I feel incredibly blessed that people would send in their money just to keep me on the road - even if it's just ten extra dollars on top of the cost of a CD. It makes me feel I'm part of something larger and that it matters to these folks that I keep playing music. So in that way it's been very effective. I play music to connect with people, but I write alone, and often play alone, and sometimes travel alone. So it's really exciting that people would reach out in return.

The descriptor of folk troubadour, on your website, sums up what you do on the road but

your albums paint a bigger picture. The move to Austin resulted in your most Americana sounding album, is that a natural result of that move and will you continue that direction in the future?

I wonder too what my next album will sound like. The rootsy Austin vibe of "Bound to Love" felt pretty natural to me, so I suspect that will continue.

As an independent artist to you now find it harder or easier, with the internet, to get your music across to your audience?

I'm kind of a Luddite to be honest. But I like writing to people on Facebook. I think my label would say the internet has helped. I like when people write in because it makes me feel connected to them, and less like I'm up on a pedestal somewhere.

You have received critical acclaim for your albums but that hasn't translated into massive sales. Do you still have any desire to go down the route of compromise that a deal with a major label might entail?

I don't really know what kind of compromise a major label deal would entail. I think I'm capable of making music a lot of people can relate to. I'm interested in making music that says something to my soul and to other peoples'. I don't think that's incompatible with selling a lot of albums.

As a songwriter are there areas of your writing that you want to develop?

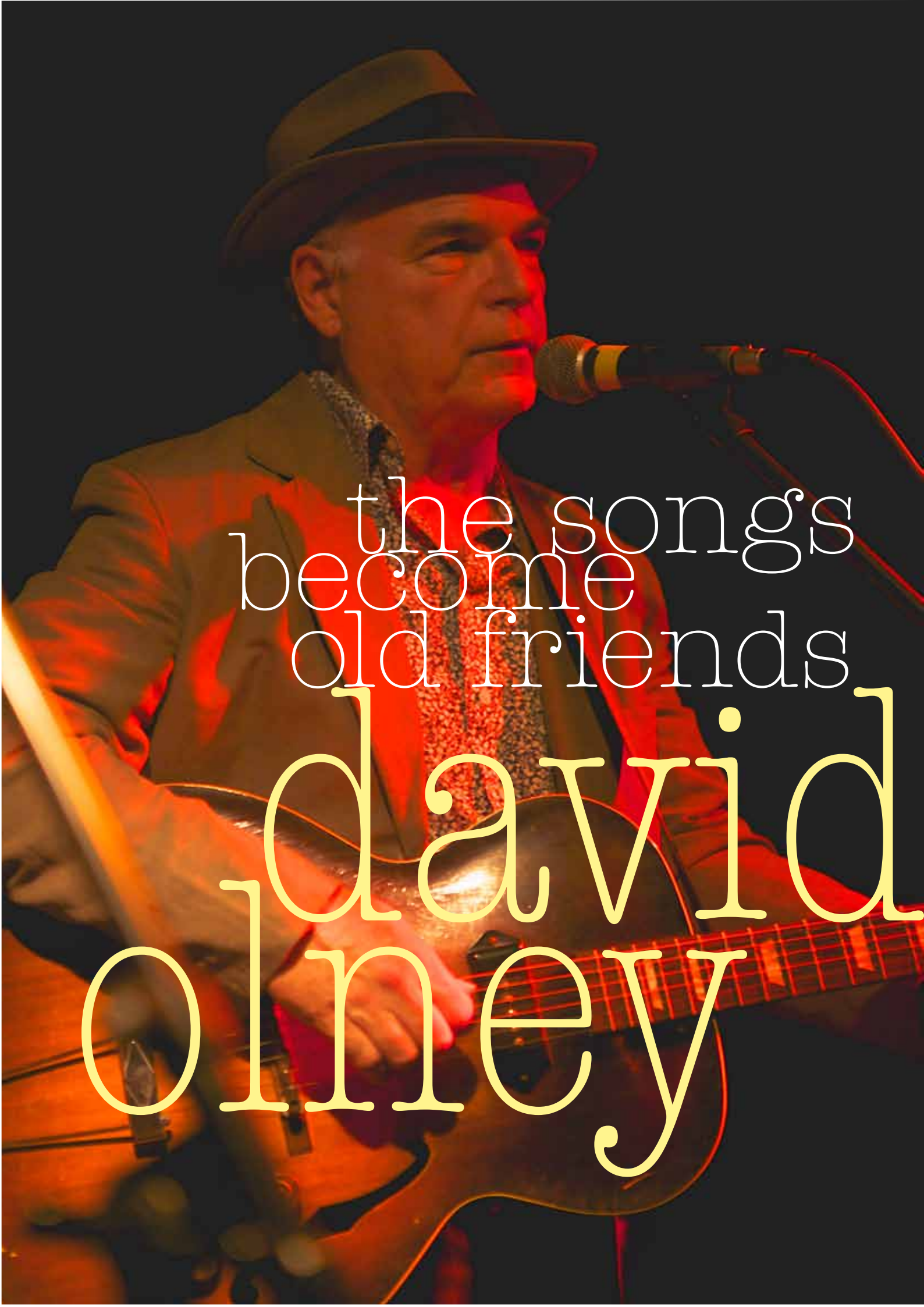
I've just been invited to be part of the rotating cast of the "Ribbon of Highway" Woody Guthrie tribute tour, and in learning some of his songs, I've definitely become more interested in how simple music about people's social struggles can be so timeless. Songs like "Pastures of Plenty" about the dust bowl era workers' migration are still so moving to sing. He was a genius.

