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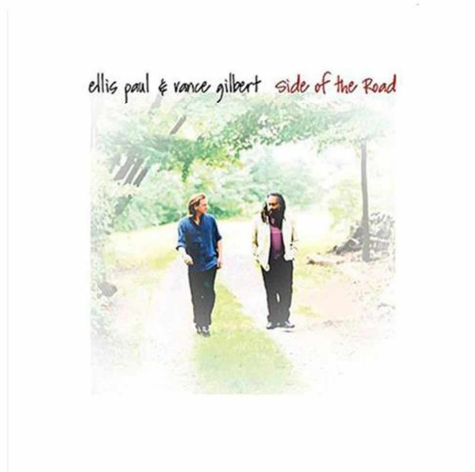


L.to R. Vance Gilbert and Ellis Paul



L. to R. Rosie Thomas and Eric Fisher

Pic. Jennifer Adams



Ellis Paul / Vance Gilbert : "Side Of The Raod" [ 2003 ]



Rosie Thomas : "Only With Laughter Can You Win" [ 2003 ]

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## Ellis Paul & Vance Gilbert:

### *The Friendship, The Concept & The Duo Album*

The following interview with Vance Gilbert and Ellis Paul took place on Tuesday 14th October 2003, during a break in the national tour in support of their Rounder/Philo album *"Side Of The Road."* Thanks to Lisa Fehl-Parette and Ralph Jaccodine for their help in setting up the interview. Thanks also to Michaela O'Brien for the disc that crossed an ocean in a flash.

*Going back to the beginning of you and Ellis as a couple. What do you recall of the first time that you met.*

**Vance Gilbert :** It was at an *ad hoc* coffeehouse, called The Naked City Coffeehouse that took place between various offices in the foyer of a building. There was like a transformation at night. It was like the elves came out while Santa was asleep, kind of thing. They transformed the foyer with candles and a PA system, and people would come up and do poetry, juggle, read prose - everything. We had a couple of people come up and do, sort of like, an open mic. style of music. I saw Ellis there. I had started frequenting the place and I was taken by the fact that this guy sang and played well, and yet he was more poetic than most of the poets that were coming through there. I, at that point, had pretty much come from a background of R&B, Motown, jazz and such. I was so struck by the sheer poetic nature of what he was doing. I guess he was struck by somewhat of the opposite in me. He felt that I had sprung from the brow of Zeus as it were, ready to perform. Doing what I was doing, he had never heard of me. The combination therein - over the years we've sort of traded and gleaned from each other, each one of these aspects. It came as trust, you know. We got to see what the other one was doing, and one guided the other into that realm of either, more absolute performance or poetry. There sprung the friendship, out of abject difference [Laughs].

*Were you already performing in night clubs.*

**VG :** Yeah I was, but I was kind of doing a lot of jazz standards and sort of, the American Songbook. In the back of my mind, I always felt that the stuff I wanted to do needed to have more of a poetic nature to it. I didn't want to do just all, you know, strictly booty shakin' pop music. I had no idea this folk scene existed.

*How long ago was it that you first met Ellis.*

**VG :** This was in 1989. And we have been fast friends ever since.

*How about you Ellis. What do you recall of meeting Vance.*

**Ellis Paul :** Yeah, we met at the Naked City Coffeehouse in Boston. It was sort of an underground

coffeehouse that happened for a time. It ended up getting shut down by the police after it got too big. It was out in a hallway of a building that sold comic books and trading cards and things like that. I was coming up the stairs one night when I heard Vance's voice, and we got along great, right off the bat. We became good friends over time.

*Has there always been a long-term plan to do an album together. Why particularly cut one now.*

**VG :** Not really a long-term plan. As we made our rise from *absolute unknown* up the ranks to *relatively obscure*, we got a couple of years into each of our careers and ended up sharing bills and sharing stages and realised "*If it's this much fun sharing the stage together, we should make an album*" - it kind of came out of his mouth that we should do an album together. I said "*That would be great,*" but every time we sat down to write something together it turned into an afternoon of maybe going for a jog and having pizza. We never quite got it together to write something. This would have been in the mid-nineties, when we decided we should try to do something together. It was a case of "*Let's try.*" We'd sit down to write and nothing would happen. Simply nothing would happen because we were having so much fun, but I also think that we did come from different ways, and different worlds, of doing music. I don't know, it's kind of hard to explain. It wasn't like I was a non-poet, but we just had such different approaches, yet still such appreciation for what the other did. We simply gave up every time we tried [Laughs].



L. to R. Ellis Paul and Vance Gilbert

**EP :** There was no real concrete plan. It was more a case of wishful thinking and you never know if the opportunity and the circumstances will arise to make it happen the way you want it to. We don't come from similar musical backgrounds, or personal backgrounds either for that matter, so there's always a question of "*What will the songs sound like ? Will we be able to pull it off and make it sound cohesive ?*" I think we did a great job.



So, Ellis, the album plan didn't work out in the mid-nineties.

**EP :** Yeah, we didn't have the timing right. When it became clear – we had been playing shows, and sometimes he would go on first and I would go on second, or vice versa. Suddenly, one night, one of us – maybe it was me who was just tired, I said *"Let's go on side by side and do a song swap."* We did that and it ended up being such a riot we decided we'd start doing shows like that and it eventually led to this tour. It was a couple of years ago that we started going onstage together. We recognised that there was something special happening with the interplay between the two of us. I mean we were kind of bringing the friendship onstage and we are a little bit of *the odd couple*. Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis with acoustic guitars, and people in the audience seemed to enjoy it so we decided we'd do this tour. And then we put the album together.

*What changed in the last couple of years that made the album not just a possibility, but a actual reality.*

**EP :** The tour. We had talked about this tour and I didn't want to go on the road without an album that represented what we were doing for people, so that they could take something home that reminded them of the show. I've done a lot of tours with split bills, with, for instance, Susan Werner and John Wesley Harding, and we never had a recording of us, on the road, because we never thought that far ahead. With Vance I definitely wanted to make sure we had something like that for people to own. Previous gigs with Vance have just been here and there. This tour we're playing the entire country, and every major market that we play, we'll hit.

**VG :** Well, we were becoming closer as performers. We were performing a lot more together so there was a certain inevitability. We still have only written one song together – I've only been co-writer with him on one tune so far, but we figured the way to circumvent that would be – *"Well, you know, someday we should do an album of covers."* *"Oh yeah, that would be fun."* Next thing you know, the events of 9/11 happened. Well after that – almost a year and then some after that, Ellis approached me and said *"You know, this would be a good time to do an album since we are doing some touring together. Why don't we, first of all, have something to sell. And second of all, why don't we take a close look at how people are dealing with the aftermath of the tragedy."* So we took a look at our respective album collections. We pretty much stuck with CD's. The reason for that rather than going for vinyl – it gave us an opportunity to plumb the depths of what our peers were doing, as opposed to older recordings. If I had gone to albums, for me, I would have probably pulled up a lot Sly and The Family Stone, or Marvin Gaye's *"What's Goin' On."* Still introspective, post-apocalyptic kind of music, however, we wouldn't have had the opportunity to do,

for instance, that song by Mark Erelli, *"The Only Way."* He's a local boy.

*But there were a couple of leviathan's crept in from the seventies.*

**VG :** You know, that's true, particularly the Van Morrison song. That song has been in my craw for a while. I picked up *"Veedon Fleece,"* which is not one of his better-known albums, about ten years ago. I have to admit that recording, actually, was a bit of an anomaly. I didn't have it on CD but I did have it on tape. So it snuck through [Laughs]. You know it's very funny that you should mention those songs, because someone said to me in a E-Mail the other day, that they didn't feel my influences were quite as prevalent as Ellis' influences. I had to question it *"What does that mean ? Are they not hearing something quite as R&B or African American in nature or what ?"* I wrote them back and defended myself. I said, *"Wait a minute, you know I've been listening to June Tabor and The Silly Sisters and Julian Bream for, respectively, ten and twenty-five years, so I have influences that kind of span the whole spectrum of music. So wait a minute now."* Not everything needs to sound like Teddy Pendergrass to have it be an influence of mine. I stick by that. I felt this album really deserved to have mandolins and jangly guitars and such, as opposed to – maybe something, that if I was solely chasing it, would have a funky bass line and all of that. This is not that album.

*And yet of you had made that album, it would have been "Oh, that's the album we expected you to make." So you're damned if you do and you're damned if you don't.*

**VG :** I'll be square up with you – I check both of our web sites and *"squeaky wheel gets the grease"* you know. There are some people that are quite non-plussed regarding this album, and they are the first ones who usually speak up and start tapping on the keyboard on the web. Then there are those who think it's the most brilliant assemblage of covers that they've ever heard. So – well, you know, I'm only starting to mature when it comes to taking criticism. And I'm starting to enjoy it. I'm starting to get it now. I'm starting to understand that sometimes, the better an album is, the more diffuse and diffident the response will be. I'm really enjoying that. I'm actually getting to the point where I hear some people talk about it and how much it annoys them, this album, and I love it. I love it. I say, *"Good. Good"* [Laughs].

*In terms of making the album, this is the first time where it has really felt right.*

**VG :** Yeah. Really. A whole bunch of things came together. Economically it may not seem it, as there's an undercurrent of people just not going out to hear live music like they did at one point. It made a certain amount of economic sense to tour together, because



the numbers shot up a bit that way. And it was a shot in the arm to both of us. I'm no Richard Thompson - who has been out on the road since forever, but we have been out and doing this for twelve years now and it can get old to a certain extent. It's actually great to be out together and have something that is so totally different from what we would normally do. It's a real breath of fresh air for both of us.

*Did you at any stage consider using an outside producer, because you and Ellis co-produced this album. For instance Duke Levine [who produced Ellis' "Speed Of Trees"] played on the sessions, as did Mark Erelli's producer, Lorne Entress.*

**EP :** We thought that adding a third party might end up creating little love triangles that were not going to help us. With every song that each of us brought in - the songs that I chose, I took the production lead on and the songs Vance chose, he took the production lead on. We also made suggestions as co-producers on each other's songs. That kept us from getting into sort of spats over who was in charge of what. It worked great, and we had no battles in the studio, like you might think we would if we were Simon and Garfunkel [Laughs]. Vance's suggestions really worked well on my songs and I think he'd say the same about my suggestions on his.

**VG :** This was always going to be Ellis and Vance from the outset. It was a combination of things. Duke had just produced Ellis' previous album and had gotten the sounds that Duke kind of gets, and that's wonderful. However, I was really feeling my oats, because my previous album "**One Thru Fourteen**," I thought was a tour-de-force [Laughs]. I was really happy with what I came up with and wanted to continue spreading my wings a little bit. I really wanted to feel that again. Ellis had also done his fair share of producing.

*He co-produced his 2001 album "Sweet Mistakes" with Don McCallister and Kristian Bush, but he's never been the sole producer of a studio album.*

**VG :** There's a local guy, here, named Rob Laurens, who tends to write sort of sweet, long epic songs. He did an album called "**The Honey On The Mountain**" that is just wonderful. It was sort of a local hit and was produced solely by Ellis. Not many people know that. He's got a great hand for the studio. One of the things about this record, as we co-produced it, this friendship symbiosis came into play again. When one of us would flag, the other one would immediately just take to the chair and it was seamless. Now, there might be a difference in sensibilities - like again, my approach to something might be a little heavier and funkier, and his might have been a little more Byrds-like with jangly guitars and the treble to the fore. However, in this day of digital recording, all you have to do is sit back and tell the other person "Go for it. Do what you want to

*do, and let's see what happens."* I trust him implicitly because I know whether we go for a jangly sort of sound, or whether we go for a heavier, funkier more lugubrious sort of textured thing - which is kind of where I come from, with a lot on the album - we knew whichever approach we took would be quality. It would be the excursion that it was. It didn't matter which approach we took, if we thought it was good. It was either an Ellis approach, or a Vance approach and Lord knows I'd say another 33 to 40% of some of the approaches we took were out of either one of our heads. We had no idea what we were going to come up with.

*The album is not, however, over produced. In fact the sound is quite stripped down in some ways, in terms of the small number of core players that you used.*

**VG :** Yes. Like you said earlier, there were straight up producers right there in the studio, with Duke and Lorne hanging around. That was fine too because, for example, on "Gentle Arms Of Eden" we played with all kinds of ideas. We tried it as a Caribbean based kind of thing, and went looking for somebody to play pans and all that. At one point - oh, you'll laugh - we tried it as a thrash punk thing. Where we just crashed away and had a great time. We just laughed. It was a riot. However, the last thing we tried was where Lorne was sort of tooling the drums and he said "Vince, try this. Try playing on this." That's when Lorne came up with the - boom, boom - and I said "That's it." In fact I put the acoustic guitar down. I picked up an electric guitar and turned it way down just so that I would have a tonic centre and I sang with the drums, and that lived on tape, like that, for two months. I threatened to just put it on the album with just me and the drums, but we ended up adding Richard Gates on bass and Duke came in and played some loop guitar - and I said "That's it, there's nothing else going on that song." That was a wonderful, wonderful evolution for us. It was out of the realm of what any of us thought was going to happen. When you're making a record, what else is there than that ?

*How many songs did you originally have listed as possibles to be on this record. Relative to those songs, did you have a particular subjective approach in terms of the album's content.*

**EP :** Vance came up with his list first and then I kind of filled in the gaps with songs that filled up holes. He was picking a lot more ballads than I was, so I tended to go out and look for a little more up-tempo things. We had a theme going into it, so we knew we wanted it to be a sort of theme of *circling the wagons* and *looking at where we are now*. Sort of a post 9/11 assessment, without having every song address that issue. And certainly include songs of comfort, and songs of self-exploration.



**VG :** You know, we had the concept for the album, as a whole, before we had the songs. We really wanted, more than anything else, to have an album that spoke to how people were dealing with their very being, post 9/11. We wanted something that ended up – which is just what it was – running the gamut from the absolute introspection of Lucinda Williams' "Side Of The Road," to the arm around your buddy at the bar kind of feeling that was "Comfort You" by Van Morrison. And every possible stop in between. I guess the cornerstone to that was, Ellis had found this Mark Erelli song that kind of spoke to the very centre of all that. And he said "Vance whatever we do, we have to do this song." Then both of us sort of evolved into "Well, why don't we do an album about people, and how they are dealing with that whole sensibility." I had an idea, which is that Susan Werner song, "May I Suggest." It is a big life-affirming song. When things go wrong, you know – I guess our biggest challenge at that point, was to do all that, but avoid being cloying or maudlin. I feel like we were successful. I feel like we touched on things and let the listener finish, you know, doing what needed to be done. I've had a lot of people that have said they have listened to the album and they are not quite sure what to make of it. They need to listen four or five times, and then they come back to me and say they get it. And that makes me very happy, because I don't know – I don't feel like we need to hit people over the head. It's also – one of the things we found with this album, is that it's not so much Ellis, or so much Vance. It's fairly guileless. We really went at this recording to get out of the way of the songs. And that's really new for me [Laughs] - because I kind of put my big foot stamp on just about everything. I even get my butt in the way.

*So in terms of saying that you each raided your record collections. Each of you must have had a fairly lengthy list of songs to begin with.*

**EP :** Not really. I had this Mark Erelli song, the opening track, "The Only Way," and that seemed to be a good cornerstone for the whole record. We wanted the songs to fit in with that kind of theme and so I used "Comes A Time" which is a song that I've been playing over the years. It's an old Neil Young song. Really over time, it's turned into almost my own song. Then I wanted to get a Woody Guthrie song in there, because I'm a big Woody fan and I killed two birds with one stone, by choosing the Slaid Cleaves and Woody co-write. Then I sort of dove into my peers, and found a Jeff Black song on one of his albums that I loved a lot. So I put that on the album. We ended up writing "Citizen Of The World" for the album. It wasn't too hard for me. I think Vance did a lot more searching than I did, because I felt like I was filling in the blanks. It was a very short process – he came up with his list over a week or two and then he sent them to me. Then I filled in the blanks. I think we had thirteen songs and clipped off the three that really didn't fit too

well with the theme we were looking at. And then we went with them.

**VG :** We came to the table with about ten each. That was it. For this kind of sensibility there were a lot of songs that didn't cut it. You know that 50% to 60% of most albums are love songs. They weren't going to make it. So those were gone. We really wanted that sense of – how are you dealing with life in general, and that started a whittling down process. I reiterate, we tried to avoid the songs that were leaning towards "We Are The World." There were lots of those [Laughs]. And the next thing you knew we had a list of ten solid songs each. A couple of those on each list were crossovers. One of them was "Gentle Arms Of Eden." Both of us had that on our list. So that made it simpler and easier. It was a more expedient process than I ever would have imagined. But that's how we got it.

*Did you record more than ten songs, or did you refine the lists further before the recording sessions began.*

**VG :** We just recorded the ten. That was pretty much it. In fact we were lucky to get that. I had just about given up on "Comfort You," because it was my song and I had brought the lead vocal to it. I tried to figure out what was happening, and basically I felt like I wasn't bringing anything new to the song. Every time I would sing the vocal and go back and listen, it would be in tune, it would be rhythmically OK, but compared to what Van had done, it was lifeless. I sort of threw my arms up in the air and said "I'm thinking twice about having this on the album." And then Ellis came in and sort of took the reins, and sang what I would call a high co-lead vocal. And the song just came alive. We both went in and did our vocals again on it, and shortened the song a bit.

*So you basically talked eight songs out of the recording process.*

**VG :** Exactly.

*Was it a no-no from the get go, that you would not cut your own compositions en masse. Obviously in saying that, I'm excluding the pair of songs that you did record.*

**VG :** Yes. That wasn't our intention at all. To tell the truth, for the direction that the album was taking, we didn't have songs that would have gone in that direction anyway. Other than my song "Alone Down Here" that is, and our co-write. That was it really. I had a handful of tunes that would be more appropriate for whatever album I come up with in the next 365 days.

