

Mark Olson [& The Creekdippers] – Bio

Mark Olson was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota on September 18th 1961. During the opening half of the eighties Olson was the stand-up bass player in the Minneapolis rockabilly band, Stagger Lee. Eager to perform the songs he had written, Olson put together a band that consisted of Norm Rodgers [drums], Marc Pearlman [bass] and Steve Retzler [guitar]. Retzler was soon replaced by Gary Louris, from Safety Last, another local rockabilly band. By 1985 the quartet began calling themselves The Jayhawks, and the following year the band self-released a self-titled album on the Bunkhouse label. They subsequently scored a record deal with the A & M label, but the deal later fell through and Louris left the band. Gary returned when the Jayhawks were signed to the local imprint, Twin/Tone. Although **"Blue Earth"** [1989], a recording that was mixed at Prince's Paisley Park recording complex, didn't enjoy massive sales it was given a more than respectable review in Issue 577 of Rolling Stone [May 1990]. I'd even go as far as to say that **"Blue Earth"** is/was a pivotal landmark in the subsequent evolution of the alt. country movement. On the strength of their Twin/Tone release, producer George Drakoulias signed the band to the Def American and **"Hollywood Town Hall"** was their first release. In support of **"Hollywood Town Hall,"** the band undertook a US tour headlined by label mates The Black Crowes. Later The Jayhawks headlined a Stateside tour, on which the support act was Shreveport, Louisiana born singer/songwriter Victoria Williams. Olson had initially been the sole songwriter in the band, but the time the first Def American album appeared the material largely consisted of Olson/Louris collaborations. Following the release of the album **"Tomorrow The Green Grass"** [1995] which included the track "Miss Williams' Guitar," Olson announced in November that year that he was quitting the band and moving to Los Angeles in order to spend more time with his wife, Victoria Williams. Williams had been diagnosed as suffering from multiple sclerosis toward the end of 1992, while touring with Neil Young. To assist with her medical expenses, during 1993 Sony/Chaos issued a compilation titled **"Sweet Relief"** that featured Victoria's compositions interpreted by friends and acquaintances. A five-piece version of The Jayhawks, that included Karen Grotberg on piano, performed Williams' song "Lights" on the album.

In California, Mark Olson and Victoria Williams soon relocated from Los Angeles, to a 1950's cabin which they amusingly dubbed, Chaparral Bottoms. The high desert air of Joshua Tree was obviously preferable to the city smog, as far as Victoria's *stop/go* medical condition was concerned. Mark and Victoria had become acquainted in California during the early eighties, and Olson has admitted that he was immediately attracted by her abilities as a musician. For a time, Williams had been married to singer, Peter Case. Single once again, Williams, who is a devout christian, renewed her friendship with Olson during the aforementioned Jayhawks tour. The following year, Olson helped Williams cut her third solo album, **"Loose."** During 1996, Olson and Williams accompanied by Buddy and Julie Miller plus Jim Lauderdale, toured Europe as the Rollin' Creek Dippers. On March 1st last year, the Honey Ridge Creeks Dippers – Olson, Williams and violinist Mike Russell - made their US concert debut at the Santa Monica's, The Ash Grove. At least that's the name of the aggregation whose set was reviewed in issue # 9 [May - June 1997] of **No Depression**. The foregoing name may be a case of a typographical glitch. During the ensuing summer, Williams and Olson appeared on the Sarah McLachlan organised, Lilleth Fair travelling music festival.

Recorded during February 1997, Mark Olsen *re-entered the race* with a privately released, self produced project as the year drew to a close. With the production stripped down to the basics of voice, acoustic guitar and fiddle **"The Original Harmony Ridge Creek Dippers"** is a thirty-two minute long, folk/country flavoured, ten-track masterpiece. In a nutshell, simplicity worked. The stripped down instrumentation on **"The Original Harmony Ridge Creek Dippers,"** was probably a reaction by Olson to the million-dollar excess of **"Tomorrow The Green Grass."** Victoria Williams released an album in January 1998 titled **"Musings of a Creekdipper."** Subsequent Creekdipper albums – the first three were independent releases - failed to develop beyond the fey innocence, charm and magic of their debut effort. Hightone Records issued the **"My Own Jo Ellen"** collection [Glitterhouse became the European outlet], and the fledgling Nashville based imprint, Dualtone, issued **"December's Child"** in the summer of 2002.

"Creekdippin' For The First Time" was released by the French imprint Fargo. It gathered together eighteen tracks, sixteen from the band's first three albums, featured a couple of **"Pacific Coast Rambler"** outtakes and the disc closed with "It Sure Can Get Cold In Des Moines" from the tribute collection **"The Tom T. Hall Project."** Produced by Mark Olson, **"Mystic Theatre"** was a new studio recording made in Joshua Tree during the summer of 2003. Glitterhouse issued the disc in Europe, but it

has yet to surface in the States. Released to coincide with the 2004 American presidential election, apart from a couple of traditional songs, the eleven track **“Political Manifest”** is filled with anti-Bush rhetoric.

Mark’s marriage to Victoria Williams ended in 2005. Hacktone Records released his solo album, **“The Salvation Blues,”** during June 2007. The songs on the album were written during the time he stayed with Cardiff-based folk musician Charlotte Greig and her novelist husband John Williams, and were inspired by his, then, recent divorce. Olson and Louris recommenced working together during late 2005 by undertaking a short tour playing their own songs as well as material from The Jayhawks catalogue. They toured together again the following spring. Their duo album **“Ready For The Love,”** produced by Chris Robinson of The Black Crowes, was recorded during early 2007 and finally released by the Hacktone label during the late summer of 2008.

Discography:

Solo and with Harmony Ridge Creek Dippers only - **“The Original Harmony Ridge Creek Dippers”** [1997] ; **“Pacific Coast Rambler”** [1998] ; **“Zola And The Tulip Tree”** [1999] ; **“My Own Jo Ellen”** [2000] ; **“December’s Child”** [2002] ; **“Creekdippin’ For The First Time”** [2003] ; **“Mystic Theatre”** [2004] ; **“Political Manifest”** [2004] ; **“Salvation Blues”** [2007] :
with Gary Louris – **“Ready For The Love”** [2008] :

Arthur Wood

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