When did you first discover the gift?

I was overheard singing in the shower in my college dorm room and encouraged to audition for the college a cappella group.

Do you have any plans to return to Europe this year?

Yes, I'm making plans to be back in Ireland and England either this summer or this fall. Also, the album seems to be getting tons of radio play in Belgium and Netherlands, so hopefully I'll get to go there too.



the songs
become
old friends

david
o'neely

You have just released a new album *Dutchman's curve* can you tell us something about that?

The way I work is you make the CD then you go out and play it. I don't follow the charts or anything like that. The landscape is so strange out there now, in a good way, people buy the CD if they like the live shows. It's basically just keeping on keeping on. Doing what I do. A lot of the songs are ones I wrote with John Hadley. *Covington Girl* is one I wrote with John and Sergio (Webb). I say it's more of the same.

Are gig still your main source of CD sales?

The only part that I care about is selling them at the gigs because that's an indication of if people are liking what you do. It's the only part that I can keep control of. The rest of it is beyond my reach. But because the big labels are so tanked out you're in control of what you do more than before. There's not a whole lot of money in it. For the other aspects of distribution I get together with my manager Marie Sachs and we work it out ourselves. It's a more 'frontier' kind of attitude. Before the internet it was "why would someone in Lincoln, Nebraska much less in Brighton, England get a CD by someone they've never heard of?" Now with the internet you can be playing someplace and some holds up a phone and records it and it's up on YouTube. I don't know what to think but I suppose that that's the way it's supposed to go as they probably wouldn't be taking a picture unless they liked it.

How different is what you're doing now to 10 or 20 years ago?

Well twenty years ago I felt like I was under a lot of pressure to get famous. But that wasn't particularly going to happen, so I learned to live with that. When I realised that I could do what ever I want it was liberating. But getting married and having family meant that I wasn't going to work about the music business... I mean I still don't discount it but you know that there are things that are more important. So, yeah, I'm a lot more relaxed but I don't like to think that I've lost my edge in playing or writing.

In terms of the writing do you come up with the core idea first?

We do it in different ways but usually I try to have some things strung together for an idea. John is great, there's nothing too weird for him. I can come in and say whatever and he'll say "that's cool". If I went to a regular country writer I'd probably be laughed out of the room. It's a compliment that John takes the time to write with me. We've written a lot of songs together and it's been fun. When Sergio and I go through Oklahoma we always stop at John's place and see if we can get a song going. He's doing some short fiction writing now as well.

Is writing short fiction something you would like to do also?

I wrote one story and they put it in this anthology called *Amplified* (it is subtitled "Fiction from leading Alt.country, Indy Rock, Blues and Folk musicians" and includes a interesting range of musicians and is available on Amazon). I'd never done anything like that. I wrote the whole thing down and it got into the book so I thought "Oh, better write another one" but I'm still waiting for the next one. I'd like to do more of that. A lot of times when I'm writing songs I think of these odd scenarios and I try to put them in a songs and it doesn't always work so I'd like to have another way to explore that. In a song you don't have to describe the scenery. There's so much stuff that unsaid and that's what hit me writing the story out. I mean I don't really notice things other than the people in a room. When we leave here I wouldn't be able to tell you what colour the walls were. But in a story you have to describe that detail. That's a skill that I would have to develop. There's a whole American thing were it almost had a trauma in fiction writing to separate itself, in a literary way, from England. Twain and the best American writers were in their way to be the best English writers, then someone like Hemingway, with his tourist writing, did something quite different from someone like Dickens. That lends itself to songwriting because in songwriting you're constantly trying to sift things down where in fiction you often need to expand on the detail.

Do you have favourite venues?

We played this venue The Loveless Barn. which is just outside Nashville, about 10 miles out of town. WSM is sponsoring the show there and Eddie Stubbs introduces and Jim Lauderdale is the main MC. It's got some real cool bands, playing roots stuff. The Loveless Cafe was a place where people visiting went out to have breakfast. Then they got the idea to built the venue. Every Wednesday they get maybe 400 people. People like Peter Rowan and The Red Mollys play there. I think that this Loveless Barn thing is closer to what the Opry was back in the 40s and 50s. In terms of recent gigs playing The Loveless Barn is about the best fun I've had. There was a time when if people left a gig you would get your feathers ruffled or there'd be a bunch of totally drunk people but then, for me, playing the songs right is a defence mechanism. My first obligation is to the song and way distant to that is the audience. I'm certainly glad when they're there but if they're not there I still have to play the song. So then if the songs go ok then, basically, it's a good gig.