**EP :** Yeah, we wanted to make sure that we were preserving our own things for our own albums. The community idea of the whole record – of circling the wagons, seemed to be suggesting to us to go out and



find people within our community – people like Dave Carter and Susan Werner.

*In terms of the community issue, did what you saw on paper evolve even more in the studio, once you began the sessions.*

**EP :** We were using Boston players, so that felt a little bit like we were diving into the community around us as well. We were talking to all the people who we could talk to – obviously we weren't talking to Van Morrison, but we did talk with Mark Erelli and Jeff Black. Jeff wrote us a nice note. We talked to Susan Werner about her song. I really feel as if we were reaching out, and people were reaching back to say "thank you" for covering their song.

*Did you hand-pick the session players to suit the songs you were going to cut. Presumably they were Boston players that you were already familiar with.*

**VG :** Well Tommy West, Lorne Entress, Richard Gates and Duke Levine are just so steady, rock solid guys that – it's funny, and I'm glad you asked that, because I'm thinking of Richard Gates and you think of Richard's bass playing on a lot of folk albums as pretty straight ahead, and maybe even kind of white bread here and there. I talked to Richard about that and he said, "You know, that's what most people want," and he reached down and played the bass. He can play, anything. The guy can thumb slap, he can play funk, he can play straight ahead jazz. He can do anything. Those players are really far above and beyond what you would normally need – Tommy West is a fine B3 player, but on "Comes A Time" that's his piano and it's just perfect. I was in awe of these guys. They are such stalwarts on the local folk scene. Honest to God, I'm wondering what people have been saving them for. I think people aren't asking them to – they're ambivalent sometimes to stretch out. We'd go "No get crazy here," and they would ask "Are you sure that's what you want." And the reply would be "Yes." Plus there was Jake Armerding who is an amazing, up and coming mandolin player. He has an album on Alison Brown's label, Compass Records. Don Conoscenti is a cohort of Ellis' – he's a wonderful multi-instrumentalist - another monster that not many people know or appreciate, in terms of all the things he is capable of playing. I'm sure I'm leaving someone out, that's why I wanted to avoid trying to nail all the other players.

**EP :** We kind of came to an agreement with them, and they are really great players. We weren't going to have a lot of chance to rehearse them and we wanted people that we could trust. People whose work we recognise already, so we weren't throwing any curve balls into the recording process. Because we were co-producing the record, we wanted to reduce the risks in the production [Laughs].

*Did you cut the vocals live with the musicians or did you overdub.*

**VG :** Yes. And the best one of those was "Comes A Time." I remember it – Ellis went in, sat down, crossed his knees, the band started up and he played and sang that in one pass. I was left absolutely frigging breathless. He just absolutely nailed that vocal and the guitar part. I couldn't believe it. I mean there are his little nuances and some breaks in his voice later, because the song had just taken an absolute emotional trip. It was fantastic. There are a couple of other things, I was pretty proud of. There are some vocals that I laid down, that were takes with the band, and I went back to do the vocal again. When we examined everything we realised that the take with the band was the best. That was pretty triumphant for me, because my studio process can be – shall we say – fraught, at best. That was the vocal for "Gentle Arms Of Eden." I sat down with the electric guitar and just sang it, and that was basically the reference vocal, and we were mixing and I was talking to Tom Eaton [Ed. Note. Associate producer, plus the album was cut at his studio] and I said "I don't remember this vocal" and he smiled. I said "Tom ?" and he said, "This old vocal, was your reference vocal and you nailed everything." I just patted myself on the back. What could I say it was pretty triumphant for me.

**EP :** "Comes A Time" I did live. I think Vance did "Alone Down Here" live. "May I Suggest" I think, was done live. He did "Side Of The Road" live. We did do some things live with the band which was great. I don't think you can really tell from the recording – the recording process is getting so good now that it's hard to tell the difference.

*In terms of the person taking the lead vocal, it's pretty democratic since you each lead on five songs. Was that because the song had been that person's choice.....in other words, was there a formula.*

**VG :** Yes, that was pretty much the formula. I think that also kept it clear in terms of the concept and what was going on. Instrumentally, someone would give someone the nod to – "Well, you should try this, or you should try that." That was pretty much the formula, except for, like I said, "Comfort You" which [Laughs] – I just gave up. Ellis saved my bacon on that one, for sure.

*You have played around two weeks of live shows together to date. I've heard that. at the Outpost In The Burbs show last weekend, Jill Sobule shared the stage with you.*

**VG :** Oh my God. She's brilliant. She's a genius. During the break, we went backstage and the three of us just stared at each other, and said "Well, yeah, I guess we're taking this on the road next year." She's brilliant and she just fit right in. As Ellis said, he shook his head and said, "I didn't think there was a third



*missing until I heard her."* She's comedic. She's lacerating lyrically and musically. She has got it all. She fit right in as the third. She's a little bit Ellis, she's a little bit me, and she's out of her mind. The banter was perfect. It was a brilliant evening. That was due to Jill, she really was the third wheel on this tricycle. It was a perfect evening.

**EP :** Jill was also on the bill that night and we decided to do it as a trio, all of us on the stage at the same time and it was hilarious. I didn't think that there would be any human being that could hang with us onstage and be comfortable, but she's really entertaining and very funny, and was a good foil for Vance. My role really is to play the straight man at the shows. I enjoyed it, and she's great and we're thinking of maybe taking her on the road a little bit sometime in the future.

*How were the shows in the weeks prior to the Outpost.*

**VG :** It's been great. It's been great. There's a little bit of an undercurrent of economic slow down here, when it comes to people going to shows, and doing art of any kind here in the States. I would imagine that it's the same where you are. The houses weren't as burgeoning as we would like them to be, but with that said, the shows have been great. There's also a lot of stuff that Ellis and I do in the show that isn't related to the album. We've sort of picked and siphoned off parts from each other's solo shows, and have added parts to songs, that we think work [Laughs]. I think they work anyway. So there's some of the songs that people are used to hearing Ellis totally solo, and also some of my songs that I perform solo.

**EP :** It's a really entertaining show. The record itself is very thoughtful and sombre, but the shows are extremely funny. In between even the serious songs, there's a lot of humour. So people are having a great time and that's really what we wanted. We're not trying to be Simon and Garfunkel - we're trying to share our friendship onstage and have a good time. We do a few songs from our solo recordings, but most of it is interacting, side-by-side.

## ***The Songs They Recorded***

*You've obviously heard a lot of 9/11 songs in the last few years.*

**EP :** Yes.

*Why particularly cover Mark Erelli's song, "The Only Way."*

**EP :** Well, Mark's song was great, because it wasn't so much about what happened - it wasn't like a historical document, of what happened, it was more like an emotional response of *"What are we going to do now ?"* which I thought was great. It was a difficult thing for anybody to write about. I'm surprised that

there were good songs that came out of it, because with a subject like that, that is so pervasive, and effects so much of our emotional life, and even our real life outside of that - I think everyone got hit pretty hard. I don't know how it is in Europe, but definitely here it affected everybody. For Mark to kind of - just say it so simply and beautifully - my wife is the one that heard the song first. She said *"You have to do this Mark Erelli song."* I tracked it down, based on her response to it and - because I knew Mark's stuff - and because he does sound somewhat like me, and it was an easy song to interpret. Our voices are still in the same range, so it was almost like it was a song that was meant for me.

*I think I'm hearing the lyric correctly, because I've known the song since "The Only Way" EP that Mark issued back in early 2002. I'm sure there's a line that goes "why seek vengeance." Was that an important line for you.*

**EP :** I think that it's crucial to the song and there was a time where I was wondering whether I should edit it out. Either choose to "go with it" or "go without." In respect to Mark, and in respect to the content of the song, I decided to go with it. It's crucial really.

*Based on the album concept was "The Only Way" the obvious opening track for the album, or did that evolve in the process of tracking the album.*

**EP :** We thought maybe it would be the opener, but it all depended on how it came out as a song once it was produced. We wanted it to feel like a single. So we treated it - I doubled the vocals, and I did a few Beatles things [Laughs] in the background. We also wanted it to feel like a folk song that could be sung at a campfire with the one guy and a guitar, so we wanted to not overwhelm it with production at the same time. We also wanted it to get a lot of airplay because we think it's a great song. I think we've accomplished all that.

*Vance, are you are a big Lucinda Williams fan.*

**VG :** You know, I'm a new Lucinda fan. I've been a Lucinda fan for just shy of a year. I think my agent sent me the album **"Essence"** and in a weak moment while I was doing some stuff in the basement I put it on and then realised I had been standing in the same place for forty minutes, while the album spun. I got in the car and headed up to the local record store and bought everything else they had on Lucinda Williams. Just did an intensive spinning of Lucinda Williams. *"Side Of The Road"* was the tune that stood out for me, because of its abject simplicity. It's a dirt simplicity she portrays.

*Do you say that because the scene painted in "Side Of The Road" is of a person wanting to be on their own so that they can contemplate.*



**VG :** Wow. It just sort of said it, and I said *"Gosh, that is so simple."* I learned it in about ten or fifteen minute, but then I realised that to sing it, and to bring it to life was like paying homage. Every time I go to do that song, it's still not mine. I'm just sort of paying it homage. That's the mark of I think, an incredible piece of work where, again, you have to be so guileless to get it done. That's what I felt like I was. I felt like I really had to step out of that song's way.

*Ellis, did "Citizen Of The World" take a long time to write.*

**EP :** A few months. Initially I left some holes for Vance to fill in, because I thought *"Maybe we could do this for the record"* if Vance came in and sang sort of his national and racial make-up in the song - so we partnered up on it. It's a song about - are we part of a community that's bigger than us, or are we out on our own. Like playing bully [Laughs]. That's what the song is about. I wish we would really treat the United Nations like it was the governing body of the world, and treat other countries with respect. I don't like how a lot of the politics have played out. I don't think we're doing anything positive for the future relationships with some of these countries that are angry with us. That's really how the statement came about. I began writing the song this Spring, as we were debating whether we were going into Iraq, and there was all this discussion from other countries about whether we had the right to do what we were doing. In those diplomatic battles with France and Germany and stuff like that.

*Sharon helped you write the song. Is she a musical person.*

**EP :** Not a musical person, but she's a writer. We were discussing how to put the third verse together in the car, and she came up with the line *"Seeds of violence, seeds of peace, what will grow in the Holy Land."* Normally if she makes a suggestion on a line or two, here or there, I won't credit her because it's sort of suggestion, but if it's crucial to the impact of the song then I'd give credit. The difference with that is that she is an editor of all my songs, and so is Vance and so is my manager, and they make comments and suggestions, and occasionally, even slip in a line. But when they are crucial to the writing process, which I think she was in that particular verse, I have to give her credit. I wouldn't have come up with that line, that's definitely her work.

*Was the universal focus of the song, something you aimed for from the outset.*

**EP :** Yes. Absolutely.

*I presume that mention of specific events, or people - like the fireman's chaplain Rev. Mychal Judge who perished, were essential elements in the structuring the song, to say "this is where we have come from, and this is where we have got to."*

**EP :** Yeah. It became important to say that people from all these countries were in the towers, it wasn't just Americans who died. It was like every nation had a representative in those towers who passed away. And every religion. Muslims died in the towers. Jews died. Christians died. Father Mychal was sort of a - it's a visual point that I sometimes use popular names, who are sort of pop icons, and he became a popular icon of the whole event. It was so tragic, and people saw the video of him praying downstairs in the towers. The first night I played the song, I was in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania in a place called Godfrey Daniels. A woman came up to me after the show and she said *"I'm trembling because Father Mychal is the priest that married me and my husband eighteen years ago, and we're celebrating our anniversary tonight."* And she pulled out her wallet, and when he moved to New York, Father Mychal had written his number on the back of one of his business cards. She pulled out his card and handed it to me and I looked down at his handwriting. On the card and he had written - Father Mychal and his new address and his new phone number. It was so bizarre, and I was contemplating whether or not I should take him out of the song, at that point. When he kind of showed up as a *ghost* at the show there, I decided to keep him in it. He was a crucial part of that whole day.

*Vance, what's your recall of contributing to the song.*

**VG :** Ellis and Sharon pretty much had that song framed out. What Ellis wanted me to do - I ended up being a gun for hire on that song [Laughs]. He wanted me on it, and wanted the details of my ethnicity in the first couple of lines. I worked on that for about a week. That was the only contention - in terms of going back and forth with that, because my first lines were kind of a little more tongue-in-cheek than he was shooting for. I didn't want - again, I was worried about the song coming off as a sort of cloying *"We Are The World"* kind of thing, so I was stuck. He had a concept that had been written down as a song, and I had basically, at that point, four lines. What was I to do with these four lines ? I hacked at them and hacked at them forever. Then finally *"Here's an African in my skin, Seminole are my kin, I'm a man of a thousand faces, Many nations, creeds and races."* I'd given up, I said *"OK, I'm like the Heinz 57 varieties. You're like a bottle of ketchup"* - my mother used to say that. Because of the various ethnicities that we all were, and that dawned on me *"I'm the man of a thousand faces, many nations, creeds and races"* - that ended up being the line. Then there were some other little plugs here and there, with stuff like St. Theresa MLK - that was mine. So it ends up being this little laundry list, but each one of us dropped in little things to the lyric. Sharon for instance - one of hers was *"Scarecrow in the oilfield, soldier in the sand. Seed of violence, seeds of peace, What will grow in the holy land."* So much of the other stuff was Ellis. Some of



the lines that Ellis had, I actually flip flopped around, so I really was a *gun for hire*, and that was quite difficult, because I didn't have the opportunity of being in on the ground floor of the concept.

*So you didn't write the song face-to-face, but presumably communicated by computer.*

**VG :** We did it on computer for a bit, and then I went up to Ellis' house to finish it, and that's when we came to blows [Laughs]. The notebook has all the scribbles in it, and it was finally – it might have been in the studio where I finally figured out what my lines were going to be, as I laid my vocal down separately.

*Was the concept of the "universality" of mankind in the lyric from the outset, or did it develop as the song developed.*

**VG :** Well I think that was originally in there. As Ellis opens the song, the first line is "*I'm an American*," – there's a tv advertisement here by the Ad Council in the States, and each person flashes on the screen for a few seconds and they stand up and say "*I'm an American*." There's a Native American, a person of Irish origin, someone in a wheelchair and then there's a five-year old black girl. All of these people say that they are American. He had a row to hoe, just by coming out of the gate like that. It's like "*Man, what are you doing to yourself*." You immediately back yourself into a corner with that line. There it was.

*"Comes A Time" is one of a pair of songs written in the seventies. Why did you pick it Ellis.*

**EP :** I love Neil Young for one. I love his acoustic stuff a lot, and that's a song about putting down roots and asking yourself "*OK, maybe it's time for me to settle into something that's a little bit more about family and community*." It seemed to fit the theme of the album, plus I love the song. It's a song that I've been carrying a long time that I thought I might record someday. When we decided what the theme of the record was going to be, I thought I'll throw it at Vance – I also perform "*Let It Be*" sometimes, which would have been really great for the record, thematically, but maybe a little too obvious.

*I know that Ellis has toured extensively with Susan Werner, so I was kind of surprised that he didn't come up with "May I Suggest."*

**VG :** That one came out of my record collection.

*You seemed to perform the song at a faster pace than Susan. Any reason.*

**VG :** Faster, huh.

*It's hardly perceptible but it does seem to be faster. In terms of the reassurance deliver in the lyric, her delivery, in my mind, employs some hesitation.*

**VG :** Well, maybe. I hadn't thought of it like that. I also thought, to be perfectly honest, that Susan's delivery since she was doing it on piano was a fair bit busier than mine. My delivery on that, since I'm playing a finger style guitar throughout, is actually a little bit more fluid I think. Not good, bad or indifferent fluid, but just more fluid. There's less, sort of, passing jazz piano chords. She employs descending chords when she plays.

*"May I Suggest" is one of about a dozen songs that are truly dear to me, where I can tell you exactly where I was, when it was, and what I was doing when I first heard it. How did you find the song.*

**VG :** I'd heard reference to it, before I actually heard the song. I'd seen somebody reference it "*Oh did anybody hear Susan sing "May I Suggest."* Oh, what a great song." Then I think I did a show with her, and she sat down at the piano and played it. Sort of plastered us all against the wall with it. I filed it in the back of my mind, like "*Wow*." Then, when we went to do the search for these tunes, I slapped on "**New Non-Fiction**" and it was the song that sat up. It sat straight up and poked me in the face. There are folks who have a relationship to a lot of these songs, and I actually had a disc jockey, literally minutes before I went on the air with him, tell me "*Maybe you shouldn't have done the Dave Carter song, because it's too early to cover his music*."

*Personally I think everyone should be out there singing Dave Carter songs right now.*

**VG :** I said "*Wait a minute. People were doing Dave Carter songs before he died. What kind of comment is that ?*" He said, "*You do it too slow*." I was like "*OK, this is your favourite Dave Carter song isn't it ?*" and he said "*Yes*." I said "*OK*." That pretty much summed it up.

*Presumably you played bills with Dave and Tracy, while Dave was still with us.*

**VG :** Oh sure.

*How did you rate him as a writer - was he a shooting star that came over the horizon and was in view for too few years.*

**VG :** Yes. Yes. I feel that Dave Carter was, at worst, wordy. There's no sin in that. His work is filled with language. Some people – I read some reviews of Dave's stuff, and some people have said that he's far too wordy. He could edit. My take is that Dave Carter, was just Dave Carter. As far as I'm concerned, he simply wrote that way. It was perfect. He was not long to be on this world, because he was just too brilliant. That may sound a bit vulgar, but I really feel that. I feel sometimes – to be cliché about it – the good really die young. It amazes me – that song is every book's genesis.



