

## Who The Hell Is David Munyon, And Why Isn't He A Household Name In America?

### Part 1

Just over a decade ago, 1993 to be precise, I was introduced to the music of David Munyon via his debut album "**Code Name : Jumper**" which was released in Europe by the German based, Glitterhouse Records. Across eleven cuts, Munyon's musical presentation ran the gamut of electric folk-rock to basic voice and guitar acoustic. When the album was recorded in Nashville, Tennessee three years earlier, this Rhode Islander was thirty-eight years of age – *a late starter you might say*. The recording was released Stateside in 1990 by Los Hermanos Records, but quickly disappeared from the sight. Irrespective of the latter *false start*, it proved to be the first in a catalogue of eleven Munyon recordings that have since appeared in the public domain – mainly on European based labels. David Munyon is far from being a household name in his homeland, yet, miraculously, all of his recordings remain in print. He is one of a handful of American's who musically tread ground that is hard to pinpoint stylistically – is it folk, contemporary singer/songwriter – what is it? In terms of feel, it is certainly roots driven. Over the last decade or thereabouts, these roots musicians who are largely unsung in their homeland have managed to carve successful careers for themselves in Europe. Founded upon the penning and recording of quality songs, Chris Burroughs, Terry Lee Hale and Joseph Parsons count among the latter coterie. Having toured Europe regularly from 1994-1998, in mid to late April 2005, David Munyon will return for his first visit of the twenty-first millennium .....but let's go back to the beginning and trace how he arrived at his current position in God's firmament.

David claimed in a recent interview that he was conceived when his parents took a day trip to New Hampshire and stayed over for the night in a motel. Seven months later, the last of five siblings, David Munyon was born in Newport, Rhode Island on August 19<sup>th</sup> 1952. The two-month premature baby grew to be a 6'3" tall adult who currently weighs in at around 210 lbs. When he was born, Munyon's father, Chet, was a serving Lieutenant Commander in the U.S. Navy, while his mother, Lola Mae, was a preacher's daughter from Kansas. Later the Munyon family relocated to the Deep South, and David's father went on to become a NASA engineer who worked on the satellite programme.

David began playing guitar at the age of twelve, and during the late sixties joined an aggregation called The Grapes of Wrath. Not to be confused with the Canadian band of 1990's vintage who recorded for Capitol Records. Munyon's band broke up for the usual reasons, musical differences and women who diverted their focus from advancement in the business. While growing up, David had listened to and was influenced by the music of the late Johnny Cash and David Blue, plus James Taylor, Joni Mitchell, Judy Collins and Bob Dylan. In 1971 David's mother was killed in an accident, an event that affected him deeply. Seeking solace, it came in the form of alcohol. Lots of it. By this stage he was residing in Los Angeles, hanging out at the Producers Workshop in Hollywood, writing songs – Munyon penned his first composition during the sixties - and playing a seemingly endless string of open mics. The bottom line - as a solo act - he made negligible headway in the music business. According to David, during 1971 and again in 1974, he recorded some early songs at the Producer's Workshop, under the supervision of legendary producer Ron Hitchcock, but the tracks were never released.

Constantly fuelled by alcohol David felt his grasp on life spiralling out of control, so he took rather radical action. In 1971 he volunteered for the U.S. Army, fully expecting to end up in the middle of a Vietnam battlefield, but spent 1972-1974 serving in, of all places, Germany. Discharged in 1974, initially Munyon planned to study at University of Florida, but once again that dark spectre – alcohol – took over his life. Moving on, open mics. in Los Angeles clubs once again became a way of life, and he continued to drink as well as holding down a day job in a picture-framing warehouse. In 1976 a fellow worker handed him a copy of "**Autobiography of a Yogi**" by Paramahansa Yogananda. Deeply affected by what he read, like many during that era, Munyon decided to become a committed Christian. As for his struggle with the "*spirit in the bottle*" in time David attended Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, undertook the twelve-step recovery programme, and has been dry for over two decades. His philosophy "*Take one day at a time.*" By way of focusing on his *cure*, Munyon stopped playing music in public for a time.