Do the songs develop when you play them through the years?

Yeah, Guil (Owen), this guy I write with, he came out and heard us play and we were doing songs from *Dutchman's Curve* and he has

pretty critical ears and he said "I listened to If I Were You on the CD and I thought it was a good song but hearing it live you seem to be singing it different". And it's true when you're singing it live there are certain lines which you can get deeper into and sometimes you'd be playing a song, for maybe the thousandth time... there's this song *Soldier Of Misfortune* and I been singing this line the one way and you can be singing but think about something different and I got to this line and it came out completely different and I thought that that was my unconscious telling me that that was the way that line was meant to go. It's like the guy inside your head is going "you know that's a pretty good song but you never did get that line right". Some things that I have recorded. for instance the original version of *Titanic* on *Eye Of The Storm* it says "the drunkard's at the bar drinking with good reason" and then at some point when I'm singing it I changed it to "the Captain's at the bar". You would expect a drunk to be drinking at the bar but the Captain of the Titanic - that's bad news! (laughs). That was some much a better line so I'm going to have to record it again sometime and do it right. You get used to singing the songs and they become old friends.

Ronnie: How do you handle songs requests?

Well if people yell something out like *Deeper Well*, *Jerusalem Tomorrow* or *Titanic* I'll do them as I enjoy playing those. *Deeper Well* is a part of this production that we do but it's also nice to give it a rest now and then.

With songwriters the music seems to be buried deep in the psyche even when some other faculties fail...

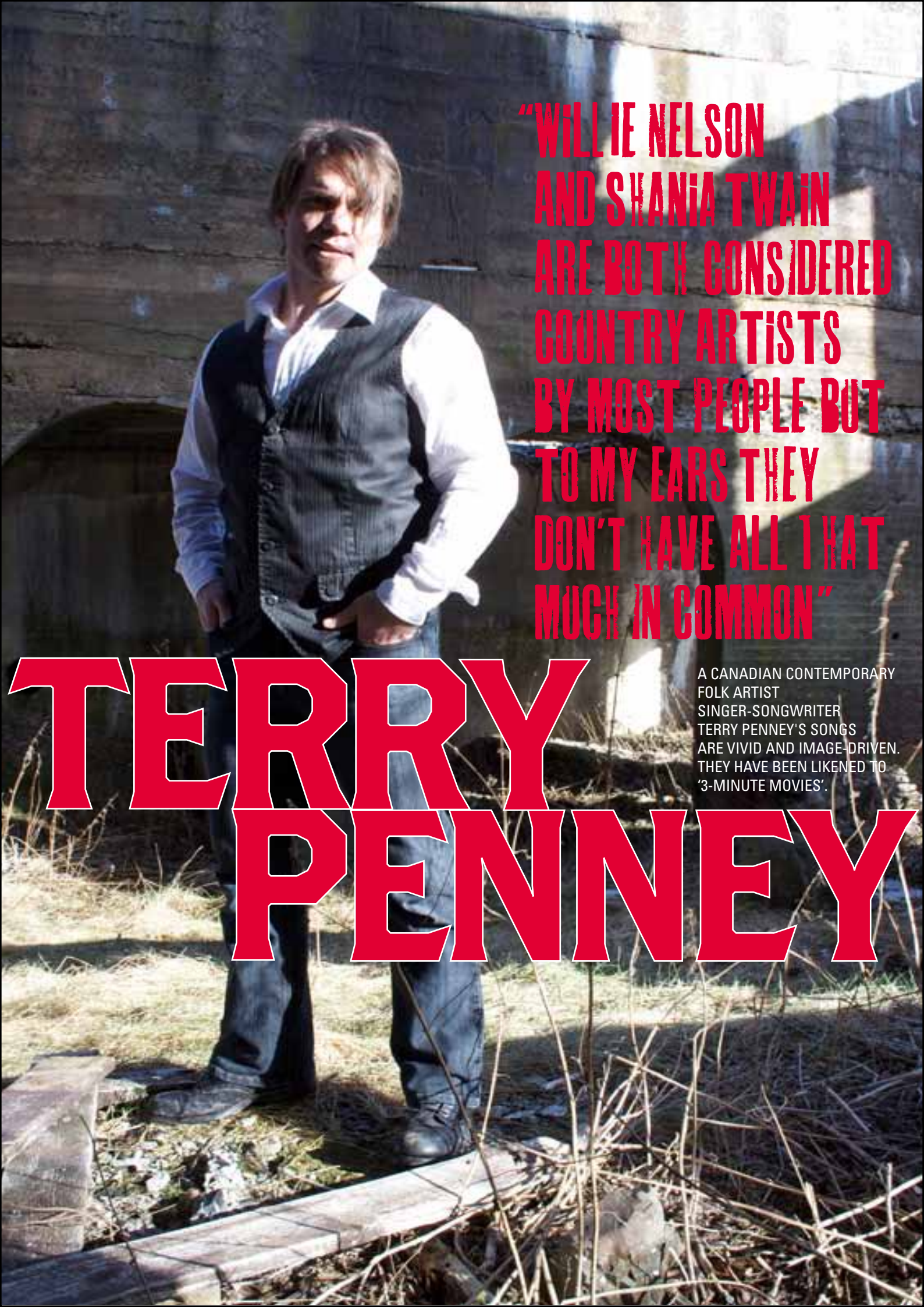
You know Victor M. His mother was in an old people's home and he was staying in the house he grew up in and as she was not going to live long as she had pretty severe alzhimers so he was going in and sitting with her and some friends too, and I did it a couple of times, and you think what are you going to talk about and she mentioned that she had sung in the choir in church. And something simple was played, like *Amazing Grace*. This was a woman who would forget who we were, what decade it was. Victor would poke his head in and she would think it was his dad but when you start playing some old hymn and she was singing harmony. Yes, music is deeply imbedded.