*In terms of the lyric opening with the evolution of life on this planet, did you deliberately put Dave's song on the album as a way of saying "Listen up World, just look where we came from and what we are throwing away by fighting each other."*

**VG :** It was – [Vance hesitates] - yes. It was almost a more lugubrious version of "Citizen of The World." "This is my home" – that ends up being the sentiment, because the evolution of the song – people forget that the evolution of that song goes from the genesis base to that final capping verse, "There's smoke upon the harbour, And factories on the shore." It's just a call to home, you know. It's the greasy, fertile mud version of "Citizen Of The World."

*You said earlier that you had a thrash version of the song on tape as well as a version cut at the same pace as Dave and Tracy's version. Do you foresee the release of a "Gentle Arms Of Eden" EP with all the variations.*

**VG :** [Laughs]. I'm hoping that those other versions no longer exist on tape. I'm not sure who has got them. The one that sounded like Harry Belafonte was just too funny. [Vance begins singing the opening verse ala Belafonte]. Man, it sounded like it came from a Disney movie. We had to try and see what happened.

*Ellis, where did you stumble across Jeff Black. Had you seen him play in Nashville.*

**EP :** I've known Jeff for maybe six or seven years, and love what he does. There's this intensity to it, and honesty to it, and I love that track on his record. We wanted to do the song as well as he did it. I don't know if we did or not, we interpreted it more in a folk rock/bluegrass kind of way, and put mandolins on it. The mandolin takes the part that was an organ on Jeff's version. Again, "What Do I Want What Do I Need" is a song about self-assessing. Like, where am I ? what's pulling me ? why am I who I am ? and what do I want out of life ?

*We've already mentioned Dave Carter and "Gentle Arms Of Eden." Did you ever play shows with Dave & Tracy.*

**EP :** Yeah, we were both friends with Dave Carter and admired his work a great deal and really both of us think he was a genius. A quirky genius at that. Dave was one of a kind. It's a beautiful song and Dave really captured my view of the whole Genesis thing.

*What about the pace of Vance's version. According to Vance a number of versions existed in the studio.*

**EP :** Yeah, and the version we do live is a lot more, sort of, up-tempo. Vance wanted to have a very, organic sound in the studio – to me it almost creates this sort of visual, Disney movie. It really builds over time and there's a lot of space in it. It seems very much like a movie to me when I hear it.

*There was bound to be a Woody Guthrie song on the album if Ellis was involved.*

**EP :** That's right [Laughs]. I think Slaid did a beautiful thing with the music on that song. Again, the lyric is about looking around you. What is heaven ? What is Earth ? Do we belong here ? To me, that song says, heaven is all around us. This whole idea of martyrs and things like that – you know, blowing themselves up, I really wish people would view life as a little more valuable and precious.

*Was the recent "Ribbon Of Highway/Endless Skyway" tour the first opportunity you had to see Slaid in concert, as well as talk to him about Woody.*

**EP :** Yeah. Occasionally we would bump into each other, but that was the first chance we got to really hang out and talk. I got to hear him do "This Morning I Am Born Again" every night for something like a month. By the end of that tour I was convinced I needed to put his song on the record.

*Is Slaid as big a Woody Guthrie fan as you are.*

**EP :** I would say yes. Absolutely. There were long conversations about Woody throughout that tour. We were all definite Woody Heads. There were about twenty of us on that tour and we were all serious about him.

*Vance how old is your song "Alone Down Here."*

**VG :** It was written in, I would say, December of last year, or January of this year. It had just been written, and Ellis really wanted to put it on the album. I was being selfish actually, and said "I'd rather save this for my next album." It was one of the tunes that I thought would end up being on whatever album I released in 2004. He convinced me. He said "This is a pretty timely song, but you think about it" and it was, it was perfect for this album. There it was, and it ended up on the album.

*Initially there's some humour in the lyric, which is not unexpected in a Vance Gilbert song, but then the words become a little more serious, with lines about war - "with all the fancy reasons we can give to come to blows." What intrigues me is that there's an underlying reference to God in the lyric, principally in the closing verse, although the word isn't used.*

**VG :** Well, I think there's a God reference throughout the song. It's just a matter of the protagonist in the song wondering about life. I guess the concept, you could say, is somewhat stolen from Stevie Wonder's "Heaven Is Ten Zillion Light Years Away," where there's a line "Where is my God, That's what my friends ask me." And the song continues "And I say it's taken him so long 'cause he's got so far to come." I love that concept. It's like, it's there and you just have to – it's there [Laughs]. Let's just say that it's a



metaphor within a metaphor. The concept, *I hope that we are alone down here*, is sort of like that thing where a parent may say to a child "Oh, if your father could see what you are doing now." It's a play on that. It ends up being a bit of embarrassment that whatever your higher power is should be seeing what you are doing. It plays on about two or three different levels. Some of them, I haven't discovered yet [Laughs].

*I know you said earlier that you've only had the "Veedon Fleece" album for ten years, but were the seventies a big influence on you musically.*

**VG :** I headed to College in 1975, and first picked up a guitar there in '76. The late sixties into the seventies, was pretty formative for me musically. I was growing up in Philadelphia and there was everything spinning on the turntable from Dinah Washington to Smokey Robinson - all the black pop music of the time. When I started making enough of my own money to go buy 45's - I was buying Elton John, Neil Sedaka and The Beatles and everything else that came across the airwaves, that I liked. It was very formative for me. To be perfectly honest, I think that's what people might be missing a little bit on the duo album, because my production values particularly on my album "**One Thru Fourteen**" tended to be very seventies based. You really needn't come into the studio with Vance Gilbert with a five string bass, with the low B. It's not necessary, because I really like that sixties and seventies pop sound. Dirty and crackly keyboards. I like going after that kind of thing. In answer to that question, the fact that "Comfort You" was seventies based - I don't think is as important as its content. When I was listening to music in the seventies, I had never heard of "**Veedon Fleece**." I'd heard of the "**Moondance**" album. Everyone played that. Well, let me step back from that a little bit, because "**Veedon Fleece**" was made also in the seventies and has that same vibe. It really does, it has that same vibe as "**Moondance**" - things are a little out of tune and falling part here and there, and yet the energy present is undeniable - so, to hell with what I just said [Laughs].

*In terms of sequencing the album, was "Comfort You" an obvious closing track.*

**VG :** Yeah, pretty obvious. You know by the time we had finished that track, like I said earlier, that song was a bit of a buddy buddy tour-de-force. "Citizen Of The World" might have been a nice way to finish an album, but a song like "Citizen Of The World," to be perfectly economic about it, there's a certain amount of airplay that it might garner as such, and we had to go with the fact that it was more prominently placed. But "Comfort You" was pretty much a perfect way to finish the album. My failing as a producer is often that I tend to like my albums to trickle down, from the rocking parts right on down to a ballad. And then sort of fizzle away. As a producer, I might need to make an

adjustment with that. I'll err towards that as opposed to hopping around, back and forth with different tempos.

*At the very least "Comfort You" was an old piece of Celtic soul that was given the twenty-first century Philly treatment.*

**VG :** Why hell, I think it was given the Philly treatment from the word go. Van's a Celtic guy that - I just can't imagine being over at his house and looking at his record collection. I bet he's got everything. You know he's got everything. I think that's what the problem was with that song, it didn't need any more soul, like I was trying to give it. Van Morrison is a soulful guy. He is anomalous in a lot of ways. He's just there - and what do you do with that.

*Any comments that either one of you want to offer on songs you didn't sing the lead vocal on.*

**VG :** I think "Comes A Time" is probably the best song on the album, because of - and not many people hear the quality that I'm hearing in it - but there's absolute realism in "Comes A Time" that is mind boggling to me. It's so absolutely real. That's the song on the album for me. The other songs - I think Ellis has added magnificent pop/rock/jangly sensibility to a lot of the stuff that really lifts a lot of the tunes. That's why I'm glad his influence was there. I think the world of his approach to stuff, whereas again, some of the tunes that I was producing ended up being a little thicker, a little groovier. Not even groovier, a little greasier. Those were good juxtapositions.

**EP :** I would say that the "May I Suggest" song by Susan Werner is getting a lot of attention. I think that's because it is so well written. Again, it follows a similar theme to the Woody Guthrie song of - *live in the now, look what's around you* - despite the hardships you are in the middle of in life, you should celebrate that fact. I think it's a really eloquent song.

*I know that you toured fairly extensively with Susan Werner a few years back, and there were segments of that tour in your "3000 Miles" DVD. When did you first hear the song.*

**EP :** When she played it live on that tour, before she recorded it. She did it ever night on that tour. If Vance wasn't going to choose it, I was going to choose it. He unfortunately came up with it first so, I didn't get to sing it on the record, but I'm a big fan of that song.

*As I said earlier, "May I Suggest" is one of maybe ten songs that I dearly love and can tell you where I was, when it was, literally to the day, and what I was doing when I first heard the song.*

**EP :** I'm with you too on that. It's so eloquently written. Everybody needs to hear that song. It needs to be recorded by more important people than Vance and



me [Laughs] – I mean people like Bette Midler and Peter, Paul & Mary need to get hold of that song.

*And yet the amazing thing is that Susan has said that when she wrote it she thought the song was a throwaway.*

**EP :** Yeah. Sometimes it's the ones that are right under your nose are the most - I don't know - accessible to everybody. There's not a lot of flowery stuff going on in that one you know. Susan can be a real poet and although that song is very poetic, it is also direct. You can hear it for the first time and get it. Like you said, you don't need to hear it repeatedly to understand what she was getting at. It's a great song.

*To be honest as far as all ten tracks are concerned, I can't see the join. Everything fits.*

**VG :** That's goal eventually. This album was such – again in my learning process of dealing with criticism and all, this album was such a success. It was such a success for us. It was such an absolute concept thing that just, so came to fruition.

*How long did the studio sessions take, about a couple of weeks.*

**VG :** Back to back if you were to stack it that way, then yes. Overall it took about two months with time in between to tour and everything else. We did a lot of it in Ellis' house in his basement. The rest of it we did at Tom Eaton's Studios. It's a wonderful, wonderful place to record because he's very accommodating and allows you to take your time. This album was such an unheralded success.

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**Rosie Thomas:**

#### ***The 'Only With Laughter Can You Win' Interview***

*The interview with Rosie Thomas took place by telephone on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2003 while Rosie was touring the United Kingdom. I was in Birmingham, and Rosie was in Crouch End, London. A word of caution before you read the text - from an early age Rosie has been involved in music and drama, and while conducting this interview on a number of occasions, by way of highlighting her point, Rosie engaged with herself in, for the sake of a better description, a two-way conversation. In the text, there are instances of consecutive sentences [all in italics] contained within inverted commas. Please read these instances as a conversation between two people, and all will make sense. Many thanks go to Sarah Wells [aka Folk Babe], Chris Jacobs and Russell Yates for all their help in setting up the interview.*

### ***The Evolution of Rosie's Songwriting***

*How old were you when you started writing songs.*

Gosh. I started very young, but really I think when I started playing out for people. I was seventeen or

eighteen, and that was when I really started writing songs that I thought were good enough for people to hear. I did that with my father. He and I played shows together to get me started, because I didn't have enough material. He's also a musician. I went to him and said, "Hey Dad, I want to play shows but I don't have enough material. Could you play some too, so that we could give people a full hours worth?" That's how we sort of started. I would say I was always writing as a young person, but I think not until I got my guitar could I say that I started composing. I also began composing on the piano when I was seventeen.

*When you played with your Dad was he doing covers or did he perform his own songs.*

He and my mother used to sing together, but they only did covers. He did write some songs, but mostly performed songs by Cat Stevens, Neil Diamond – who else does he do? – Bob Dylan. A lot of early folk songs as well - Paul Simon – Simon & Garfunkel type songs. So he and I would collaborate on those, and sings harmonies while performing them. Then I would go up and do my own material.



**Rosie Thomas** [pic. by Jennifer Adams]

*Was this just in Detroit.*

Yeah. It was around the suburbs of Detroit. I grew up in a suburb outside of Detroit, and we played in coffee shops in suburbs like Royal Oak and Livonia and in Detroit. Ann Arbor as well. We went into coffee shops – I used to go in with my guitar, because I didn't have a demo at the time. I would walk around with my guitar and go in every coffee shop and ask "Can I play



here?" I'd play for them right there. We did it for free really. If we got shows, they'd said "We can't pay you anything," and we'd say "OK, that's all right" and we'd put a tip jar out. There's this one coffee shop in Royal Oak though that we played outside, so it was right on the street where people were walking by and we put a tip jar out. That was the one we always loved to play at, because we made more money that way. I think it was called The Chocolate Factory or something like that. I know it was a coffee shop that made chocolate.

*How long ago was it that you played with your Dad.*

Let's see. It was eight years ago.

*When you began writing songs, what sparked your interest.*

I think it was a lot of things. I was always very creative and I think I wanted to see what I had to say on my own. I grew up doing theatre and was in musicals at school and took performing arts high school. I was in the music programme there, so I learned theory. The teachers taught us about The Beatles and when they started writing, and Bob Dylan - that sort of thing. It really turned me on to realising that maybe what I wanted to do with my life was to entertain people - but not necessarily be part of something that had already been done. I always got parts in plays where I thought, "Oh, I don't want to play this part. It doesn't say anything. I doesn't say what I would want to say." When I got Joni Mitchell's "Blue" album, I think I was seventeen and someone handed it to me in school. I listened to that thing until the tape wore out, because I couldn't believe how compelling her music was and what stories she was telling. Her vocal quality. All of it. I thought, "That's what I want to do. I want to tell my own story." To me, to tell your story through your own life experience, I couldn't think of a better way to engage people in who you are. To connect with people in a better way, by presenting to them who you are as a human being, so that they can relate to you, and you can relate to them. So that was when I decided how really great it would be to push myself to write my own material.

*My next question was going to be, have you ever taken songwriting lessons, but you just mentioned attending a performing arts school. What was the name of the school.*

It was called CAPA. The Creative And Performing Arts. I went to public school for half the day and then took a bus to the other school for the rest of the day. This was in the suburbs of Detroit. It was a great programme, and the only classes I ever did well in of course. The other classes at the beginning of the day sucked. Once I got to the other programme, all I took was music classes. Everything was about music. We studied The Beatles. We studied everything.

*Did the course include classical music.*

All sorts of stuff, but the coolest and best thing about that programme was, my voice teacher. It was a really small programme and you had to audition to get into it and whatever. I was thirteen when I auditioned, and they treated it very professionally, like a College sort of. You know, what it would be like to get into a real Performing Arts College. They only took in a certain amount of people, so our classes were very small. As a result, the teacher had enough time to give 1 on 1 with all the students. The great thing about my teacher was that he got to know us individually within those four years, he watched us develop with our voice and also knew our personalities and knew what type of music we were really into. Like, for me, he knew I was really big on folk and soul music. Motown music. When he gave me a song to learn and perform - he would give me something like "Georgia" - stuff like that, to really sing out my soul. Or he would give me, Joni Mitchell songs to sing. If it was someone that wanted to go into opera, then they would get opera pieces. The great thing was, they only pushed you to find your individual voice. So that was the only type of music they gave you to sing. Everybody had different material. It was really, really cool that I didn't have to per se, take a vocal - there are so many friends I have that take vocal classes, and are so bummed because they always have this thing where they have to sing musical songs. That's not how they want to sing. I think it's real important in taking vocal lessons that people remind you that you have an individual voice down there. You don't want to sound like everyone else, and perhaps you don't. I felt really lucky to be able to have that experience at a young age. We had to take theory classes. That was always the hardest one. That was it really - we did study some songwriting ideas, but not too much, because, really, everybody writes so differently. There's really no method to writing a song. To me anyways.

*Once you began songwriting was it something that you did every day because you felt you had to.*

In the beginning it was more of a forced thing. I think when I started writing, it was a case of, I didn't feel good unless I wrote a song a day.

*So it was like a guilt thing at the outset.*

Kind of - yes. All of a sudden you think "Oh shit, you're supposed to be a songwriter, so you'd better write all the time." The down side of that is that I had a lot of crappy songs, because they weren't really inspired by anything, but more or less pushed. I think when I finally realised "Wait a minute, this is what I love to do and this doesn't have to be the kind of job where I put pressure on myself to do it every day." The great thing that comes with the passage of time, and writing for a while, is that you realise how with every songwriter, how songs come out better when you just let them lie.

*And let them evolve naturally.*



Yeah, kind of. There are some songs on the first record, like "Farewell" that came right out of me. It's a very simple song. "Wedding Day" for some reason, it's so wordy, but that song took no time to write because inspiration was there. I think that those are always my best songs, those are always my favourite ones, because they are the ones that sort of spill out of me. Sometimes before you can even acknowledge what you wrote. Sometimes you're just sort of writing, writing, writing and then you look down and think *"Alright. Cool. That's what I had to say. Alright, I got it out."* I think the process comes more naturally that way. I definitely don't push myself anymore. It's hard being on the road, because I'll hear a tune and know that if I were at home with my piano, I would probably have written a song that day. I used to bring a tape recorder with me, but I've forgotten it on this trip. I try to write things down on it quickly and use the theory method in my head, the quarter note and the dotted fourth. But then I think that if they're meant to be there, they will always come back. And they do usually, so -

*You've begun to cover my next question. Are you a keeper of notebooks.*

Yeah, I am. I scribble notes everywhere. I go through journals and napkins - I have so many of them. I journal a lot about what I'm going through, what I'm thinking about. I've always done that. I've kept a journal since I was a young person. Now they are much more - they are pretty chaotic, they're thoughts about that day or whatever and then the next page is just music notes and scribbles and stuff. An idea for a song. My set lists are in there. I tape clippings and things in there from newspapers. They are just this real full mess - a book that probably I should throw out really [Laughs]. I keep them all though. I think they all have a story to tell at some point. I like to look back on them and witness the growth that I've gone through, or perhaps, maybe, realise that I'm in the same position. And draw the conclusion - Oh, Oh - that's a problem with me, or whatever [Laughs]. I think they are good reference points in your life. They help me get through things anyways. It's nice to write down on paper how you are feeling, when you don't feel like talking to somebody.