Well on the way to recovery, during 1981 David married Sharon Peacock Standley, who he now affectionately refers to as "Dixie Blue." Four years later David Munyon picked up his guitar once more. As for the 400+ songs that have subsequently arrived, by far the major proportion, have been collaborations with Dixie [credited as S. P. Standley]. Along the way, not unexpectedly, a spiritual dimension entered their lyrics. Their words consistently express a wish for peace [among the world's

nations], as well as a belief that miracles [major and minor] occur here on Earth. An astute editor, Sharon reigns back David's more exotic lyrical excesses. By the late eighties David and Sharon were living in Nashville, where he mostly played *pass the hat* gigs, while his wife worked as a waitress. Nashville based producer Greg Humphrey introduced them to the Hicks brothers, Jerry D. and Bruce, from Sacramento, California and they helped finance the recording of "**Code Name : Jumper.**" A couple of the tracks were recorded at Jack Clement's *home studio* Cowboy Arms Hotel and Recording Spa, others at Villa Recorders, but most of the sessions took place at Nashville's The Cutting Edge. In varying combinations, the liner credits Greg Humphrey, Warren Haynes and Matt Rollings with production of the tracks. The line-up of support musicians included Warren Haynes [Allman Brothers, Government Mule], Matt Rollings [Lyle Lovett], Leland Sklar [Jackson Browne, CSNY], Sneaky Pete Kleinow [Flying Burrito Brothers], Al Perkins [Flying Burrito Brothers, Manassas] and Anthony Crawford [Neil Young]. Vocally, Munyon's voice possessed a world-weary edge, and the collection included "Me and This Old Suitcase," which, according to David's liner note is "*A song for all hoboes, as well as the late John Hartford and Roger Miller,*" while "Beijing Dreams" recalled the events in Tianenmen Square during June 1989, and one person's stand for freedom and democracy. Despite the seemingly amusing title, Munyon/Standley's "Lost One, This Is Lost Three, Are You Lost Too" saw the pair focus on the subject of war veterans who "*spent night after night saving people's lives, and came home to sweep floors in a store.*" As I noted earlier, the album sold poorly and quickly disappeared from American record store shelves.

And that, I guess, would have been the extent of David Munyon's recording career, had a copy of "**Code Name : Jumper**" not found its way to, of all countries, Germany, and the desk of Reinhard Holstein, owner of the Glitterhouse label. Holstein leased the recording, and arranged for the tracks to be remixed and re-mastered by Gunter Pauler. Thus began a working relationship in which Pauler has supervised the recording of six of David's seven, subsequent, official CD releases. In addition to Pauler Acoustics, Gunter owns a state-of-the-art recording studio in Northeim and is proprietor of the Stockfisch label. The Glitterhouse version of "**Code Name : Jumper**" was released in 1993, and the following year David Munyon toured Europe for the first time.

*to be continued.*

Arthur Wood  
Kerrville Kronikles 02/05  
[1280 words]

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## **Who The Hell Is David Munyon, And Why Isn't He A Household Name In America?** **Part 2**

*Last week, in Part 1 we traced David Munyon's musical career up to the point in 1993 where his debut solo album "**Code Name : Jumper**" was released in Germany. And it's in Germany that the story now continues.....*

In September 1995, while touring Germany [once again], Glitterhouse arranged for David to cut some acoustic tracks at Pauler's studio, and two consecutive evening sessions were held. Early the following year, twelve of the songs appeared on the 1000 copy limited edition Glitterhouse release, "**Stories From The Curve : Christian Hill Community, Alabama.**" David revisited "Beijing Dreams" and the spiritual "Stealer Of Hearts" from "**Jumper,**" while six tracks were destined to appear on his sophomore studio effort, "**Acrylic Teepees.**" Four tracks, "Love Is Like A Flower," "Seven Crows Against A Greyer Sky," "Zippo Lighter" and "Cadillac Town" are only available on this recording, which, astoundingly is still in print! But not for long, if you go and buy a copy today.....