The concept of, and this has gone out the window now, stuff like the Beatles who were really good hit so many people but now if you can get one person out of 500 to be really into what you're doing that's probably pretty good. Now with the internet it's becoming easier

to find that person. But the ones that come to hear how it sounded on the record they're going to leave, but you probably want them to leave as they won't enjoy it. It's the label who doesn't want them to leave. A lot of Americana you have to accept that what you do on the record you are not going to be able to afford to do it onstage, so it's got to be different. When we played in Nashville Jack Irwin, who plays on the album, was playing drums and Dave Symour was playing bass. So when you're working up the songs you say "listen to the songs but don't feel that you have to play what's on there". The most fun is when everyone finds their own way to do the song with their own take on it. I can keep the lyrics pretty much consistent and if I take care of that then there's plenty of room to manoeuvre. When we went over the songs we did it a lot to get what the arrangement was and they when you go out you start to push the envelope a little.

***Jerusalem Tomorrow*, was that an easy song to write, to define the character in the song?**

I know what he's going to do but it surprises me every time he does it. I was writing the lyrics at the time of the scandals with the televangelists. I was watching a lot of re-runs of *Gunsmoke* and there was one were a guy came into town and claimed he could make it rain, so I was noodling and I wrote down about this guy who said "I could really tell a lie". And I thought maybe he could be a snake oil salesman or something like that but I kind of ran out of steam there so then I thought maybe he's a religious guy but it was in the wild west and I could figure out how to move it along. I had him in the desert so I thought I'll move the desert someplace else and I tried it in China and there wasn't a whole lot there but then I put him in the Middle East and Shazam I thought "here we go". This guy was like an old Polaroid and all of a sudden it develops and you think "there he is". Don't know why I came and I'm looking at 10 people in the audience and thinking "why am I doing this?". But I'll tell you a song that really got me was Townes' Pancho and Lefty. That song takes place in a mythic Mexico, whatever. Then he say Lefty split for Ohio and the word split basically splits the song and suddenly it's not back then it's right now and I think I had that in mind when I said the guy who come through last month was something else. Something else is a phase that puts it in a different place. In Chaucer's *Canturbury Tales* there's guy going round with relics and he says that it's "saint so in so". I hadn't read this until I'd written *Jerusalem Tomorrow* and it's the same guy. It's really eriee to me how close that guy was to my guy. You can almost see the guy.

A photograph of Terry Penney, a man with shoulder-length brown hair, wearing a white long-sleeved shirt and a dark grey vest. He is standing outdoors in front of a rough stone wall, with his hands in his pockets. The ground is covered with dry grass and some debris.

**"WILLIE NELSON
AND SHANIA TWAIN
ARE BOTH CONSIDERED
COUNTRY ARTISTS
BY MOST PEOPLE BUT
TO MY EARS THEY
DON'T HAVE ALL THAT
MUCH IN COMMON"**

TERRY PENNEY

A CANADIAN CONTEMPORARY
FOLK ARTIST
SINGER-SONGWRITER
TERRY PENNEY'S SONGS
ARE VIVID AND IMAGE-DRIVEN.
THEY HAVE BEEN LIKENED TO
'3-MINUTE MOVIES'.

You have stated that you have always had a penchant for the past, why do you think that is?

It's hard to say why I'm intrigued by the past, but I've been fascinated with it my whole life. There was an innocence back then that's sorely lacking today and thoughts of those simpler times always give me a warm fuzzy feeling.

The 1950s in particular have always been a point of interest for me. It seemed like a time of great optimism. I guess World War 2 was done, the Great Depression was over and things were looking up. That "feel good" attitude was reflected in the styles and music of what became known as the "Fabulous Fifties".