*You're lyrical approach is in the main, personal, but if you keep journals are you an observer of other people.*

Absolutely. Oh, of course. I think if you don't have an understanding of people - a good understanding or a good observation, or even be empathetic - I think that's the whole key to it. For me, I look at my life and I look at everything very, very honestly and sincerely. Therefore I look at people, hopefully, that way as well. When I sit with someone I know that I'd rather talk about more personal things than just goof around the whole time. It's fun to do that too. Everybody needs to do that, but I know from my experience that I'd much

rather somebody talked to me about personal things. Have the bravery to do that anyways, than just be another jokester friend, because we all have enough of those. Therefore, what I mean by that is, that I'm very connected to the human condition - I am very intrigued by it anyways. Lots of my songs come from conversations I've had with other people where, more or less, I'm probably thinking the same thing because we are very similar in the things that we think about. Even at this point in my life, in my twenties, there are all these weird things you go through - what is love? what does it mean to be in love? what does it mean to be loved? what does it mean to die? - holy shit, one day we're going to die. What does that mean? Am I living the right life? Am I doing everything right? Am I going to have a lot of regrets? Am I brave enough? Faith - those are things that people think about. Things that I consider, things that I've been told since I was a kid that I struggle with. It definitely has a lot to do with filtering through my own humanity, but only because, as well, of conversations I've had with other people that have also given me ideas as to what I write. What I write about. If I get together with people and I hear like *"Jenn is upset about love, and this person is as well, and this person is scared of dying and so am I."* And this person has just talked about their faith and how they don't understand it, and they are on the verge of letting it go or whatever. Blah, blah, blah. That's what I'm going to write about. That's what I think people need to hear.

*In terms of the songs on your sophomore album "Only With Laughter Can You Win" I presume they were written in period following the release of your debut album. How many songs do you write in a year.*

I write a record's worth at least. Actually it's probably more, because, I think the other thing, for me, is that you have to write at least twenty to thirty songs and then hopefully, out of those, there are around twelve or thirteen songs that are keepers [Laughs]. Let's say I write thirty songs a year, and then I go through them and say, *"These are definitely the ones."* Perhaps those other ones will be used. It doesn't mean that they are bad. Maybe they need more work. Maybe I didn't quite say what I wanted to, yet. Maybe I want to figure out the piano structure a little more. The ones that I wrote where I went, *"That's exactly how it's supposed to be."* Then those are the ones I used for the record. All the songs on the new record are pretty much present songs. It was hard, almost, for the first one, because at that point I had all these songs. I had so many songs.

*And you didn't know which ones to pick.*

Yeah. And you feel sort of obligated to them all, like they are your children. That's sort of how I look at them sometimes. I baby them, and think *"I have to give each one of them their chance."*



*You mentioned a moment ago that "Wedding Day" was a song that came very quickly. Even if they do arrive that way, do your songs still go through an editing process.*

Yes and no. Certainly when we did the record with our producer and friend Martin [Feveyear], when he heard "Wedding Day" he was like *"Oh, this is the one. This is the one."* He sort of had fun coming up with some hooks to it, and that sort of thing, which I'm not necessarily really brilliant at. I write something, I keep it simple and think *"It's beautiful. It's simple and it says what it's supposed to say."* There's no chorus. There's nothing. It's a song. It's a piece of work. It's just words on paper and that's all people need in my view. With "Wedding Day," Martin went *"Please let me have fun with one."* I think there a few more "Oh's" and "Ah's" in it, at the end and than sort of thing, which I probably wouldn't have come up with. More or less everything that I write, that usually is exactly how we play it. What we do is we – me and Eric [Fisher], go through the songs beforehand and then demo them. Then, when we go into the studio it's a case of *"This is how we want it. It's exactly this way. Let's record it."*

*Has anyone covered any of your songs yet.*

You know, I don't know. I really don't know. I believe that some band did "Lorraine." I don't even know who the band was. I'd be excited to have a Dolly Parton cover. She can pick "Wedding Day" [Laughs] and give me some money. Just kidding.

*The songs on "When We Were Small" focused on relationships, while, subjectively speaking, the songs on "Laughter" question issues to do with life. There's an intensity in relation to how you construct a lyric, yet there's also the aspect of simplicity which you've mentioned. Where do you think your songs come from.*

I think they come from my heart, I guess. I don't know. I think it's funny, because only with songwriting is everything very serious and also very sad. I also think they come from a very sad place, in a way. I think the best way to describe it is, that they just come from a very sincere place in me. Underneath all of this is a part of me that is a very broken person. I think that's probably where they come from, if that makes sense.

*Maybe I didn't word that question too well. For instance, take "Wedding Day" in terms of its conventional meaning, and then look at the lyric. It's a song about parting. Subjectively, it's the total antithesis of the song title. Similarly, in "Tell Me How," there's that wonderful line "Aren't you supposed to love yourself before you can understand how to love someone after all?"*

I know what you mean. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. It just comes – that's the way I talk anyways. Those are things I think about. Those are things I tell people. Those are conversations I have had with people. Those are the things I was taught by my parents – *"you've got to love yourself, before you love*

*somebody else."* "Wedding Day" was funny, because my brother was getting married at the time, so I was thinking about his wedding, and it was really where the song came from. I wrote a song for his wedding to sing. He asked me, *"Will you write a song for my wedding?"* and I said *"Absolutely."* I'd always promised my brother I'd write a song for his wedding. I wrote a song just about him. It wasn't called "Wedding Day," but it was in the same finger-picking pattern, so what I did is after I wrote it I thought, *"The song was about a wedding day. I'm not getting married. I'm far from getting married [Laughs]. What would be a wedding day for someone like me? Would it be opposite? Would it be embracing yourself?"* It's going to be so great. It's going to be like my wedding day, but it's not a wedding. It's just a young person going on the road and getting away from everything that's the opposite of love. Everything. It's just about being yourself and self-growth. Being brave and on your own, and that sort of thing. It really was derived from his wedding day. That's where the idea came from.

*But then you twisted things a little.*

Yeah. Absolutely. Because I thought, well I have to, because I certainly don't know what it's like – you see, that's the thing, it's hard for me to write about things that I don't know. If I get married one day, that's what I'll write songs about. What it really is like to get married. I don't know yet. I don't really know what that feels like, so most things I write about are things I go through because I know what it feels like. Then I'm excited about it, because it gives me one more thing to relate to somebody else. Then I can go, did I know what it's like to have my heart broken? – Yeah, I've been there. I know what it's like to be completely confused – because I have definitely been there. Those are the things that I'm willing to embrace with even more of a hope that I can connect with more people. My mother is very much that way. You know she's a very, very down to earth person and is so willing to take on so much, I think, just for the experience of knowing, more and more, how to empathise with people. I want to be open to those things, again, so that I can say for people what they are afraid to say for themselves. Really the songs come from a very personal part of me. They relate to really, really personal things that I've gone through.

*Lyricaly you've made the situations more universal, so that people can conclude, "That's what happened to me."*

I think that's really important. To me it's real important to keep things simple – like, my young niece says the most simple things and yet they're perfect. She says *"I love you Auntie Rosie"* and I know she does. Maybe she's still figuring out what the words mean [Laughs], but I think keeping it simple is the best way to reach people. The more complicated a song becomes word wise anyways, the more people miss what you're saying. I think that if you can keep it very simple, you'll



reach more people that way. That's certainly very important to me.

*One thing I noticed this morning while listening to your new album, and you've already mentioned "Blue" and Joni Mitchell, but this morning I heard something I can't say I've noticed before. What if I said, Nick Drake.*

Oh, I'm a huge fan. A huge fan of his.

*What about other songwriting heroes.*

Oh, Stevie Wonder. I'm a huge, huge fan of his. Growing up I listened to his music.

*And, of course, you were living in Motor City.*

Exactly. My Dad had all that stuff. I loved The Jackson Five. The Temptations. The Supremes. My Dad loved that music. We went to the Motown Museum a number of times. He always showed us, *"That was the old Motown recording studio. That's where all those artists did it."* And always reminded us that, *"They all don't have any money now, because they were screwed on their publishing [Laughs]. If you guys go into that business, be very careful."* He was huge on those type of artists, but I really discovered Stevie Wonder on my own. His seventies albums are my favourite vinyls. That's all I look for in record stores are his vinyls - as many as I can get. **"Talking Book"** is probably one of my favourite records of his. **"Songs In The Key Of Life"** is amazing as well, and there's a way that he has about saying things - even bringing God into it - there's hope in it that I think is so mesmerising. It's so fulfilling for me, because he may write about something very sad, but there's always - I don't know, you can hear like this smile underneath it all. You can sort of feel his joy in it. Even in his sorrow. That's something about his songwriting that I've always been just so fascinated by. Like *"How does that guy do that? How does he do that, because it always wins me over."* And not only that, his records just put so much joy in me when I listen to them. It doesn't even matter if it's one of the sadder songs like *"I Never Dreamed You Would Leave."* These songs are like - oh, so heartbreaking, and yet he can follow it up with [Rosie sings] *"I believe when I fall in love"* - like those type of song, that you're just like *"Yeah"* - so much soul. There's so much soul in his voice and I think, *"That's the singing style that I love so much, because it's just enough."* That would be enough for me if he did an a cappella record. I think that would be enough for me. But then it's the instrumentation as well, of course. The organs and the other instruments he uses. I think that was something I tried, just a bit to do on this record. I was listening to his records, and I thought *"I need a Hammond organ."* The key thing on his records is the organ. So with *"Tell Me How"* we used a little bit of Hammond on that. God, my dream one day is to record like that. Just a soul record, you know [Laughs]. I think my voice is getting a bit

stronger. For this record, I think I sort of sang out a bit more. I wasn't so shy about my voice. That's a direction I'd love to go in.

## ***Musicians & Producers That Rosie Has Worked With.....***

*OK the next item that I wanted to talk about was, specifically, three people that you've worked with. They are Damian Jurado, Eric Fisher and Martin Feveyear. In terms of time chronology of how you met them, which was the first. Was it Damian.*

Damian [Jurado] was the first.

*Can you tell me how he helped you musically.*

I met him when he was on tour. We ended up playing a show in Detroit together and talked after the show. Our tour ended in Detroit, and I went in the car with them. Damian and Pedro The Lion, the band he was travelling with. I went along to chat with him and hang out for a week. I was planning on moving to Seattle at the time. I thought I wouldn't know anybody when I went there, but when I talked to Damian he said *"I'm from Seattle."* All the other guys were as well. I thought, *"That's weird."* When I moved out there, we kept in contact. I was auditioning for a theatre school at the time. That's the reason I was going there. I went out to audition and got accepted, and really they were the only friends in Seattle I had at that time - Damian and a few other fellows. We started a friendship, and then I began attending school and that's where I met Eric [Fisher] - at the theatre school. This is Cornish College of the Arts and Eric was studying graphic design. We became good friends and he kept saying, *"Let's play guitar together."*

*You knew that he was a musician, but did he know that you were a musician.*

He knew that I was, but I didn't really trust - at that time, when people asked me that I was like *"Oh, I can't play with anybody. I only play D, A and E. Like, I'm slightly boring. I can't jam with anyone."* I would have bored them to death. Later, I was playing a show - maybe it was with Damian, or was it with someone else? - so for fun I thought *"I'll ask Eric, and see what he can do."* I'd never played with anybody else at that time. Never ever. My Dad was the only one. I asked him, and we got together and sang a couple of songs and I thought, *"Wow, this is really great."* So we started playing together at that point. Then Eric's friend Andy [Myers] moved from California to Seattle, so he became our drummer.

*Where were you playing at that time.*

We played in local clubs, and I was also going to school. Most of the time I sang with Damian. We were singing harmonies on his songs, more than anything. I



played my own shows, but it was hard to get shows. If you didn't have a record label, nobody really gave you the time of day. I'd drop a demo off, and nobody cared. I played a lot of shows with Damian and I was really inspired by him. We had long conversations, and he would say, *"I want to help you get your music heard"* because he saw that I was so miserable at school. It was like *"God, I don't want to be at this school anymore. I just want to be doing it. I don't want to be learning anymore. What am I doing? I just want to be out there. I want to be entertaining people."* If it were comedy, I wouldn't care. If it were music, I wouldn't care. If it were theatre, I would have done anything at that time, just to be doing it. I was really having a struggle in my classes. I was like *"I don't want to learn anymore. What am I doing here?"* On the **"Ghost Of David"** [2000] album that Damian gave to Sub Pop, he asked me to sing on one song and that was when the label became interested in me. Damian was like *"Rosie I told you. They want to talk to you."* I was like *"Come on. Sub Pop? No they don't. Why would they want my music?"* *"Rosie, they are totally into it."* So I met Damian first, and we were really great friends -

*Which year did you meet Damian.*

I think it was '99 or 2000. No. Gosh, maybe it was earlier. It was. It was '98.

*You and Damian covered Springsteen's "Wages Of Sin" on the Sub Pop compilation "Badlands" [2001].*

That's right. And that was funny, because I wasn't even on Sub Pop at the time. They called from their office and left a message saying, *"Can you come down to see us."* I was really nervous about it, and thought *"What do they want to talk to me about?"* They said, *"We know you sing with Damian a lot. We want you guys to do this "Wages Of Sin" cover."* I was like *"OK."*

*Was this before you'd cut the "Parking Lot" vocal for Damian's album.*

It was just shortly after. It was the first time that I ever got real money for singing a song. They gave me something like \$1500. I thought *"Wow, that's amazing."* I'd never been paid for making music. It had all been tips up till then. There was no publishing involved, because it was Springsteen's song. The problem was, I had a plane ticket to go home to Michigan to visit my family that summer. By the time Sub Pop asked me, I was leaving in two days time. We had two days to learn that song. I had to call Damian that night, he didn't even know yet. I was at a bar with some friends, and it was like midnight and I was trying to get a hold of him. And then I had to get a hold of our friend Blake [Wescott] who we thought would do a good job of producing it. I finally got a hold of Blake at like midnight and went *"Dude, are you*

*busy this weekend?" "Why?" "We need you to do a song." "Alright."* We went in the next day and just started work on it. We hadn't even heard the song yet. We bought a tape of it, and just listened to it over and over again. It was pretty stressful, but we got it done and I thought, *"Gosh"* - I couldn't believe how great it sounded anyways, considering the short time we had.

*So you meet Damian in Michigan and it transpires that he lives in Seattle, which is where you move to, and where you meet Eric. And then his friend, Andy the drummer, surfaces in Seattle. What did you do, just keep playing clubs for a time till Sub Pop eventually signed you.*

Basically that was it. Sub Pop came to a show in the summer of 2000 right after school had finished. Probably a month after I got out of school. I had told my teachers, *"I'm definitely coming back for the next year."* I was really bummed about it, because what I really thought was *"I don't want to go back there."* So I kept praying, *"Please, please give me an outlet. Maybe something could happen this summer. Maybe something great, so I don't have to go back to school."* We were playing this show at a club called The Paradox. It was an all ages venue that is now closed. It was located close to where I lived, so I walked down there to meet Damian. I remember we were out in the street and he said, *"Jonathan Poneman from Sub Pop is coming tonight to hear you sing."* I was like, *"What? No, he's not,"* to which he replied, *"Yeah he is dude, he wants to talk with you."* *"Like come on."* It was Damian's show and I was only meant to be singing with him, but he said, *"I want you to play two songs of your own tonight so that he can hear them."* I played *"Two Dollar Shoes"* - I'd just written it the day before. He said, *"Play that song you just wrote"* and I also played *"Bicycle Tricycle"* I think. In the middle of Damian's set, I played the two songs on my own, so that Jonathan, if he was there, could hear my stuff. After the show Jonathan approached me and said, *"Let's get coffee together."* I said *"Alright."* We met a couple of days later and that's when we talked about making a record. Basically all that Jonathan said to me was *"What do you want to do with your life?"* I said, *"I want to entertain people."* He said *"Alright. Well, I'm going to give you a chance to do that because I'm so afraid that if I don't do something with your music, it might go unnoticed. I want to help get your music off the ground. I may not be the one that carries it entirely, but if I can just help get people to even know that you exist, I'd love to be that person."* It was really weird, because it was Sun Pop and I thought -

*I guess that word would be, grunge. As a label they have however evolved over the years.*

Right. We had a big talk about that, as well, on our walk. We walked around the city for about three hours that day and just talked and talked. He basically said, *"If you'd be willing to take a risk with us, we'd be*



willing to take a risk with you. We'd love it." He went on to say "I want this label to evolve. It has been what it has been for so long now and it's dying. I want to diversify, and for people to know us for different things." It was really exciting for him, I think, as well to get outside of those things. I thought, "I like to take risks. So why not?" Opportunities come in your life, few and far between. Sometimes more often for others, but for me I just thought, "This is such an opportunity. It's what I've been waiting for, someone telling me that I can do what I love." It all I wanted to do. I didn't need a \$1M, I didn't need fame and fortune. I just wanted the chance to do what I loved. That was it. It's all I ever dreamed of. It's all I ever wrote about. I never said, "I need to be the next Madonna." I merely wanted to make a living at something I loved, and thought that would completely fulfil me. Pretty much, for the most part, I think I've been more content than ever before in my life because of being able to record and play my music.

Which year did you start attending Cornish College.

That would be 1999, because I would have graduated this year.

Once Sub Pop had signed you, I presume Martin Feveyear came into the picture. Did you already know him.

