

Jonathan Byrd – Bio

Jonathan Christian Byrd was born November 13th 1970 in Fayetteville, North Carolina. At that time his father was attending a Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. In 1975, the Reverend Byrd and his family moved to Mannheim, West Germany where he preached at a English speaking, Southern Baptist Church. It was in Germany that Jonathan's mother gave him his first piano lessons. A church in the university town of Giessen, near Frankfurt, was the Reverend's next parish, and then the Byrd family returned to North Carolina in 1980 settling in Chapel Hill.

When his parents separated, Jonathan continued living with his mother. During summer vacations Jonathan would stay with his father, and he eventually persuaded his dad to buy him a *cheap* electric guitar. Led Zeppelin's "Stairway To Heaven" and countless Hendrix tunes were played on the instrument. While attending Orange High School in Hillsborough, NC, the teenager joined the big band jazz programme, and as he recalled *"I really learned what music was made of, the mathematics behind the sounds."* Then he added, *"I was still a teenager though, and I loved rock 'n' roll"* – particularly, it seems, heavy metal music and, at that time, he penned a few songs of his own in that genre.

Having graduated from High School, over a period of four years, Jonathan undertook three tours of duty in the Mediterranean with the US Navy, before leaving the service and returning to Chapel Hill. While still aboard ship, armed with his Stratocaster and a cheap amp, and accompanied by like-minded *"friends that had acoustics,"* Jonathan would practice in "inappropriate" spaces, much to the chagrin of the senior officers. *"We'd bang out the latest REM song or whatever."*

Back in Chapel Hill and, by now, midway through his twenties, Jonathan began considering his options. Although he had been involved with music most of his life, he had never considered it as a career. He tried putting a few bands together, but nothing worked out. Eventually deciding to pursue music as a solo artist, Jonathan *went acoustic*, and linked up with other local players who *"introduced me to Old-Time, pre-bluegrass string band music. Simple, repetitive riffs with lyrics about death and sadness."*

As for the songs that Byrd began composing, he told me *"My writing found its roots in the old ballad style and my hands fell into the ancient rhythms of the Appalachians. I traveled to Ireland twice and found a tradition alive with spontaneity and change. That's where I picked up an alternate tuning for the guitar, DADGAD, and learned how to use it for nearly every kind of music out there. For a personal challenge, I wrote and recorded my entire first album in that tuning, bringing it into the old-time, bluegrass, and country idioms."* Aged 30, Jonathan released the foregoing album, **"Wildflowers,"** in Y2K. A collection of sixteen songs, the disc included four that were traditional. As for his own "Ashe County Fair," a song that I'm certain will become, in time, a folk classic, he recalled *"When I started writing it, I didn't know the girl was going to die."* In 2000, Jonathan won the Carolina Songwriter's Co-op 'Song of the Year' competition.

Jonathan's sophomore collection, **"The Waitress,"** consisting of ten originals and three traditional/cover songs, appeared toward the close of 2002. Ringing the changes, in the story song "The Ballad Of Larry" Byrd employed pathos, while the wry "Tape Full Of Love Songs" confirmed his grasp of humour. Having attended the festival for the first time the previous year, Jonathan was a finalist in the New Folk Songwriting competition at 2003 Kerrville Folk Festival, and also one of the competition's half-dozen winners. One of Jonathan's recent musical *side projects* has been The Boys Of Walltown, a duo featuring accordionist friend David DiGiuseppe, an aggregation that performs *"a high-energy fusion of Celtic and American music."*

Soon after he returned from Kerrville to North Carolina, in the summer of 2003, Byrd recorded **"The Sea And The Sky"** with the Athens, Georgia based duo Dromedary. The recording was released in early May 2004 on the Oregon based Waterbug imprint. In late 2003, Jonathan undertook a short UK tour, and he was, on two occasions, a mainstage performer at the 2004 Kerrville Folk Festival. Andrew Reissiger [electric guitar] and Rob McMaken [electric guitar, backing vocals], aka Dromedary, also contributed to Byrd's fourth recording **"This Is The New That"** as did Jeff Reilly [drums], Neal Fountain [bass, lap steel], Will McFarlane [electric guitar] and Mary Moss [backing vocals]. Recorded over a four-day period during the spring of 2006, the album was released by Waterbug Records in late March 2007. Apart from the twelve songs featured on the disc, the release also included multi-media content and the option to download three additional songs as mp3's. In late 2006, Byrd's "Breathless" appeared on the eighth Waterbug compilation **"Born Into The Whisper."** The latter song was one of the aforementioned trio of

mp3 downloads, and Byrd's then unreleased recording was credited [on the "**Born Into The Whisper**" liner] with the title "**Learn To Rock & Roll.**"

A ten-song collection that was recorded in Toronto, Ontario, "**The Law And The Lonesome**" was released by Waterbug Records in the summer of 2008.

Discography :

"Wildflowers" [2000] ; **"The Waitress"** [2002] ; **"The Sea And The Sky"** [2004] ; **"This Is The New That"** [2007] ; **"The Law And The Lonesome"** [2008] :

Arthur Wood

Kerrville Kronikles 06/03, 05/04, 01/07 & 07/08.

[870 words]