It's that candy-coated version of the post-war years with its jukeboxes and tail-finned cars that I've always been drawn to. Of course, the reality was that behind all that optimism the red threat loomed, oppression was everywhere and the world on a large scale was a mess just like it is today. But everyone needs a happy place to go from time to time and the past is usually my destination.

Also, those who have fought for Canada overseas in world wars hold a fascination, is that a subject you will return to?

I've always held war veterans in the highest regard. Both my Grandfather and Great Uncle fought with the Royal Newfoundland Regiment in World War I and I also had an Uncle who was with the Newfoundland Forestry Unit in Scotland in World War II. With that family history, those who have served have always been close to my heart.

To compound my interest, about 15 years ago I befriended a veteran named Les Ginn in my home town of Lewisporte. He was a very inspiring gentleman. The stories he related to me about his time overseas were riveting and heartbreaking and really opened my eyes to what those guys went through over there. I wrote a song called *Normandy in Newfoundland* for Mr. Ginn which was included on my second release in 2001. There are also two war songs on my new album, *Town That Time Forgot*. And another already completed for my forthcoming CD. The response to these songs has been overwhelming. I've heard from war vets and their families from all over the world both through emails and phone calls. In addition to being contacted by veterans of past wars, I've also gotten messages from those who are currently serving. My songs about war deal

mostly with the human side of things; the sacrifice, the tragedy and those left waiting at home. I think that's why they've resonated. Songwriting is about reaching out and connecting with people. So, to have those people I'm writing about respond with approval is a huge honor and very humbling.

I have plans down the road for a complete album of war related tunes.

Your website describes you as a contemporary folk artist even though you have won Country artist of the year in the past. Which best sums you up do you think given most artist hate to be pigeonholed?

The genre question is a tough one because people's perception of what genres are can be so subjective. Willie Nelson and Shania Twain are both considered country artists by most people but to my ears they don't have all that much in common.

I've been very fortunate over the years in that I've been embraced regionally by country radio. It's a great family to be a part of and for that I'm grateful. The truth is though, I've never considered myself a strictly country artist. In the past I've recorded songs that fall into any number of categories. In fact I've probably been guilty of confusing the listener with the stylistic range on some of my records. In the last five years I've settled into who I want to be as an artist and I think it's evident on my latest release. I really cut away the musical fat on this one and made a cohesive, listenable album that at least to me on a personal level makes sense. The songs on the album still draw from numerous styles but I think the production and arrangements of the tracks really pull things together and give the record direction... I've always considered myself more of a folk artist than anything else. I'm a storyteller and my tunes tend to be topic driven as opposed to boy-girl scenarios. I do 95% of my live shows with just an acoustic guitar and the production on my CDs is intentionally stripped down to let the song peek through. It just feels folk or Canadiana to me. But again my idea of folk and someone else's could be completely different.

The music in your parent's record collection was a formative influence. You've noted that you especially loved their Buddy Holly record, but who would you most liked to have toured with?

Well, Buddy Holly and his peers toured in horrific

conditions which ultimately led to his demise, so he's out as an option. I think John Prine would be a cool guy to tour with. He seems very personable and funny and I could listen to his tunes every night, no problem.

As a Canadian artist, which Canadian most influenced you growing up, and who, of your contemporaries, do you like today?

When I was 14 or 15, I was really into a band called Red Rider. They were a group from the Toronto area with a really unique sound at the time. The songwriter and driving force of that band was a guy named Tom Cochrane, who has since become a national treasure in Canada. He's responsible for tunes like *Lunatic Fringe* and *Life is a Highway*. Even though stylistically, I don't write like him, Tom Cochrane was the first Canadian songwriter that I really stood up and took notice of.

Recently, I've been listening to a guy from Nova Scotia named Dave Gunning. We just toured Ireland together and quickly discovered that musically we have a lot in common and we're kind of like kindred spirits. Dave is a great guy and a phenomenal songwriter.

Musical mavericks have always drawn your interest. Why?

Most of the artists I like are just making the best music they can with the tools that they have. They aren't shackled to genres or musical correctness. I think when an artist is not concerned about fitting into a slot or meeting genre specific expectations, the freedom he or she employs in the creative process puts them in a position to make music that's pure, honest and cool. I think Elvis Presley was the ultimate musical maverick. He threw all caution to the wind, drew from every style of music he'd ever heard and helped create something fresh and appealing. You can hear and feel the excitement on those early recordings every time you put them on. It's much better listening than all of this cookie-cutter stuff that we're subjected to so often on radio and television these days.

You have released four albums to date. Are you working on your fifth and does it take you time to collect a set of songs that you feel work together?