No, and there's the funny part – we got the record deal. I signed with them in October 2000. At first it was just going to be for one record, because I was really nervous. They basically said, "If you want to do one record. If you want to do two. If you want to do five. Whatever." At first I just wanted to do one. Then I thought "Well that's kind of silly isn't it, what does one even do? That lasts such a short time." So I signed a three record deal with them and that was it. What happened next was, they threw all these producers at me. "Why don't you work with this guy in Boston? Why don't you work with this guy in New York? Blah. Blah. Blah." I didn't know any of these people, and it was so important that I knew the producer. I thought, "I don't want to work with someone I don't know." At that point in my life everything I had done was around people I loved. Friends or family, more than anything with family. It was really important that that feeling, that comfort of being around people that I loved and knew, was there. It was more important than anything. I was at a bar one night with a friend who had just moved here from New Mexico and we were talking about – basically at that point everybody was giving me advice. "I've got a studio." Everybody was there. I was like "Oh, OK everybody makes records." So how do you pick and choose a producer and studio when you don't know anybody? For some reason my friend Mike said, "I know this is just one more person to add to your list, but I worked with this guy and he runs a recording studio. He's from England. He's an awesome person. He just did a record by The Briefs." There was a lot of punk rock music in Seattle at that

point. I'm like "Mike, dude, my music isn't like that. Can he do other music?" He said, "Of course he can. Why don't you come in? He's an awesome person." So I went in the next day – made an appointment with him. I'd already met with a bunch of other producers and I was like – "Aagh!" – I was annoyed by their personalities and nothing clicked. Anyway, I met Martin and right away he made me laugh. He was a very personable, funny guy. He played me Mark Lanegan records and other stuff that he had recorded. And that was it. There was something there. It was more his personality than anything. That was more important to me. Because, you know – I looked at my music and thought "Is it really that hard to record? It's so simple." I wasn't looking for somebody to spice it up, or do this amazing recording. I was, more or less, wanting to ensure the process was comfortable for me. Meeting Martin and getting to know his personality, he won me by that. I thought, "This will be a good record, just because of that. It will be fun doing it. If I'm going to have the chance to do this, I want to have fun with it otherwise it will be a waste of time."

So when exactly did you meet Martin.

Three years ago. That would have been in early 2001.

## **Recording The "Only With Laughter Can You Win" Album**

Five of the tracks on the new album were produced by Martin, and the remainder were produced by you and Eric. What was the sequence of recording the tracks.

Eric and I did our stuff first. We did the ones that I'd been playing for a long time at that point – well it seemed that way anyways. We started working on "Gradually," "I Play Music" and "Red Rover." We picked our favourites, the ones where we thought we knew the structure, and exactly how they should be recorded without anybody's help. I thought, "I know my music better than anyone. I know what I want it to sound like." There's no one better to collaborate with than Eric. He knows where a lot of my songs are going. It was a challenge to see what we could come up with all on our own. We recorded pretty much everywhere. In his basement. At his house. At our friend Cameron's studio – there's no bathroom or anything in his place, and the wiring kept making noises when we recorded. It took us forever. Basically we recorded most of it in Eric's basement and in his bedroom. So we did the first six songs on our own, and then we picked out songs where we thought vocally it would be better to do them with Martin. Vocally, it was always a thing I was concerned about, as my voice can be a bit – because of its range – it's hard to record. It takes a certain microphone, or a certain way to really record it, so I was really happier to go to Martin for that. There were some songs as well where we needed a piano, and he happened to



have a piano in his studio. I thought it would be great to do them there and use his piano. I didn't want everything on the record to be keyboard type piano - on songs like "Dialogue" and "You And Me" especially. We also recorded at Cornish, my old school.

*I believe that was a piano part on "You And Me."*

Yeah. We had a friend break us into one of the piano rooms. They have the most beautiful pianos there, and we have a friend that still goes to school there, who is studying music. He had a key to the piano room, so we went in one day and used one of their pianos. That's got to be one of my favourites songs, as it's very organic sounding. We miced it, of course, in this crazy room filled with all these instruments. Vibraphones. We did the piano part there and then cut the vocals with Martin in the studio. That's basically what we did. We did half on our own, and then we did the last part of it with him.

*Time wise, when were the songs recorded with Martin.*

In the Spring of this year. The stuff that Eric and I did, we started last October. We started right after we got back from touring Europe with Bryan Ferry. We took about five months for our part, so we didn't start with Martin until around April time. That's when I got my family on the album. That was another thing - I really wanted my family on it. I thought, *"They can't afford to fly out to Seattle. We can't afford to pay Martin for this whole record,"* it's just so expensive sometimes to be in the studio. Not only that studios are so dull to me. You know the creative process in the studio, for me, is very stale. To do a record in someone's basement, to do part of it in my father's living room, to do part of it in my mom's house up north, to do it in Cameron's studio - all these different places we went, and the church in Detroit - that was inspiring for me. That was creative. That to me only inspired the songs more to reach their full potential. So we got to take the recording equipment home to Detroit, and had my family sing their parts to "I Play Music." My brother was home from Chicago for Xmas, and he did all the piano parts because I knew he'd play better piano than I would. That was more exciting for me than anything. That was when I felt like, whatever this record is, it will probably be one of my favourites forever because my family was part of it. Just watching them sing on it and being so proud of them. And seeing them be so excited about being a part of it was such a gratifying experience for me.

*You mentioned the piano part recorded at Cornish, and how the track sounded organic. My question about the album as a whole was "Did you intend to record part of the album in Detroit, or did that just evolve organically." It seems like our thought processes are similar.*

That's the thing - we had the time available to do that with this record. With the first record, we had three

weeks, because that was the budget. If you exceed that, it's like *"Where's that money going to come from?"* I couldn't even pay my rent during that first record, I was so broke. I was stressed about money. Everything we got for the record, we gave to Martin - which he totally, completely deserved. He also gave us a discount, and even with that we were barely making it. We went over some days and he didn't charge us for it. If he had, we would still have been in a hole. So that, plus the money aspect, plus the timeframe - I'm completely amazed at how well that record came together for my first record. For my first time ever being in a recording studio to cut an album. My first time ever really hearing my songs recorded with a full band. All of that. I was so freaked out about all of it, because at that point Eric, Andy and I had only been playing together for about a year. Before that, it was just me and my Dad, which was all-acoustic. I was really worried about overly doing everything. How it was really weird for me to hear songs like "Lorraine" or "Wedding Day" really, really produced - that freaked me out. Like *"This isn't me. This isn't how I'm going to sound like for people."* All of it was really nerve racking and very stressful, because you know, it's your music. It's your art. It's like doing a painting. You don't want to do it so quickly and go *"Is it done?"* *"Well kind of, I mean if I had three more months, it would be so much better."* It's like, *"Well take three months and make it better."* It's your art. It's what people are going to look at. Your signature is on it. I think for the next one - I discussed this with Eric and concluded, *"I'm not doing that again. Next time in, I'm taking as long as I can on it. As long as I can."*

*And you're also going to record it in unconventional places.*

Yeah. That was my idea. I was like *"I want to record in a church, I want to record - I want to be all over the place."* I want to have different people playing on it. People coming through town can play on it. You know Sam Beam just happened to come into Seattle at the right time to do the vocal on "Red Rover." Our friend Denison [Witmer] came to meet us in Michigan. We paid him gas money to come there and hang out in my Mom's cabin up north, which is where he put guitar on "I Play Music" and "Red Rover." It was such a fun experience. I think that's why I had time along the way to come up with things like, *"What about a church?"* *"Yeah."* Maybe if the sessions had been over quickly, I wouldn't have had time to be that creative with it.

## ***The Songs On The "Only With Laughter Can You Win" Album***

*Can we talk about the songs on the album.*

Of course.



*We've mentioned Detroit's St John's Church a number of times. Why did you record "Let Myself Fall" there, was it because of the acoustics, or was it a place you knew.*

No, it wasn't a place I knew. I'd never been there before. To be honest, it was really the acoustics. The Cowboy Junkies did a whole record in a church, and I remember hearing that and thinking "Crap. That's so beautiful." There is nothing more amazing and captivating than natural acoustics in a church, of all places. It was always in my vision to do a song like that. Not only that you know, "Let Myself Fall" was something I wrote just for fun. It's a quick song that I wrote on guitar and initially I thought, "That sounds so boring." Then I thought, "What if it is was performed a cappella." Eric and I had recoded it with piano, and then I think we took the piano out, and thought, "Wow, what if we layered all these vocals and made it almost like a hymn in church." That's what it sounded like to me. So I thought, "If that's what it sounds like, then perhaps that's where it belongs." When we went to Michigan, what I did was, I called around churches – around the area, and there was this one – it's the oldest Catholic Church in Detroit. It just happens to be right on the main strip in Detroit, on Woodward Avenue. It's kitty-corner, and it's pretty much diagonally across from the old Motown Recording Studio. That was originally where I wanted to record it – it was like "Late one night we're going to break into the Motown Recording Studio" – wouldn't that have been fabulous. Then I realised "I can't do that." That place is where homeless people live. There's probably no electricity in there. It's just a vacant building – it's Detroit for crying out loud, there's broken windows. You'd never know it was the old Motown Recording Studio. It just looks like a vacant crack house. We went to look at it, and thought "Crap, we can't do it there" but then there was the church, kitty-corner to it, called St. John's. I called them and they said, "We're available today if you want to come in." We had to make a donation to the church and they let us be there for however long we wanted. That song really sounded like a hymn to me. Like an old gospel hymn, and that's what I wanted it to sound like. I wanted my Mom, Delores, to sing on it, so we had two female vocalists sort of intertwining their voices. It was great to sing with her. I've always enjoyed singing music with her, because I think our voices go together very well. We went there, set up a microphone, pressed record – we didn't need many microphones, because the place picked up sound very well. The only problem was, we picked up a bunch of traffic sounds from the freeway. The Church is located pretty close to the freeway. We were kind of worried that those sounds would intrude on what we were recording [Rosie makes traffic noises mingled with singing the "Let Myself Fall" lyric]. At one stage we weren't going to use that recording, and then we played it for Martin and he went "I think that's amazing." Then we realised that it was, because it was so natural. There's

something so amazing about it, with all the busyness – all this crazy busyness of the traffic and then those voices singing through it all. It was my favourite part.

*"I Play Music" was recorded in your Dad's house, but what interests me more is that the lyric is personal statement of intent. Have you always been an independent person.*

Yeah. Yeah.

*Is singing the most important thing to you in your life.*

I think playing music is. I wrote that song as sort of a – out of spite really, because we'd been on the Bryan Ferry tour and I was really having a hard time with it. The audiences were a bit rough sometimes.

*They were strictly there to see Bryan.*

That's right. Exactly.

*Plus they probably lacked a sense of respect for the other artist on the bill.*

Exactly. I tried to see the humorous side of it. There was one night in particular, someone said something particularly off and really rude, and I thought "Man, why am I letting this get me down. It's just so stupid?" I was in the dressing room and wrote "I Play Music" – just to remind myself – or, at least, myself reminding me "Rosie, you belong here." "But it doesn't feel right." "You belong here. This is what you were born to do, don't let these people make you think otherwise. You know better than that, don't let anybody tell you who to be. Or what to do. Or what you can't do. You know better than that, you can do anything, you're brave. Look how far you've come." Everything.

*Like I said, it appears to be a statement but you wouldn't know that that situation had caused the song to be written.*

I looked back, and thought "Yeah." I know that ever since I was a kid, I always did it the way I wanted. I tried everything. I did. I even went through that. I had to remind myself of that too, "Rosie, you tried everything." You went to work on an organic farm. You did that for a day, and it was terrible. You wanted to help your Grandpa on the farm. You thought you wanted to be a farmer like him. You did that for, like, a week. It was too hot, and you hated it. You went to school. You hated school. You travelled. That didn't do anything. I've pretty much gone about my life by trial and error. Not until you try stuff, can you cross it off your list and narrow it down. It always came back to music. It always came back to entertaining. It was sort of a liberation song for me. It was a way of validating myself once again. To have my parents sing on the recording of that song – they were my inspiration musically. They taught me – "Find out what you heart is telling you to do, and do that no matter what money does or doesn't come your way – it doesn't matter. Do what you love. Whatever that is,



*we'll be supportive of it,"* and they have been. They have been the whole way. Even before I got a record deal. They were always proud of everything. It was really important to me to make them a part of this album, because music is a huge thing in their lives. My Dad is 62 years old and music is his God. It's his huge passion. That's all he does, and that's what gets him through. I thought, *"That's him too. That's how he gets his inspiration, is through music."* He just bought a twelve-string guitar. He's learning different finger-picks. He called me at midnight a couple of months ago to tell me – he put me on speaker phone, and he goes *"Look I'm learning how to Paul Simon finger-pick. Listen."* He's like a little kid you know. He is still totally passionate about music, which is so incredible to me.

*We're still with the song "I Play Music." I hope that you can remember the third verse. The opening line is "And when you love me you love me well." Now my take is that you are speaking strictly about a love affair with music.*

Yes. But I was speaking for both uses of the term, as well. When I graduated from High School and made my first trip to California - I was going there to find myself. I pictured myself playing in coffee shops. I thought it was going to be good. So the lyric goes *"When I finished school, I took the highway"* – means I was looking for music, looking for that thing. On the other hand, I was also speaking about love. In my journal I wrote *"Maybe I'll find that person in California too, that will love me even despite my craziness. That will love me despite how mental I am, or how ridiculous I am. That will love me for me. And love me while I'm trying to find all these things for me."* That sort of thing. It is sort of a play on words and I think they go hand in hand. It is really about music, but I think it could also be about finding love as well.

*What is the "Red Rover." In the lyric, the narrator talks to two people – Mary and Daniel – about how they shouldn't let their parents suffocate them creatively.*

Red Rover is a game that we used to play as kids. I hated the game. I fucking hated the game. What it involved was all these kids held hands, next to each other. Sometimes it was boys and girls – if the teacher wasn't around, that's usually what happened. If the teacher had you play, it was boy-girl-boy-girl and so on. They all held hands and one person would be out of the group. What they would say is - *"Red Rover, Red Rover send Rosie right over"* [sings] – and what you'd have to do is run and try to break through their hands. So you'd look at the line and try to pick the weakest two. Like, *"OK, there's Danny he's super tiny and he's standing next to Stacy and she's really skinny, so I bet I can break through their arms."* The thing is, if you didn't break through, then they all laughed at you and you're out of the game. If you broke through then you joined the chain, and then someone else tried to run through. I hated it because I

was so small, I could never break through their arms. It was humiliating really. It's that time in your life, when of course – you're eight years old and everybody likes to pick on everybody. I used that game as a reference as to what I was trying to say. I'm picturing Mary as a young person *"Schoolbooks in her hand and a shawl over her shoulder, and let her run, run as fast as she can."* It's like don't hold her back. Let her break through those arms. Don't let anybody humiliate her along the way. Don't let anybody bring her down. Don't let her grow up to be like her mom. No one has to be like their parents. You can be who you are. It's kind of reminding people of that. Like you don't have to grow up and think, *"I'm going to be like my dad."* Because that's who my dad was, that's who I am. It's like, *"No, you're not."* You are your own person. You can learn things from that and be better. You can learn things from that and embrace them, but you are still your own person. You can do everything different if you want to. So I think that's really what it was about. I used family members in it. There's kind of a theme in there about my Dad's family. They are very -

*But no one really knows that in real life.*

Mmmm, I think my Dad kind of does. My Mom thought it was about her. I was like *"Oh shit"* [Laughs]. You know, the line *"Don't let her grow up to be like her mother."* Part of it really was about my parents, but it was my Dad's parents.

*I thought that Mary and Daniel were a couple of kids that you had known in school.*

I actually threw in the names of my Dad's brothers and sisters. He has a brother Daniel, and a sister Marian, but I called her Mary – to cover it a bit. I was really thinking about my grandfather and how he did sort of suffocate them and not teach them to be brave. And not tell them how wonderful they were. Their mother was very quiet, never spoke up, and was miserable her whole life. She never tried to be any other way, or fight for anything more.

*The song "Sell All My Things" mentions "castles in Ireland." I also noticed from the liner that your Mother's full name is, Delores Thomas McMullen. Is there Irish blood in your family.*

There is Irish blood in there.

*Thomas could be taken for being of Welsh origin.*

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. But see, we don't even know where Thomas came from. My paternal grandfather came over, and we think he changed his name. So we're not sure where it comes from [Laughs]. That song was actually written when I went to Europe by myself. I wrote it on that trip, in Ireland. I was still getting over a heartbreak at that time.

*Which year are we talking about.*



This was immediately before we recorded the first album. So it would have been two or three years ago. I went to Ireland – it was such a dumb thing. I went to Europe for almost two months, spent all my money and then came back to make a record. I was as broke as hell. What a stupid idea – bad timing.

*Had you been to Ireland before*

No, it was my first time. It was something I always wanted to do. I used the money from “**Badlands**,” from that “Wages Of Sin” track. I thought, “*I’m going to take my music money and have it be the first thing that takes me to a place I always wanted to go.*” I always had a fascination with going to Ireland. So, I started off the trip with my mother. I paid for her ticket as well because I thought, “*When is she ever going to go to Europe?*” We went to Paris and Rome. The places she wanted to go. She went home after about a week and half, and I carried on by myself and went to Belgium, Germany and Holland. Amsterdam. Then I went to Ireland for the rest of the time. I wrote about that, and what it would be like if I stayed there. I met so many people who were going to do that. So many travellers that said, “*God, isn’t this great. I don’t have to get up for work. Nothing. I don’t even care about any possessions.*” No one cared about material things. They had the same clothes on every day. Backpacks on their back with everything they needed in them. It was just so simple. So it started me thinking – *sell all my things* – I don’t need anything. I’m not going to go home, I’m just going to hang out here and look at all these great things. Visiting castles. Spending ever day alone. I spent almost all my time alone. I loved it.