"**Acrylic Teepees**" was released by the Glitterhouse label in May 1996. Production is credited to Greg Humphrey, and David is supported by a studio band consisting of bassist Dave Pomeroy [James McMurtry, Don Williams], drummer Craig Krampf [Melissa Etheridge] and lap steel/dobro/guitarist Al Perkins. The sessions took place at Jack Clement's *home studio*. The liner credits Munyon's contribution as "*Martin guitar, singing,*" and the tracks were mastered at Pauler Acoustics. The album opened with "Super Blue," the Munyon/John Scott Sherrill/Don Devaney co-write and Buddy Holly/*driving in cars* tribute. Later, "Super Blue" appeared on the cleverly titled compilation "**Bob Harris Presents, Vol. 1**" [2000] compiled and released by Radio 1/UK DJ Bob Harris. On the latter album Munyon's track, the

closing cut, rubbed shoulders with recordings by Steve Earle, Alison Krauss and Emmylou Harris. David co-wrote "Coffee In Duluth," also an "**Acrylic Teepees**" track, with Nashville based hit *song scribe* Pebe Sebert [eg. "Old Flames Can't Hold A Candle To You" was co-written with her, then, husband Hugh Moffatt]. Eight tracks on the album bear the hallmark Munyon/Standley, and include their tribute to the late music promoter, Bill Graham, "Waves Of Monterey." "Surfin'" co-written by David and Jason Breedlove, was sub-titled "Song For River Phoenix," while it's sufficient to say that "Desperate For A Friend," co-written with Sharon and Reinard Holstein, is an emotion filled roller coaster of a song. On release, the album gained a four star review in the German edition of Rolling Stone.

As if two 1996 releases weren't sufficient to saturate listener interest, before year-end Stockfisch released the Gunter Pauler produced and recorded, "**Slim Possibilities.**" Cut in Gunter's Northeim studio the support players included Chris Jones [guitar], Frank Fiedler [electric bass], Beo Brockhausen [acoustic bass], John Hickman [hurdy-gurdy, jew's-harp], Byron Berline [banjo] and Steve Baker [fiddle]. The album opens with "Mississippi Rain," a song about lost love and broken hearts. Pursuing a well-established folk tradition "Iron And Wooden Road" is a train song, and the disc closes with "Bakersfield," to which, in the liner booklet, Munyon has appended the footnote *"A song about Humphrey's old girl friends in Bakersfield."*

Munyon's final European releases of the twentieth century appeared in 1998. The Stockfish studio recording was titled "**Poet Wind,**" while the subtly titled "**Down To The Wire**" was another sparse voice and guitar set. Munyon, in the role of storyteller, often draws on historic events as well as his own life experiences, and the former album opened with the album title track, which, in the liner booklet bears the legend *"from the prayers of Lee Clayton"* – Clayton is another *time served* American folk/rock songwriter [his titles include "Ladies Love Outlaws"], former USAF "Widowmaker" pilot, who has struggled with personal demons. Elsewhere, "In India" is dedicated to Mahavatar Babaji a Himalayan mahayogi who appears in Paramahansa Yogananda's book "**Autobiography of a Yogi,**" while "Guitar Road" is David's heartfelt memorial to his recently deceased friend Townes Van Zandt. "**Poet Wind**" also features a virtual Munyon rarity – a cover song - David's reading of Van Zandt's famous "Snowin' On Raton." The session players included Beo Brockhausen [piano, flute], Mike Silver [guitar, vocals], Hans Jorg Maucksch [bass], Hrolfur Vagnsson [accordion], Freek Borstlap [viola], Martin Grosskurth [organ] and Chris Jones [guitar].

As for "**Down To The Wire,**" the eleven songs were also captured in Northeim, according to the digipak liner, during the Fall of 1997. The collection opened with "The Story Of Amer Stocking," the real life tale of David's maternal grandfather who was a preacher in Kansas [the song reappears on "**Seven Leaves In A Blue Bowl of Water**"], while the second track "Song For Maureen O' Hara" recently reappeared on "**More Songs For Planet Earth.**" The latter pair of 2004 releases also reprise the "**Down To The Wire**" tracks "Looking At The Rain" and "Words Of Love." Elsewhere on "**Down To The Wire,**" "Holding Aces" retells the story of Mississippi blues musician C. P. Austin, and in "Zavala's Café" David paints a vivid and insight filled portrait of the establishment and it's clientele.