I'm currently writing and recording songs for my next record. My plan is to produce a two CD set. One will be all new songs and the other a collection and reinterpretation of some of my earlier works. I've never been one to write 30 songs and whittle it down to a dozen to make a record. On my latest

release, *Town That Time Forgot*, I really wanted to make a cohesive album and that was something I kept in mind during the writing process. I would start working on a tune and if at some stage of the proceedings it started to veer away from the direction that I had already established for the record, I would stop working on that song and start another. In the end I completed ten songs and those are the ten tracks on the record. That album was written over a five year period. The next CD will be out in 2011 so I really need to get to work.

How has your travels in Europe influenced you and your writing. Do you ever feel to comment on what's happening around you on a local or international level?

My recent trips to Europe have really opened my eyes to the fact that the market for my music is so much broader than I could have imagined. It's very rewarding to play in a different country and receive positive feedback on what you do. It's fuel for your fire and a great incentive to keep writing so that you've more to share with those who show up. I think all of my songs are reports on what I see going on around me or things I've seen others go through. My live show really zeros in on the stories behind the stories. The fact that my music almost always deals with real people and real experiences seems to generate special interest from the audience.

As a family man, how do you balance the requirements of being a performer and with your home life?

I'm actually very fortunate as a musician. My wife Angie has always been my biggest supporter and it's her involvement as my manager over the last two years that's really ramped up my career. The hardest part of being on the road is missing my kids. The thing that offsets that to a degree is the fact that when I'm home I'm totally present in their lives. My wife calls me Superdad; that makes it a little easier for them and me when it's time for me to travel.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years time?

The last two years have presented a lot of opportunities for me and in many ways I feel like I'm just hitting my stride. I just want to keep writing songs and making records and getting out there and sharing my stories with as many people as possible.



*"The stuff that I like
has lots of character,
meaning and feeling
and it comes without
too much extra baggage"*



UNCLE MOM



**LONESOME HIGHWAY
TALKS TO
TOMMY RAMONE**

Were you someone who grew up listening to bluegrass in your household?

Oh yeah, I had been listening to that music since I was a child. My father's a big country music fan and my older brother used to bring home records of string bands and folk music from the library and we'd make tape copies. So I grew up listening to that stuff. In fact I got a folk guitar when I was young but then the Beatles happened and everybody, including me, went out and got an electric guitar (laughs). I liked that stuff simultaneously to rock 'n' roll. I had come to the United States in late '56, early '57 and rock 'n' roll was exploding then.

As a member of the Ramones you were also producing them. Was the recording process an important thing for you?

I was always fascinated by recording studios and the magic that happened inside of them. When I was growing up my idols were Phil Spector and the sounds of records. I really got into that.

After you left the Ramones you got more into production with Red Kross and The Replacements, was that the way you wanted to move then?

As far as production was concerned if there was a group with something extra, something a little special I would get involved. I didn't just want to do any band, Occasionally something would come along that I thought would blend well with what I basically liked. As for the Ramones I was originally their manager as I'd encouraged them to get together and they had come down to a little studio with original songs. I was surprised that they had original songs and the songs were so unique. And I'd thought "wow, this is more than I'd expected" and that's how that thing got rolling.

That whole New York underground rock scene must have been exciting.

Yes, it was. We're talking about a year, a year and a half prior to the Ramones. It was the glam rock scene, whatever. At least it was a scene. Because before that there wasn't anything but it didn't last that long. But it was kinda fun. Then the punk scene happened after that and I'd thought "what comes next, as we been dressing like girls" (laughs).

You have said that you saw the correlation between punk and country in the honesty at their core. Is that something that you carry on with with Uncle Monk?

Yes, I guess it just suits my tastes in music in a seemingly deceptively simple way, but wasn't really. It's got lots of depth. The stuff that I like has lots of character, meaning and feeling and it comes without too much extra baggage. It's nice and direct.

Do you think what you're doing now has a direct link to old-time music?

Our influences are old-time and bluegrass. But the songs we write are modern songs but the aesthetics are there from constantly listening to songs from the 20s and 30s. It becomes an interesting combination of modern and classic rolled into one.

Is the recording process for acoustic music as challenging as doing a rock band?

All these things are like a challenge. I just go for trying to make it sound appropriate. That's the word I think I would like to use there. It's got to sound right with its context. That's what we go for.

Do you play on the bluegrass circuit in the States?

We play all kinds of places. We kinda cut

through all kinds of genres. We play anything from folk clubs, rock clubs to opening for big acts in large venues. Actually we've done all kinds of shows. We don't really have one type of circuit.

Is it always just the two of you or do you bring extra musicians on occasions?

So far it's just been the two of us although, down the line, we could add musicians if we choose to. We've been doing pretty well just the two of us.

It must be easier for traveling purposes.

Yes, it is.

Are you preparing for your second album at the moment?

We're working on the next one now. We already have ten or twelve songs but we're still writing. We'll do that for a little bit longer then we'll be done.

Do you get to see or meet any of the new younger acoustic bands coming up?