*Did you hear a lot of music in Ireland and Europe.*

Yeah, I did. I went to a lot of pubs. But then I went to a lot of pubs that played a lot of cover songs. I did go to a couple that were really, really amazing. There was this old man who did plays in Gaelic, and sang in Gaelic. That was really awesome. I did get to see and appreciate the culture, because I went to a lot of small towns. Cork and Kilkenny. I just got a bus ticket and got off wherever I wanted, and decided that day if I would stay or not. Find a hostel and stay there. I met a lot of neat people. It was just a very freeing time for me. It was really fun to be alone and embrace everything. And not have to think about the record. It was just a time for me to take a vacation.

*In terms of the future, is it a dream that one day you’ll sell all your things and disappear from this world.*

Maybe, you know. Maybe, at some point. I think we all need that time to get away.

*With you Mom having the surname McMullen. That’s definitely Irish.*

It is, yes. They have a very big Irish family. They’ve got about – I think – ten kids on their side of the family, including two sets of twins.

*Do you have relatives in Ireland.*

There were some, but I didn’t meet them.

*In the song “Crazy” three different words lead off each of the verses. There’s Crazy, Worry and Lonely.*

That’s me [Laughs].

*If the latter are major things in your life, does the melancholy in your songs mirror your life.*

Yes, I believe so. I definitely believe so.

*But then writing songs is a way of taking out the trash, of bringing some form of relief. Closure even. And those songs also become a way of connecting with people.*

Yes. I think that’s it. Gosh, sometimes we all feel that way, I hope anyways – I wouldn’t mind if only I did, but I think it’s always comforting to know that you’re not alone in what you go through. There are times, I think, when I feel lonely with others around. There are times I feel that way when I play music. I meet all these great people, but I don’t really know any of them. And they don’t know me. I feel lonely sometimes, on tour. There are times when I feel lonely even being with friends. We all have those moments where we feel – we hate who we are – we don’t really like what we are feeling for that day – we feel alone – I guess anyways we all feel that way sometimes. Misunderstood. Maybe we’d rather be alone. I wrote “Crazy” because, when I was a kid, I was always called “weird” by boys. “*You’re so weird Rose,*” and I’d go home and cry. Tell my Mom. “*Boys say I’m weird. I don’t like that. Why do they say I’m weird?*” My Mom would say “*They don’t mean it in a bad way. You’re just funny. You’re different. You’re not quiet. You’re loud and that’s your personality.*” I struggled with that for a long time. I think the song “Crazy” is a reference to something I’ve always struggled with, in terms of feeling that way. Feeling strange and awkward, and, then yet, realising as you grow up, that it’s beautiful. Because that is part of who you are. [Rosie quotes the opening verse of the song] “*Crazy is what they’ve all said, craziness lies in my head, craziness lies in my bed*” – so what. So cool. That’s me.

*And of course, “Crazy” has been used as a song title before. Willie Nelson wrote a song with that title.*

Yes, of course [Laughs]. And Sub Pop said, are “*Are you sure you want to call it “Crazy”?*”

*I think there’s bravery in terms of the subjects you tackle in your songs. Particularly in the area of taboo subjects where after hearing one of your songs people might conclude “I feel that way as well.”*



Yeah. Exactly. And I think that's it. You know, it's funny because I never thought about it as bravery, because sometimes I just think, *"That's natural isn't it. It's who I've always been. I've always been that way. I've always told people like -"*

*But you haven't always been doing it from a stage, with music.*

No, and that is certainly different. I've definitely realised that of late. Just how vulnerable it can be. And how hard it can be to give that, all the time. Night after night after night. The problem is, when you set yourself up to be very approachable, which is extremely important to me, that gets hard to maintain for long periods. I realise -

*But isn't there a payback in terms of connecting with others.*

Yes. Maybe not strictly, a payback. It's sometimes, to me, more of a reminder that I'm doing the right thing with my life. As for things people tell you and that sort of thing. That's when I go *"Thank you for telling me that."* *"Well, why?"* *"Well, because, you see, I was having a weird day today and now you have told me something that makes me realise, I have to keep doing this."* That was what my whole hope in doing music was. If I could strip myself naked, show everybody every fucking thing that I think about and struggle with and freak out about, then if I can be brave enough to embrace all that - if I can admit it all before everybody, I can't fail because I'm not setting myself up to be a *pretend person*. I'm not setting myself up to be anything other than *me*. If I can embrace that and give an individual performance, then that's really giving my *individual self*. That's when you connect with people. When you think of your favourite artists, those are the ones that you connected with because you really felt like - when Stevie Wonder wrote that song I mentioned earlier he really meant it. I think that's when you can reach other people. If there is a payback in it, it's that it reminds me, *"Yeah. I was feeling very weak today, or I was feeling like I don't want to play anymore music, I just want to go home and be quiet,"* but then I realise, *"I know why I've got to do this. I've got to do it for people. I've got to do it for myself. I've got to do in the hope of making that connection. That's good."*

*In the lyric of "One More Day," you present a scenario of something that is ending. What precisely is it that's ending.*

Life itself. [Rosie quotes her lyric] *"One more day, just one more day, then I'm done."* It's basically saying - that song was written about what happens when you get to the point you just don't want to go on anymore. So I was really saying, *"This is it. This is my last day."* Basically that's what I meant. Just one more day and I'm going to my grave. I'm going to decide that there is no hope - there's nothing - it's over. I think people get to that point. I love to think that every day you wake

up and you feel hopeful about everything, like *"Yeah, life is falling apart,"* or *"Life is a struggle, but hey, it's great isn't it?"* I do feel that way, hopefully the majority of the time - maybe 60% of the time. But there are those days where, you just don't see it at all. You don't know who your God is. You don't anything. You don't know where there is any hope to be found. All you see is this pattern continuing, continuing. That song really is written about regret. I was talking to my brother about some things that had happened and that is really what inspired it. He has basically changed his life. He has quit his job, and he's going back to music. It was a really brave thing for him to do. I think the world of him for it, for finding himself again. And he is scared of doing it. I think he is so brave for doing it. It's really a song about that - like, what happens if you lie to yourself and get to a point where you've let all your chances go by - you've let every great dream pass you by, and you're just filled with regret. That's it. In that situation, it's not surprising for somebody to go, *"What's to live for anymore? My past haunts me too much."* Everything is a series of denial and grief. What makes people go on? What gives people hope? I think there are times when some people just don't have it. They really don't. I have so many days where I am just without hope and it sucks. I think we all have hit those moments in life. That song is really, in it's own tragic and depressing way, about the times when we all want to give up. And that's it.

*"All My Life" is the second song on the album - the first being "I Play Music" - where you use the word "God" in the lyric. The song is also a celebration of finding what? - love.*

Yeah. It's about love, really - [Rosie quotes a line] *"I've been waiting all my life, I've been waiting for you to come"* - for that person to come into your life. The concept being, I thought I could do it all on my own, and now I've realised that it's pretty lonely doing that. There is a gift. And the true gift is sharing that with somebody. That's really what that song is about.

*I wondered about "All My Life" and the track that immediately follows, "You And Me" - were those songs written around the same time.*

No. They weren't, they were written at completely separate times.

*Let me just highlight why I thought this. The lyric to "You And Me" also includes the third mention of "God." It also seemed to me that "You And Me" arose from the same situation.*

It's different, but it is also similar. It's about my Mother and I and the things that she has taught me. Things she has said to me. She always says to her children, *"I just see so much of God's love in you guys."* Or *"I get so much joy out of my children."* That sort of thing - so it was a line taken from her really. It's about the



things that we've been through that have brought us closer. And what I would do without her, really. So it's the same context as "All My Life," but different people.

*"Tell Me How" strikes me as a fairly philosophical song.*

Yeah [Laughs].

*And it's all about the mysteries of life.*

I guess [still laughing].

*And I'm going to make things even worse now, because in the final verse of "Tell Me How," you mention "heaven" and "Christ." What were you thinking.*

Right. Right [Laughs]. That one has been really difficult - it's going to be interesting what people are going to take from it. When I wrote that song, I thought, *"That's great. That says it all."* Not realising perhaps, how it can be taken on some levels. Simply and basically where it started was, I came up with this guitar part and thought, *"This is going to be a wordy song. This is going to be about everything."* It just started speaking for itself. Like *"Hi, where do I start? What Am I confused about? What is everyone confused about?"* "OK, love." *"So I need love in there and blah blah blah."* How do you help others, forms part of that song. How do you help somebody, when they can't help themselves? There's a beautiful lesson in learning that you can only do so much. You are a human being and there's not much you can do. Everyone has to be willing to help themselves. Then I started thinking about other aspects of life - what about death? *"What are people afraid of?"* *"Well, they are afraid of dying."* *"What does that mean?"* That's the only certainty that we have in this life, when more people want to live their lives to the fullest, want to be braver, want to be more willing to admit who they are, or are more broken - who cares, because in death it's all over anyway. It's sort of written in the context of that. Then I started thinking about faith and what that means. Describing to people what faith is. And having people describe to me what faith is to them. Having grown up in an environment where Christianity was present - and have certain people tell me, *"If you're not saved you won't enter the kingdom of heaven."* And finding that difficult to take in. To swallow. Thinking, how? But how? Everyone is just the same. Everyone is just as amazing. I'm no better than anybody else. I don't understand that. All it really was, was an admission of my own confusion with everything in life. Everything that I've been taught. Everything that has been told to me. Everything that I've come to understand on my own. Conversations I've had with people. It was really about that.

*Relative to some of the songs that we've already talked about is "Gradually" a song about recovery. It's about confidence, about being able to spread your wings, and feeling better about yourself.*

Yeah, I think it's about that. It's about being brave. Again it's a case of thinking, *"Stop pretending that you don't have anything to say. Stop pretending that you're just quiet."* Everyone has got more in them to give. I think of my Mom and I think of friends of mine that remain quiet so much of the time, and I know that they are bummed, and I know that they have something to say. I know that they can be stronger than that. Myself as well. I'm learning in this business already that I have to stand up for myself. That I'm going to have a lot of times where people won't like what I'm saying - won't like what I'm doing - how do I remain brave in the face of that? How do I stop pretending that *"It's OK"* - how do you pretend that anyway? - you should stop pretending that things are OK, if they are not. I think that as I get older I'll get braver and I'll get better at being who I am. With more time I'll get to know myself more and maybe apologise less and less every year and that sort of thing. So it's a song written about hope that the longer you go, the better it will get. Keep hanging on - that sort of thing.

*In the lyrics to "Dialogue," you begin to question life again.*

Pretty much. Yes. Just when I pretty much tell people *"Be brave."* Then I go, *"Oh no it's not. It's crap. It's all crap"* [Laughs]. That song is written about basically - *"Can you help me figure out this stuff."* I'm trying to make some sort of punctuation marks there. I'm trying to state that I can shout and say *"Yeah, quote me on that."* But then, maybe not. You know, there's always that hesitancy, *"Maybe I don't know anything that I'm talking about."* It's a lot easier to write about things that you don't understand and making clear remarks about them. I think it's a lot easier for me. I'm so afraid of - not saying the wrong thing, but I'm so afraid of claiming that I know things when I just don't know a lot. I definitely don't want to put myself on that box and say, *"Look, the last thing I was trying to do with the closing verse of "Tell Me How" was tell people, if you don't follow Christ you're going to hell"* - that's not what I was saying. I was basically saying, *"Look, I'm just as confused. I have no idea. I'm putting myself on a limb here saying that I have strong faith in my life, but even that stuff when I get to it, I want to have a heart attack. I don't understand it."* I was basically admitting that to people. I think it's the same with "Dialogue," again it's me saying, *"I have no idea where I am going. I can't tell anybody where they are going. I can't promise anything to anybody. We just don't know. We don't know where we are going to be in a year. We don't know where we are going to be in ten years time. I don't know how long my music career will last. I don't know anything. Can I still live not knowing that? Can I just admit it - like, I don't know - but it's alright as I'm still in for the ride. I'm still just as excited about it, no matter what. There are no promises. If I were to sit down with a fortune teller and she were to tell me everything, would I really want to know?"* I don't think I would. I think I'm OK not



knowing. It leaves the pages blank and it keeps my expectations at a minimum, so that you can be just that more excited when it happens. My life has been full of surprises in the last few years, in a great way. I've been to places I would never have thought I would go. I look back and think, *"I never thought I would be a songwriter. Ever. Look what I'm doing."* I feel proud. I feel grateful.

*So is it a dream come true.*

In a way yeah, but in a different way. It's not all I thought it was going to be. What's the word? – it's sort of similar to everything else in life, like *"If I fall in love it's going to make everything that I do great."* Then you realise – *"Oh, this is hard! This sucks! I'm bored!"* [Laughs]. You go through all of those emotions. That's been a learning lesson for me as well. I tell people *"If you really think that you can do what you love and you will get a lot of attention that that's going to make things better – it doesn't."* You're still you. You still wake up in the morning. You still have to pay your rent. You still wear the same socks for a week. You're still as confused by everything as you ever were. You feel awkward. All of that, so it doesn't make anything better. What it does do is, it makes me feel more complete. It makes me feel braver, because I know it's going to be a long journey. It's going to be a long ride. I never expected it to not be. I think I've got the energy to do it, and the hope that it will take me to where it's supposed to go. Plus, I'm already grateful for where it has gone. If this was it and I could look back on my life and say *"Look kids, look what I did in my twenties. I went to Europe. I went to Sweden and listened to people talk in a language I didn't understand. I got to go to Portugal and Spain. Yeah, it was great."* That would be a great story. That would be enough for me. Wherever it goes now, it's only going to be more of a great surprise for me. I already feel like I've gotten to do it all.

*On your first album "When We Were Small" between the tracks there were voice recordings, made by your father, of you as a youngster. Do some of those old recordings appear on "Dialogue," as I can hear a female voice.*

It's basically me and a tape recorder just talking – saying, *"I play music."* *"I, you know, blah blah blah."* Basically what I did was, I took a quote from every song and put it on the track. Basically, in a way, *"Dialogue"* sums up the whole record. It's me going *"I don't know anything."*

## **Odds & Ends: The Final Questions**

*I've asked everything about "Only With Laughter Can You Win," that I was going to ask, but I've still got a couple of questions. In the rear of the liner booklet, and I think it actually appears on both your albums, there's a credit to Mr. Broecker. Is he the college lecturer at Cornish who launched your parallel career as a stand-up comedian.*

No, he's my man. He's my fella [Laughs].

*So who was the guy at Cornish that dared you to go and perform at a comedy club.*

That was my teacher. It was a woman that did that. She was the one that – she kept me back after class and I thought I was going to get in trouble, because we had to do a passion speech that day, which is so stupid. That's the thing with theatre school, you have to sit and listen to everybody's broken heart. It's like *"Oh God, can't you see a counsellor? I don't want to hear about this right now."* We had to give this passion speech and I had forgotten about it. She called me first, out of spite, and I think she knew I had forgotten about it. *"Rosie's going to give her passion speech today."* I'm like *"Oh shit, I don't remember enough."* I said *"Oh, can I go get my guitar, I've left it out in the car."* She said, *"Yeah."* I ran out to my car and I was thinking *"Crap. What are you going to talk about."* Anyways I came back in and talked for about forty-five minutes on just about everything in life. I played my guitar at the end. She kept me after class. I thought she was going to yell at me and go bezerk. Instead she said, *"What are you doing here?"* I said *"What do you mean, what am I doing here?"* She said *"What are you doing at this school?"* I was like *"Crap. She's telling me I don't belong here. I don't know. All I know is I'm supposed to go to school. Everyone is supposed to go to college, or something, and get a degree. I'm being a good kid, I'm making my parents proud."* She went, *"No, you're not supposed be here. You already have it figured out Rose. You just played music for us. You just talked about comedy. What are you doing here? People are here when they are confused. It seems to me that you already have it figured out."* She was an inspiration for me to leave school, in a way.

*What was the lady's name.*

Ellen Boyle. And we still keep in contact. She's an awesome woman. She's in her forties and we get together for dinner once in a while. She's like a sister to me. She's from Michigan actually, and grew up in the same area that I grew up in. She's very much like a mother to me, on some level. She was the biggest person to ever challenge me that giving up, doesn't mean giving up.

*It just means that you're moving on to something new. It's another door to go through.*

Absolutely. I struggled with that for so long. *"I quit school man, and I'm a quitter."* She said *"Hell no Rose, you're a quitter if you stay here and you don't acknowledge that you're ready to do what you want to do. That's denying yourself."* I went out that night and did comedy on a club stage. She inspired that. She asked why had I never done it. I think it was because I had been so afraid of being that weird girl in school



when I was eight years old. I was afraid of that. I don't want to be afraid of that anymore. I don't want to live a life in fear. I want to embrace everything that scares me, even if it's just to do it one time. I want to know that I've tried to be as much myself as possible. And given that to people, as much as possible. That would be most fulfilling. When I left school, because of her, I didn't have a guilty conscience. Because, I knew she was right. I knew that school was just another cop out for me. I knew that really what I needed to do was get out there and start doing it and be brave. Yeah, Ellen Boyle. She's awesome.