During the nineteen-nineties, David was featured on a number of Glitterhouse compilation releases, the first being "**Speed Of The Sound Of Loneliness**" – appropriate, since David is a self-declared John Prine fan. In 1994 the imprint launched an ongoing series of low-cost compilations titled "**Out of The Blue.**" A number of discs featured tracks from Munyon's Glitterhouse and Stockfisch recordings, but "**Vol. 2**" included the "**Stories From The Curve**" out-take "Bigger Than A Dream," while a previously unreleased acoustic version of "Coney Island" appeared on "**Vol. 4.**" A studio version of the latter song had appeared on "**Acrylic Teepees.**"

In 2001 David recorded some newer songs at Steve Clayton's studio, Rayven Audio, in Dothan, Alabama. To date, Munyon has self-released three such *acoustic guitar and voice only* albums - "**Songs From The Mobile Home**" [2001], "**From The Shade Of The Big Mamosa**" [2001] and of more recent vintage "**Two Billion Banjos, Blues Songs For EB**" [2004]. Available direct from David, at a cost of \$20.00 each, he also autographs the disc, and apparently contributes some of the revenue monies to his favourite charities and religious organizations. Having lived close to the bread line for much of his life, Munyon is nothing if not an enigma as well being a loving, giving, open-hearted individual. "**Songs From The Mobile Home, Pretty Much Feng Shui**" is actually the full title of the recording and the song titles include "Bring Back Love [Song For George Harrison]," while "**From The Shade Of The Big Mamosa**" features "Woody Wrenches [Song For Woody Guthrie]."

During 2003, Gunter Pauler and Wolfgang Hess visited David and Sharon at their home in Alabama. During this trip, recording sessions took place at Mt. Enon Baptist Church in nearby Dothan, for an album that was provisionally titled **"Tunes for Vina's Boy's : New Avenues."** In addition a DVD was filmed, but the sound recordings were damaged in transit back to Germany. The album was to have featured a couple of older, already familiar songs, alongside new Munyon/Standley creations. Undaunted by the latter calamity, Pauler and his staff revisited unreleased David Munyon acoustic tracks dating from Norheim sessions that took place in October 1996, plus February and August 1997. The basic tracks were overdubbed with instrumental and backing vocal contributions by many of the musicians who appeared on **"Poet Wind,"** and in late 2004 Stockfisch released a pair of discs each featuring thirteen songs, respectively titled **"More Songs For Planet Earth"** and **"Seven Leaves In A Blue Bowl of Water."** It is those discs that Munyon will promote on his forthcoming European tour. The former title is reviewed in this week's Folkwax. **[One Part only]** OR The former title was reviewed in last week's Folkwax. **[Two Parts]**

David and "Dixie Blue" currently reside on a farm - he calls this *"piece of land,"* Om Field - near Midland City, Alabama where they occupy an old trailer that he claims was once owned by Hank Williams Sr. David has said that the late Harlin Howard, the legendary Nashville hit songwriter, once told him *"When you start crying as you write, you know it is a good song."* One thing is certain, Munyon is a self-confessed notebook keeper, who tirelessly commits song titles and lyrics to print as soon as they come to him. At some point, on most days, Munyon will pick up his guitar and attempt to communicate with his muse. Should anything result, the *work in progress* is quickly captured on cassette tape. When complete, the song lyrics and tabs are entered in his beloved songbook. Munyon's lyrics are consistently wistful, yet they remain optimistic that through *"expressions of love"* the world will become a more just place to live for the whole of mankind. Without resorting to naming names, based on his catalogue to date, David Munyon can – and deserves to - stand shoulder to shoulder with the best songwriters in the roots arena [through the latter half of the twentieth century and onward]. Some may feel that he is an innocent abroad, yet for me the universe he paints with words is as pure and clear as a flawless diamond. One facet that I should mention - David's [and Dixie's] words also display a compassion for those who dare to live differently and flout convention. In addition to being a songwriter and performer, Munyon is also a painter and if you scroll to the foot of the page at [http://www.stockfisch-records.de/stckff/sf\\_davmun\\_e.html](http://www.stockfisch-records.de/stckff/sf_davmun_e.html) you'll find examples of his work. Munyon recently described his style of painting as *"Cool Art, kinda like Van Gogh meets Forrest Gump!"*

David Munyon's eight official CD releases are available on the web from Glitterhouse Records <http://www.glitterhouse.com>. In addition, his quartet of Stockfisch releases are also available from <http://www.stockfisch-records.de>, while his trio of self-releases are available by contacting David at [JdvdMnyn@aol.com](mailto:JdvdMnyn@aol.com). It's also worth checking out <http://www.munyon.moonfruit.com/> if only for the colourful graphics, as well as, many things Munyon.

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