Well we have some favourites. I like the Foghorn String Band and, of course, the Old Crow Medicine Show, The Carolina Chocolate Drops, Crooked Still. There's many actually. There's a lot of great young players like Chris Thile and his band Punch Brothers.

Ron: How are you received at radio?

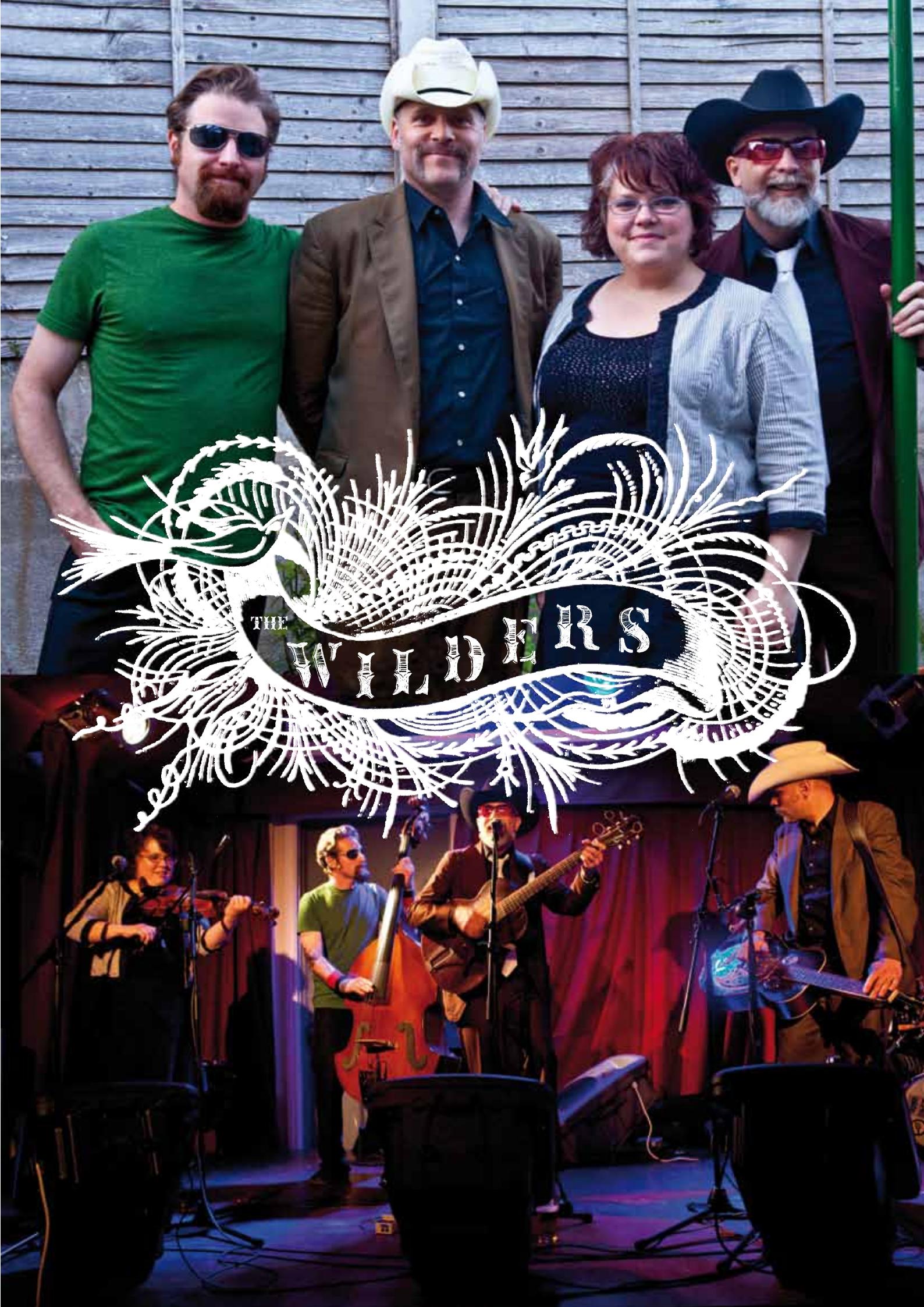
It's funny as we don't have a radio promotions person so some stations have just picked it up on their own. They've sent me an e-mail to send the CD in. But for the next record we may have to look at that. As regards the more hardliners let me put it this way the musicians they really like us, the artists, they take to us right away. As far as that hardcore bluegrass audience it's hard

to say as we haven't played for them that much. Sometimes they can be... how will I say it, well hardline. They're not supposed to like us. But the artists like us very much. I understand that attitude as I do like traditional music.

Do you get many Ramones fans coming along looking for you to do the songs in a bluegrass style?

There are a lot of bands out there who are like jug bands, kind of punky. Very basic and raucous and sometimes they expect us to be like that. We're not like that at all. They play the college circuit and they do well. We do some of the old songs in the set. Yeah, sure. Because fans like to hear that.