*Presumably at the minute, comedy is on the backburner for you.*

Yeah. I do it sometimes at shows. I'll combine the two – music and comedy. On this tour I've only done it one time. I do it here and there. It's definitely something I love. There are times when I'm feeling more melancholy, that I just want to give the music a chance. Sometimes I do think it's important to give just the music. I also don't want to cheat people, and at the end of this very personal *musical* experience, all of a sudden, bring Sheila out. [Rosie in a high-pitched voice ala Sheila] *"Oh, forget all of that. Everything's funny"* [Laughs]. Sometimes I do think laughter is important. As far as the title of the record is concerned **"Only With Laughter Can You Win,"** laughter is a huge source in my life to get me through. It helps me write about these things. I told somebody the other day, *"Look, if you played 'Farewell' every night, you have to laugh."* It's like, come on. It's so dramatic and ridiculous on certain levels. To me it's a very simple, beautiful song. It's dramatic – it's about my parents. But I have to laugh as well. My parents always taught us that. They have a great sense of humour, I think. That is a source I've now realised, that is the biggest source to get you through. If you can look at your life – if you can take it all, pull it out of you and look at everything and just see your brokenness. Everything. Then, what are you going to do with that? You're either going to fall apart and be Elliott Smith who kills himself – which is so tragic, or you've got to find another way out. Some people find God. Some people find a different hope in themselves. I rely on my faith. I also rely on the fact of having a light-heartedness toward life. You have to. You have to. I still think that people need to look at those serious things in life. Everybody does. I love having conversations with people. I love meeting up with girlfriends when I go home, and talking to them about their trials, and me talking to them about mine. Again, so many of us just need to laugh sometimes. If we face all that stuff, what a dull life it would be. I do think we are meant to have joy in life, and trials – all of that. That's the source that gets me through. I have to laugh at my own life sometimes. I used to laugh at the heartache, or the confusion. It's a great way to breathe.

*Hopefully I've asked you some sensible questions. Now, finally, this is the really dumb question. What does Sheila think of Rosie's music.*

Oh, she thinks it's too dramatic [Laughs]. She came out once to do a comedy performance after I played and said *"Oh God, the songs are just to depressing."* She's more into heartthrobs and Leonardo DiCaprio, and light-hearted things.

*I believe she has her own band, Strawberry Jam.*

She does, but they only do covers. She likes "Take These Broken Wings." That song, she usually breaks down on. That one is really touching to her. She's really into bands like Survivor and Foreigner. Those are the songs she really loves. My stuff – it's too much for her. She wants to push me offstage and come on and do "Eye Of The Tiger" and have people in the audience fight.

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## Kerrville-kompacts, kassettes & other koincidences.

### Redbird "Redbird" Self Release

In term of the *logistics* of this self-titled debut recording by the trio, Redbird, think Cowboy Junkies and **"The Trinity Sessions."** Instead of the venue being an old church [Toronto's Holy Trinity in the Canuck's case], the single microphone was positioned in Mark Olson's living room in Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin during August 2003 [ED. NOTE Jeffrey Foucault was a Fort Atkinson resident at the time]. While it's claimed that the Junkies accomplished their creation in a single fourteen-hour stint, Redbird cut around four-dozen songs over a period of seventy-two hours and then selected the seventeen cuts that appear on this disc. As for the trio, *structurally*, they consist of the Brooklyn born and bred, Kris Delmhurst, and two guys weaned in Wisconsin, Peter Mulvey and Jeffrey Foucault. Now what about the music.....

The album opens gently with all three voices present on the Greg Brown obscurity "Ships," a song that only ever appeared on the 1999 CD version of the Iowan's 1983 live album **"One Night..."** Dating from the early 1930's "Moonglow" features some fine string driven instrumental breaks, and Delmhurst's and Mulvey's voices intertwine beautifully on the verses of this easy going swing-era standard which was penned by Irving Mills, Edgar DeLange and Will Hudson. Mills was a song publisher, while Hudson and DeLange shared the leadership of a big band for three years during that decade. The late Mark J. Sandman [d. 1999] was lead singer/bass man for the Boston band Morphine, and his song "Patience" has been around the block a few times in recent years. As for those essential connections – Billy Conway, Morphine's drummer, has worked on three of Kris' solo discs, co-produced two



of them, while fellow Boston based songbird, Catie Curtis, included "Patience" on her **"My Shirt Looks Good On You"** [2001]. Here Kris takes the lead vocal, and Jeff follows with one of his all-time favourite songs, Dylan's "Buckets Of Rain."

These guys obviously share a predilection for live albums, since the Mitch Jayne/Joe Stuart co-write "The Whole World Round" appeared on The Dillards sophomore album **"Live...Almost"** issued by Elektra in 1964. At the time Jayne was a member of the, then, bluegrass quartet, and here Peter Mulvey takes the lead vocal, with sterling support from Kris on fiddle and harmonies. Next up, Delmhorst delivers Peter's "Ithaca," a touching tale about love, death and the feelings of loss that inevitably ensue. Taken from Paul Cebal's 1997 album **"The Get-Go,"** "Lovely As The Day Is Long" was penned by the Wisconsin musician, leader of the Milwaukeeans, and, supported by Delmhorst, Mulvey wraps his *dark brown* voice around this jazzy little goodtime number and just croons, croons, croons. Hell you can practically hear the pair *vocally smiling* their way through this cut. "Moonshiner" is a traditional number that the now deceased Uncle Tupelo featured on their *similarly structured back-to-basics recording* and utterly stunning **"March 16-20, 1992."** The Grateful Dead and Dylan have also had a tilt at the title, and the worthy **"Redbird"** arrangement finds Jeffrey adding his name to an already prestigious Roll Of Honour.

As Billy Preston was to The Beatles, so producer/songwriter/musician/recording artist, David Goodrich, is [on stringed instruments] to Redbird. The *fourth fret* as it were. His intricately melodic "Redbird Waltz" is the sole instrumental on the disc. Kris' third solo album **"Five Stories"** [2001] closed with "Lullaby 101" and the lead vocal on this reading is taken by Peter. Willie Nelson's "I Gotta Get Drunk" is a tune that dates from 1963, and it recently resurfacing on the Sugar Hill collection **"Crazy : The Demo Sessions."** Nelson recut the tune for **"Both Sides Now"** [1970], and Jeff Foucault struts and swings his way through the song. Once upon a time, Kris was a member of the Boston based trio, Vinal Avenue String Band, and her compatriots included Sean Staples and Ry Cavanaugh whose "Lighthouse Light" was the closing cut on their only recording, **"Live At Tir na nOg."** Kris, vocally supported by Peter and Jeff, revisits her past on **"Redbird."**

Kris and Jeff share a stirring co-vocal on "You Are The Everything," which first appeared on R.E.M.'s **"Green"** [1988]. The words of "Down By The Sally Garden" hail from an 1889 poem by one of Ireland's *finest men of words*, William Butler Yeats. The sad tale of a lover's parting, Peter and Kris rendition is totally heartrending. Credited to L. Baltimore, the album title cut "Redbird" is assigned [according to the liner] to Delmhorst's song publisher, Big Bean Music,

but an web search for further insight as to the writer's identity proved fruitless. I later discovered that this piece of music was found *hidden* in the Delmhorst family piano. Kris attests that it was a relative. A female relative. On this cut Kris and Peter [and later Jeff] enjoy one hell of a vocal blast. *Smiling voices*, hell this cut is pure *vocal hysterics*. As for Goody's solo contribution on mandolin, what can I say – *"It was stardust frosted stellar!"* And then, for the second time on **"Redbird"** Jeff warbles on a song that features the word *drunk* in the title. I guess some songwriters feel that alcohol fuels the creative process, and Foucault's own world weary, post-gig reflection "Drunk Lullaby" includes the insights, *"I'll buy you a drink, I'll be broke by tomorrow, But I'm flush for tonight"* and *"The Moon is a beat up old record, This town is a broken down hi-five."* Having opened with the creation of one *dark-voiced* songwriter, **"Redbird"** closes with a contribution from another. Namely, Tom Waits' [co-penned with his wife, Kathleen Brennan] upbeat decree to "Hold On," which pulsates to the *russet* vocal hues of Milwaukee's own, Mr. Peter Mulvey, aided by *soulful vocal support* from Ms. D and Mr. F.

Being one of the few people on the planet who doesn't understand why people make such a fuss about Greg Brown [I guess I need to see the lowan *live*, rather than listen to him on *record*], the opening cut passed me by, and while "Moonglow" and "Patience," which follow, are worthy efforts, for me, the album truly came to life when Jeff launched into his recent years, in concert staple, "Buckets Of Rain." From that point on I was utterly smitten by this lo-fi effort. By the way, on a couple of tracks, can I hear a roof fan humming in the background ? Quite simply, here are three folks + a *fourth*, having a blast on acoustic instruments and singing their hearts out on songs old and new, self-penned, borrowed from friends or simply included because they *fit like a glove*. Whatever, **"Redbird"** is a seventeen-song *bag of lustrous gems*.

The second UK tour by Redbird took place in February 2004. Last year they traded as solo acts under the banner of Chautauqua, but onstage through any one concert performed solo, in duos and as a trio. Halfway into 2004, and Jeff will deliver his sophomore solo disc. He is, hands down, the finest new song scribe whose work has passed through my CD player post Y2K and having already heard *in concert* some of his new tunes such as the heartfelt road saga "Northbound 35," the soulful "Stripping Cane" and "Song For Sitting Bull," a historic exploration, I guess you can tell..... I cannot wait for this new arrival !

Including her early career cassette only **"Swim For It"** and the Y2K mini album **"Oddlot,"** Kris Delmhorst delivered her fifth solo outing **"Songs For A Hurricane"** a few months ago, and it's an excellent collection. Peter Mulvey's latest **"Kitchen Radio"** has



just arrived in the stores. Like Delmhorst's recent album it is a Signature Sounds release.

Meantime, the debut Redbird album is available on the web at <http://www.younghunter.com/jfstore.html> While you're there, you can also avail yourself of solo recordings by Jeff and Peter. Also try the record store on Kris' web site at <http://www.krisdelmhorst.com/>

#### Michael Peter Smith "Such Things Are Finely Done" Tales From The Tavern

Nearly three decades back, Michael and his beloved wife Barbara, Detroit residents at the time, cut the *live* album "Zen." Back in the days when Bruce Kaplan [d. 1992], the founder of the Flying Fish record label, was still with us, a live Michael Smith disc recorded at Fitzgerald's in Chicago was *mooted* but eventually failed to *materialise*. Recent years have seen Michael and Barbara take the stage Stateside as part of Weavermania! That quartet issued the "Live" CD a couple of years back. The foregoing neatly brings us to late 2003 AD and the appearance of, not one but, two Michael Peter Smith *live* recordings.

This review will principally focus on "Such Things Are Finely Done," recorded during a concert in the Tales From The Tavern series. It's a collection of thirteen songs [including a non-credited reading of "Dialing," Michael's 30 sec. long *sardonic tribute* to the technological curse that society has, in recent decades, willingly grasped with both hands], four jokes and for openers - Rone Colone's short'n'snappy introduction. The recording session took place at Mattei's Tavern in Los Olivos, California on Friday 28<sup>th</sup> February 2003. Of the aforementioned *baker's dozen*, a handful and respectively "The Princess & The Frog," "Famous In France," "Zippy," "Honey To The Hive" and the album title cut that closes the collection, are new additions to Smith's recorded oeuvre. Thankfully Michael's song introductions - sometimes humorous, always insightful - have been left intact and they, frankly, add greatly to the overall impact of each performance. "Sister Clarissa," "Ballad Of Elizabeth Dark," "I Brought My Father With Me" and "Something About Twist" reprise Michael's stunning *autobiography in song* "Michael, Margaret, Pat And Kate" [1994/1999] [\*]. I've witnessed in the past that the latter album was the finest song collection to be released during the twentieth century, and I'll stand on absolutely *anybody's* coffee table - famous and anonymous - and repeat that truth till you all *finally get the message*. Making up the complement of *familiar* Smith tunes is the decades old pairing of the classic paeon to *eternal love* "The Dutchman" and the dreamy south seas celebration "Move Over Mr. Gauguin," plus the more recent addition "There."

OK, time to return to the quintet of new MPS songs. With a late twentieth/early twenty-first century edge, when Michael Peter composes a humorous lyric you'd

better listen - and closely. Three of the new tunes fit the rib-tickling template. As for Smith's ingenuity and subtlety in stringing words together think, "*a modern day Noel Coward*." Thankfully [again !] the liner booklet features the song lyrics in full, so there's nary a word [or punch line !] that you'll miss. Set in the mode of that spirited homage, the movie "Shrek," "The Princess & The Frog" pilfers and purloins blatantly from the world of fairy tales, adds numerous references to 20<sup>th</sup> century movie stars, writers and more [Victor McLaglen, Truman Capote and Timothy Leary], and is delivered in an accent that is *shamrock green*. In fact [is it coincidental, that ?] in three consecutive lines Smith name checks Maureen O'Hara [*the bride*], Barry Fitzgerald [*the matchmaker*] and McLaglen [*the bride's broth of a brother*], who starred alongside Marion Michael Morrison [aka John Wayne] in the 1952 movie "The Quiet Man." Smith's humour is sharp, surreal and can also be as stinging as a paper cut. When Fred, the frog, asks the Princess for a kiss, she retorts "*But laddie let's make it swift, For lately falls the hour, And I'm due home for me evening shift of, Pining in the tower.*"

Pursuing further the theme of *web-footed amphibians* [+], "Famous In France," set at a waltz pace, is a verbal romp through many things Gallic. Mention of *Champs Elysees*, *Maurice Chevalier*, *mon ami* and *brie* should provide an inkling of where Michael's lyric delves. If the foregoing pairing fails to bring tears of laughter and aching ribs, "Zippy" most certainly will. Spanning the era, 1968 to date, and mentioning personalities, fashions and inventions, it's a tribute to the bright shiny bustling world you will discover [or, conversely, the nightmare your life will become] when the effect of long-term inhalation of *the weed* wears off. I know that Michael was, at one stage, contemplating recording an album of [his] humorous songs, but this setting [for the foregoing trio] perfectly suits their arrival in the public domain. "Honey To The Hive" is anthemic in conception and a celebration [of life] in execution, while "Such Things Are Finely Done" is an observation upon our universe, and the turning of each earthly day and season. The closing lines - "*There's doubt for those with evidence, And faith for those with none*" - perfectly encapsulates the uncertainty of the human condition.

Recorded at a Lakeside, California house concert series, a mere forty-eight hours after "Such Things Are Finely Done," "Michael Peter Smith - Live At Dark-Thirty" is a nineteen track collection - fourteen songs and a handful of spoken narratives - of which only half a dozen tunes also appear on "Such Things Are Finely Done." Both are essential listening experiences, and "Dark-Thirty" also includes compositions previously unrecorded by Smith as a solo act. Currently "Such Things Are Finely Done" and "Live At Dark-Thirty," which were released practically concurrently [well, the latter was issued



around a month after "**Such Things...**"], are available from Michael's web site at <http://www.artistsofnote.com/michael/index.html>

#### Note.

[\*] – And still available from <http://www.folkera.com/windriver/michaelsmith/index.html>

[+] – Here in the islands of Britannia, we *lovingly* refer to the Gauloise puffing brotherhood across the English Channel as *frogs*. A species that, according to legend, their gastronomic code dictates they devour.

#### Rosie Thomas "**Only With Laughter Can You Win**" Sub Pop Records

Angelic, anthemic [in a lo-fi way], dream like, spiritual, beautiful [in a stunning way], ethereal, pure, honest, direct, stark, heavenly, melancholic - all of the foregoing are terms that could apply to elements of Thomas' sophomore disc. There are numerous occasions on this emotional roller coaster of a recording when it sounds as if her whisper-like voice is about to break. It's as if Rosie is struggling to draw her final breath and yet those occurrences are an integral part of who Thomas is and the manner in which she delivers her creations. Subjectively, melancholy consistently permeates Rosie's words, yet it is delivered with such purity and honesty that instead of the sustained barrage becoming unbearable, it is actually addictive...and not, I would stress, in a voyeuristic way. It is uplifting in terms of "*there but for the grace of God go I.*" Song after song, Thomas strips away the *five thousand* layers of the onion to reveal the essence of this thing we call *life*.

Although she's based in Seattle these days, Thomas recorded a significant portion of this album in her hometown of Detroit. The opening track, an *a cappella* confessional admission of love, "Let Myself Fall," was recorded in St. John's Church in *downtown Detroit* with vocal assistance from her mother, Delores. By way of comparison, it's as ethereal as the Fairport Convention "**What We Did On Our Holidays**" St. Peter's, Westbourne Grove track "The Lord Is In His Place...How Dreadful Is This Place" except that thirty-five years and an ocean separate the recordings. "I Play Music," the second cut, and "Gradually" which appears later in the disc, were recorded at her father's home with assorted relatives [mother, father, brothers etc.] providing the backing vocals, while "Red Rover" was cut at a location that is only identified in the liner as Michigan. The foregoing quartet was co-produced by Rosie and Eric Fisher, as were a couple of tracks they cut in Seattle. Fisher has played guitar and groove box on all of Thomas' previous recordings, and is a member of her road band. Martin Feveyear who produced her mini album "**In Between**," "**Paper Airplane E.P.**" and "**When We Were Small**" was responsible for the five other cuts on "**Only With Laughter Can You Win**." Such is the uniqueness of

what Thomas does, musically, that the Feveyear and Thomas/Fisher produced tracks are seamless.

In the aforementioned "Let Myself Fall," in less than two minutes, Thomas pictures "*wedding gowns and wedding rings, since I let myself fall in love with you*" and later, in "Gradually," mentions infatuation, once again, with "*When you should be sorry for making me fall.*" In the latter song Thomas, as narrator, states that she will become "*wiser, stronger, bolder*" albeit "Gradually," while in relation to the person being addressed she intimates that she will, in time, "*outrun you, out grow you, ignore you.*" The strings on "You And Me" were recorded in London and feature, on violin, Rosie's buddy, Lucy Wilkins whom she met while touring Europe last year with Bryan Ferry. Cellist Sarah Willson assists Lucy, and the two string players have also previously worked with Beth Orton. The latter cut, a positive ["*Knowing you has made me able to go on*"] and negative ["*And if you leave me, I'll feel scared, I'll fall apart*"] love song, also reveals "*Through it all I've come to understand God's love,*" and segues with Thomas' affirmative statement about the greatest joy in her life, "I Play Music." That song reveals "*I did it my way and I still do, Held my head up high, Asking God for answers and begging him to tell me what to do.*" Further affirmation arrives in the subsequent verse, "*And when I sing I lose myself, There's nothing more I would rather do.*"

The travelogue of the heart "Sell All My Things," "Crazy," "One More Day," "All My Life" and the closing "Dialogue" all deserve mention in terms of how Thomas succeeds, lyrically, in retaining genuine melancholy and avoiding the maudlin. "*How am I to live this life when the only certainty is that death is waiting for me at the end ?*" from "Tell Me How" may appear a simple way to encapsulate the immensity of life, yet it captures *the mystery* that lies between the first breath and the final sigh we all [eventually] take.

In terms of being a *wordy and deep* song poet, Thomas is no Richard Shindell. Neither is she a Dave Carter. Plain and simple [but very effectively], she's Rosie Thomas. And for the present, this is as close as I want to be, in terms of hearing the music of an angel....."**Only With Laughter Can You Win**" is available on the web from <http://www.amazon.com>

#### Tim Grimm "**Coyote's Dream**" Vault Records

According to a posting in the News Section of Tim's web site [[www.timgrimm.com](http://www.timgrimm.com)] his favourite albums in 2002 were Patty Griffin's "**1000 Kisses**," and "**The Gathering of Spirits**" by his Bloomington, Indiana neighbour Carrie Newcomer. Grimm also mentions looking forward to Tom Pacheco's "**There Was A Time**." Those discs were musical high spots of 2002, so I guess Tim and I talk the same language. Well, truth to tell, we've been talking the same language for



some while, as I was much impressed by his 1999 comeback album, "**Heart Land.**"

On the sessions for that album Tim worked with Jason Wilber [Indiana based solo recording act in his own right, and John Prine sideman], and they've been collaborating ever since. Cut at Dave Weber's Airtime Studio on Fish Road in Bloomington, as was "**Heart Land,**" the pair co-produced "**Coyote's Dream.**" Supporting Grimm on this collection of eight originals and three covers are local players Dan Lodge-Rigal [piano, organ, guitar], Don Stiernberg [mandolin], Todd Smith [bass], Greg Cahill [banjo], Jamey Reid [perc.], Gordon Lowry [fiddle] and Jason Wilber [guitar, banjo, mandolin]. Backing vocalists include Loretta Vinson, Tim's wife Jan Lucas, while guest vocals from Stacy Earle and Ramblin' Jack Elliott.

In fact we'll start with Jack's contribution. Grimm and Elliott are long standing buddies. Jack included the traditional "Buffalo Skinners" on his Red House album "**South Coast.**" Here, Tim's rendition of "Buffalo Skinners" is realistically rough-hewn, complete with a backdrop of storm sounds and the whooping and hollering of cowboys. Jack supplies the voice of the [slimy] famous drover who offers a summer's work, albeit conditional, "*on the trail of the buffalo.*" Unemployed at the opening of the tale, the narrator relates how all went well until the hunting party reached Bogey Creek, New Mexico. A lightning storm caused the cattle to stampede, and having given chase the narrator "*got all full of stickers from the cactus that did grow.*" As if that weren't enough, outlaws ambush the hunters, and finally the drover reneges on paying them their wages, citing "*You went and drunk too much – you're all in debt to me !*" That comment turned out to be his final earthly utterance, as the hunting party "*left the drover's bones to bleach on the trail of the buffalo.*" "Browning Mountain," which follows, is the name of a local beauty spot near Tim's home. Accompanied by Stacy Earle, Grimm relates the tale of a couple visiting the mountain. Partway to the top, "*we passed the ghost of you and me.*" In relation to the ghostly couple Grimm writes, "*Their eyes were filled with timeless love,*" and succinctly adds, "*I took your hand in joy and sorrow, We watched them fade so peacefully.*" The woman subsequently enquires "*Were those the ghosts of past or future ?*" to which the narrator replies "*Ahead is the mystery.*" It appears that on Browning Mountain there are numerous *unexplained* mounds of stones, and after mentioning them in the lyric, Tim closes the song with "*Sometimes the truth is a mystery.*"

These days, as well as plying his craft as a musician and actor, Tim is a farmer, and although "Raining" may appear to be a relevant subject in that trade, he employs it as a metaphor. On his web site, in relation to the song, Grimm quotes the philosopher Alan Watts, "*The perfection of Zen is to be perfectly and*

*simply human.*" "The River Where She Sleeps" by the late Dave Carter included the line "*She reads me books by Alan Watts, Speakin' words of wisdom, let it be.*" And let's not forget the Van Morrison penned "Alan Watts Blues." In relation to "*let it be*" the late George Harrison was also an admirer of the British born Zen philosopher [d. 1973]. The bottom line is that Grimm and the aforementioned writers are *satellites* that tune into messages borne on *radio waves* or some such. As for Tim's "Raining," it's an intensely personal song that touches on being a father, a lover, while simply surviving and doing the best you can in this life. Surveying that life, the closing line is a gem....."*maybe I'm spinning gold...*"

I think my opinion of the endless stream of *tired old* love songs that certain scribes churn out is well known in this publication, but I'd hold up Grimm's "Slipped Away" as a piece of work – concerning a man with a secret - that is well thought out and intelligently constructed. Not all men are macho and "*full of piss and vinegar.*" Reflecting upon his life, Grimm's character remarks "*you're just never sure what makes you happy...*" and in relation to his wife adds, later "*what you don't know could tear us apart, Hope is a shadow somewhere on the wall.*" Written a few days prior to 9/11, "Coyote's Dream" damns the inexorable march of commerce and the damage it has wrought upon family life in the last half century. The events described in the opening verse are somewhat apocalyptic, but the *kicker* for me is the line "*with nothin' plugged in you had time to think.*" For a number of years now I've truly believed that working a day job damages your health.

In Woody Guthrie's "1913 Massacre" seventy-three children are murdered while attending a Christmas Party, at the Italian Hall in Calumet, Michigan. A bunch of thugs, hired by the copper mine owners to break the miner's strike, torched the hall and prevented anyone leaving the building. Grimm gives this desperate lyric a wonderfully sympathetic reading. Self explanatory, "Twister" is set in Kansas [where Dorothy lives], and Grimm captures the unpredictable path of these freaks of nature with "*it's got no brakeman, it's got no rails.*" In the midst of what may appear to be a suite of dark songs "Meeting Wendell Berry" is a light-hearted discourse involving two people discussing life *down on the farm.* Wendell Berry, a former university professor, has farmed in Henry County, Kentucky since 1965. Closing the disc is Jason Wilber's "Heaven." Like Grimm, Wilber is a close observer of the simple, yet mystical, every day events of farm life. "*It's just an old farmhouse down a country road,*" but it's where you'll find "*big shade trees, a front porch swing, smell the cookin', and a woman waving behind the front screen door.*" Home is where the heart is, and both are evocations of heaven. "**Coyote's Dream**" is available from CDBaby at <http://www.cdbaby.com/cd/timgrimm3>



# A Kerrverts Festival 50.



There is a reason, There is a rhyme,  
There is a season, There is a time,  
and then, there's the latest KERRVERTS FESTIVAL 50.

1. The Dutchman **JUAREZ** feat. **MICHAEL SMITH & BARBARA BARROW** "Juarez" Decca DL75189 [1970]. #
2. The Dance **TOM RUSSELL BAND** "As The Crow Flies" End Of The Trail Music (cassette only) *no index no.* [1985]. #
3. Years **BETH NIELSEN CHAPMAN** "Beth Nielsen Chapman" Reprise 9 26172-2 [1990]. #
4. I Play Music **ROSIE THOMAS** "Only With Laughter Can You Win" Sub Pop SPCD 612 [2003]. #
5. Redbird **REDBIRD** "Redbird" self release *no index no.* [2003]. #
6. Yarrington Town **MICKIE MERKENS** "Texas Summer Nights, Vol. 1" Potato Satellite PS2-1000 [1983]. #
7. Sad As It Seems **TONI PRICE** "Born To Be Blue" Texas Music Group/Antone's TMG-ANT 0060 [2003]. #
8. October Child **MICHAEL PETER SMITH** "Live AT Dark-Thirty" self release MPS3564 [2003]. #
9. Zippy **MICHAEL SMITH** "Such Things Are Finely Done" Tales From The Tavern TFT019 [2003]. #
10. Rainslicker **JOSH RITTER** "Hello Starling" Signature Sounds Recordings SIG 1280 [2003]. #
11. 10 Million Miles **PATTY GRIFFIN** "A Kiss In Time" ATO Records ATO0014 [2003]. #
12. The Wing And The Wheel **NANCI GRIFFITH** "The Dust Bowl Symphony" Elektra 62418-2 [1999].
13. Cold Hard Truth **[CHRISTINE] ALBERT & [CHRIS] GAGE** "At Anderson Fair" Moon House Records MH2900 [2003]. #
14. At The End Of The Day **RICHARD DOBSON** "A River Will Do" Brambus Records 200384-2 [2003]. #
15. The Lakes Of Pontchartrain **PAUL BRADY** "The Missing Liberty Tapes" Compass Records 7 4335-2 [2002]. #
16. Sligo Honeymoon 1946 **TERRY CLARKE** "The Shelly River" Minidoka MICD005 [1991].
17. Cup Of Kindness **EMMYLOU HARRIS** "Stumble Into Grace" Nonesuch 7559-79805-2 [2003]. #
18. McCurdy's Boy **TANGLEFOOT** "Captured Alive" Borealis Records BCD157 [2003]. #
19. Raining **TIM GRIMM** "Coyote's Dream" Vault Records VR06 [2003]. #
20. In The Bleak Midwinter **JANE SIBERRY** "Sushan The Palace {Hymns On Earth}" Sheeba SHE011 [2003]. #
21. Who'll Sing For Me **WAYFARING STRANGERS** "This Train" Rounder 11661-0528-2A [2003]. #
22. Broken Heart Tattoo **KEVIN MEISEL** "Country Lines" Brambus Records 200379-2 [2003]. #
23. Early Bird **MICHAEL McNEVIN** "In The Rough" self release *no index no.* [2002]. #
24. This Train Still Runs **JANIS IAN** "Working Without A Net" Oh Boy Records OBR-026 [2003]. #
25. Almost Always **RON SEXSMITH** "Rarities" Ronboy Records 2-70024 [2003]. #
26. You're No Train **KRIS DELMHORST** "Songs For A Hurricane" Signature Sounds Recordings SIG 1279 [2003]. #
27. The Farewell Ball **MARK ERELLI** "Hillbilly Pilgrim" Signature Sounds Recordings SIG 1281 [2003]. #
28. Lay Me Down **JOHN GORKA** "Old Futures Gone" Red House Records RHR CD 165 [2003]. #
29. Heart Of A Believer **KIMMIE RHODES** "Lost & Found" Sunbird Records SBD 0008 [2003]. #
30. I Shot Your Dog **FRED EAGESMITH** "Balin" *no label no index no.* [2003]. #
31. Strange Life **DAVID MALLETT** "Artist In Me" North Road Records NR CD71603 [2003]. #
32. Lord Bateman **JIM MORAY** "Sweet England" Niblick Is A Giraffe Records NIBL003 [2003]. #
33. Hard Town **EAMON FRIEL** "The Waltz Of The Years" Than Records THR 1003 [2003].
34. Mean Ol' Wind **KRIS DELMHORST** "Oddlot" Big Bean Music bb-002 [2000]. #
35. Bandages **FRED EAGLESMITH** "The Official Bootleg Series Vol. 1 : Live Solo 2002" self release *no index no.* [2003]. #
36. You And Me **ROSIE THOMAS** "Only With Laughter Can You Win" Sub Pop SPCD 612 [2003]. #
37. Coming Home **PETER MAYER** "Earth Town Square" Blue Boat BB1206 [2002]. #
38. Afternoons **LORI MCKENNA** "The Kitchen Tapes" Gyrox Records GYR003 [2003]. #
39. This Old Town **JANIS IAN** "Unreleased 3 : Society's Child" Rude Girl Publishing *no index no.* [2001]. #
40. Bolinas **JOHN STEWART** "The Lonesome Picker Rides Again" Collectors Choice CCM-406-2 [2003]. #
41. Wild Eyes **CRIS CUDDY** "Keep The Change" Vanishing Castle Recordings VC-55 [2003]. #
42. Out Here In The Middle **ROBERT EARL KEEN** "Farm Fresh Onions" Audium AUD-CD-8191 [2003]. #
43. Falling At Your Feet **DANIEL LANOIS** "Shine" Anti 86661-2 [2003]. #
44. Cute As A Bug **LYLE LOVETT** "My Baby Don't Tolerate" Lost Highway 986083-3 [2003]. #
45. Kansas Rain **JOHN STEWART** "Sunstorm" Collectors Choice CCM-407-2 [2003]. #
46. Indian Summer **JASON WILBER** "Behind The Midway" Flat Earth Records FLT-122-CD [2000]. #
47. Your Mouth **MAYBE BABY** "What Matters" self release *no index no.* [2003]. #
48. Rachrai Island **FRANCES BLACK** "How High The Moon" Dara Records TORTV 1160CD [2003].
49. When You Left Me **JANN ARDEN** "Love Is The Only Soldier" Universal 4400383992 [2003]. #
50. Heal In The Wisdom **BOBBY BRIDGER** "Live At The Kerrville Folk Festival 1986" (cassette only) *no index no.* [1987]. #



All albums released in the UK, unless marked. US releases marked #. European releases marked \$. Introductory rhyme taken from the Bobby Bridger song, "Heal In The Wisdom" - The Kerrville Folk Festival Anthem.



## Contents.

Ellis Paul/Vance Gilbert Interview 14th October 2003	p.2
Rosie Thomas Interview 23rd October 2003	p.12
Kerrville – kompacts, kassettes & other coincidences	p.26
The latest Kerrville Festival Top 50	p.31

## Editorial.

I actually wrapped up most of the writing of this issue during December 2003 and had hoped to print and publish Kronikle Issue # 32 in January 2004. Sadly our Nottingham based printer for the last decade and more, Michael Costello, passed away late last year. In the end two months seemed to whiz by before I filled the void.

The 2004 Redbird tour was even better than 2003, and I caught two of their shows. One in Leicester, and the other show here in town. The *fourth fret*, Dave Goodrich is one hell of a guitar picker and a nice guy to boot. Hopefully Jeff Foucault's second album will be out by mid summer, and may be called "**Stripping Cane.**" On the other hand, it..... Peter Mulvey's new album "**Kitchen Radio**" is just out on Signature Sounds. My review of Redbird's Birmingham show appeared online in Folkwax in late February. To subscribe to Folkwax, go to [www.folkwax.com](http://www.folkwax.com)

Mickey Newbury's final studio album "**Blue To This Day**" finally arrived in late February after a number of provisional releases dates came and went, and I must say that it is a stunning piece of work. Well worth the wait. If you're already familiar with Mickey's work, then you know what to expect. If you don't know his work, you're missing one hell of a lot. You can order the disc online at [www.mickeynewbury.com](http://www.mickeynewbury.com)

Luka Bloom has issued a Tom Pacheco styled, recorded in an evening, acoustic album titled "**Before Sleep Comes**" which as the collection title suggests, contains tracks that are intended to lull the listener into a somnambulant state. Meantime the recording is only available from Luka at his web site [www.lukabloom.com](http://www.lukabloom.com)

Patty Griffin has a new album out on ATO Records in late April. Tom Pacheco may have up to three recordings issued this year. The band album "**Long Walk**" is just out in Scandinavia, and he may have the third of his *bare bones, barbed wire* albums "**Year Of The Big Wind**" available by the time he tours the UK in April. Later in the year there are plans for Tom to cut another album for Appleseed Recordings.

One time California crystal gazer Eliza Gilkyson has recorded what, for me, is her finest album to date "**Land Of Milk And Honey.**" Her participation in last year's Woody Guthrie song tribute tour "Ribbon Of Highway, Endless Skyway" has obviously sparked the seemingly dormant political animal in her psyche, as the opening cut "Hiway 9" attests. The album closes with a previously unrecorded Guthrie song "Peace Call" that features the voices of Gilkyson, Austin neighbour Patty Griffin, Mary Chapin Carpenter and Iris DeMent. [Unless noted otherwise] to purchase this and many of the discs featured in the subsequent paragraphs, go to [www.villagerecords.com](http://www.villagerecords.com)

Tom Russell has come up with his third cowboy song collection, but it's a little short on Russell originals – there are only five of his originals out of twelve cuts – and it is titled "**Indians Cowboys Horses Dogs.**"

Also essential listening and released in the last few months is Mark Erelli's western swing recording "**Hillbilly Pilgrim**" featuring lyrics that are way smarter than those you'd find on the average western swing disc, and Lucy Kaplansky's first post 9/11 recording statement "**The Red Thread.**" Both albums were recently reviewed in Folkwax and I also interviewed both musicians for that online publication.

Regarding the contents of this issue, and in no particular order, thanks are due to **Rod Kennedy, Dalis Allen, Ellis Paul, Vince Gilbert** and **Rosie Thomas**. This issue is dedicated to the late Michael Costello, for over a decade printer of the Kerrville Kronikle.

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### You can also find us at :

Web Page [sadly not yet posted] :

<http://www.kerrkron.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk>

E-Mail :

[kerrkron@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:kerrkron@blueyonder.co.uk)

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12 July 1983

Eden's first rain  
fell quietly I'm sure,  
not like these fury-filled menaces  
that thrash and flash  
and tear into the limbs  
of a Central Texas night,  
but the slow-falling  
gentle dripping hum  
of a new morning rain –  
the kind to makes the hills  
still themselves in misty green  
and know that they are



**ALPHA RAY**