THE

WILDBERS

The Wilders are a diverse four-piece band who bring their music to Europe on a regular basis and have gained a devoted following in Scotland. Their music is a lively, spirited - a fun mix of old-time, honky-tonk and roots music. An addictive mix of original songs and classic and lesser-known songs from the golden era of country music. They recently played a return visit to the Seamus Ennis Cultural Centre in The Naul and Lonesome Highway had a chance of a few words with Ike Sheldon and Nate Gawron before the gig. Conversation after the show was fun too but somewhat more relaxed and rambling.

Tell us something about the Wilders background?

Ike: We've been together about 11 years, we started in 1999. The four of us have been playing a lot ever since. We've been full time in the last six years. We toured the States a lot and have been playing a lot more overseas lately. Nate's the rookie as he's only been with us for eleven years. Me and Phil (Wade) and Betse (Ellis) started the band in 1996 and we had some friends who played bass with us. In 1999 Nate joined the band. That's when it all really came together and we all thought "wow, this could really be something". I play guitar and sing. Betse plays the fiddle. Nate is on stand-up bass. Phil plays dobro, mandolin and banjo. So in a way we're like three different bands because of that as when he plays the dobro we play honky tonk and swing stuff. With the mandolin and banjo we can do some old time stuff and bluegrass. At a typical gig we start with a fiddle tune then we switch to dobro and do some honky tonk. We have a lot of variety. So whatever instrument Phil's playing sets the tone for the song. It's a pretty versatile thing.

Is the reaction you get in Europe little different than the one you get in the States?

Nate: The audience reception is definitely different, over there the audience, even when they love the music, will walk around with their beer and it's "cheer when you want to". But over here you get a real attentive

crowd, who listen and then go nuts afterwards. Last night we played a gig where people ended up dancing and enjoying it, when they get up and do that it really raises the bar. Also in the States the gas (petrol) prices have rocketed and CD sales dropped off because of iTunes. A promoter, Loudon Temple, saw us at Merlefest and asked us would we like to come over to Scotland. We have had some great shows in Edinburgh. It was a magical time for us. We've been over three years or so in a row now.

Ike: Your set is a mix of your own songs with some well chosen covers but you don't use a set list.

Is that how you like it?

Our set new is about 80% originals and some of the great old country tunes be it Hank Williams or Johnny Cash, though last night we played (the Knack's) *My Sharona!* We also do Summer of 69 on occasion. Another thing we liked to do, as we have a lot of friends in Kansas City who are wonderful musicians and songwriters so we've been bringing some of their songs on the road with us too. We don't have a set list, we haven't had one for years. We start to play and we can see what's working. We have learned to read a room.

Nate: They don't get to travel as much as they might have kids and things so it's nice to promote their songs on the road. We get to travel all over so it's great to take some of my friend's songs and play them for people. We can then tell them "you're a big hit in Ireland".

You use acoustic instruments on the road though you use electric instruments on the albums can you see yourselves doing that live?

Nate: We put some drums on the last record. We use some electric guitar and Ike played piano. It's a money thing what we can do. We like to be able to do it different than the record. A big thing about us is that we've all played in other electric bands in the past. So we have a lot of influences. I don't feel so bad about that

because if you look at bands like The Beatles what they did in the studio was different from the live act.

Ike: We have tunes that are very traditional but we have other elements too.

You can cross genres. Does that help or hinder you?

Ike: No we don't run into too much discrimination, we just decide to follow ourselves. We play the music that we want to play. We want to play creatively and to play well. It's really not that much of a difference in the scheme of things. Most people just want to hear good music. Everybody seems to be happy so far.

Nate: A real true band to me goes out and does what they want to do. A few fans might leave. But it's important to show your true nature and that's what your their for. When we play a venue like a church or a small hall we take that into account. So what we do depends on the situations we're in to a degree. It's usually not because we're worried about what people might think. We play the music that we believe in. That everybody's enjoying themselves is the key thing.

What were the formative influences?

Ike: I grew up listening to traditional country music in Southern Missouri outside of a town of around 120. Phil and Nate and I would have all heard country music growing up and then went against it in different ways and then we came back to it. It was part of our upbringing but we had to go out and find our own way to play it. We came around to realize how powerful it was.

Nate: Back in the time when I was a teenager in the 80s it wasn't cool to like country at all. That's changed a lot and there's a lot of kids involved today.

Dwight Yoakam was a touch stone for a lot of people in Europe who weren't necessarily into country music at that time...

Ike: We love Dwight man. Do you guys ever see the Flatlanders? I love them. *More Of A Legend Than A Band* is one of the classic country albums.



Nate: Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings, they to me were like punk rock. We're also big fans of Hank Jr.

The duo were then called away to play the first of two sets at the sell-out gig which ended with all four members of the band standing among the audience singing a rendition of *Goodnight Irene* with the audience joining in and, on occasion, leading the song. There was no doubting the rapport they formed with the audience and that both parties had a good time.

