

## BEN BEDFORD

Illinois bred and based singer-songwriter Ben Bedford has toured Europe on a couple of occasions. When he returns in March he'll tour France, Holland and Belgium and also undertake his first U.K. dates. I was introduced to Bedford's music soon after the 2007 release of his sophomore recording *LINCOLN'S MAN* and, while it's been said that I'm hard to please, I was immediately smitten by his words and music.

Ben Bedford was born on November 28, 1981 in Springfield and raised in nearby Chatham. Initial musical inspiration came by way of his mother's record collection, and early influences included Gordon Lightfoot and Willie Nelson. Impressed by the enhanced social standing of his high school friend Levi once the opposite sex saw him with a guitar, aged fourteen Ben picked up the instrument. Truth to tell there had been a pre-teen flirtation with a set of drums owned by another acquaintance. For a couple of years Bedford took classical music guitar lessons from Pauline Cormier, but they ceased after he came under the spell of electric blues guitarists such as B B King. For a few years Ben refined his guitar playing techniques by listening to records (alone in his room), and in the process his love of the blues gave way to a wider exploration of folk and other roots music genres. From an early age Bedford sang in his church choir, school choruses and took part in school musicals and plays. Once competent on guitar he joined his local church band. Following high school, Bedford enrolled as a history major at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and after graduating in 2004 settled in his birthplace.

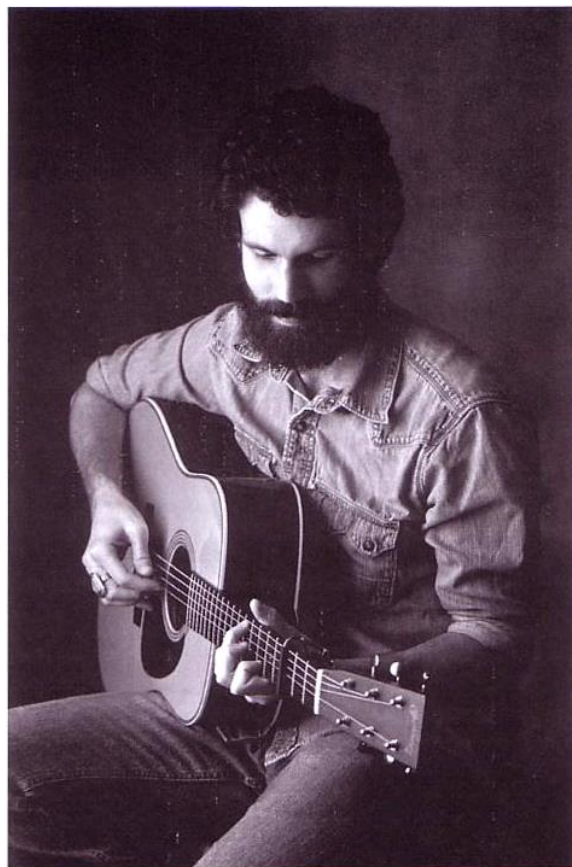
From an early age through his grade school years Ben dabbled with writing short stories. Aged twenty, Bedford began writing songs. In June the following year, at Bernie and Betty's Pizza, a small Springfield bar and restaurant, he debuted those songs in public. The sessions for *THE VAST EXPANSE OF HEARTACHE*, a fourteen-song recording, took place during 2005 at his friend Matt Johnson's Champaign-Urbana apartment. Now out of print, these days Ben considers the recording experimental, and after recording it mainly used it as a promotional aid for booking gigs.

With initial pressings credited to Butterchurn Music, Bedford's song publishing company, *LINCOLN'S MAN* his ten-song debut album was released during early 2007. Ben subsequently

founded Hopeful Sky Records and his two recordings are now available on that imprint. The *LINCOLN'S MAN* sessions took place during September 2006 at Robert E. Lee Studios in Brentwood, Tennessee. Ben's co-producer was Nanci Griffith guitar/Dobro player Chas Williams. Other session players included one time Griffith bassist Ron De La Vega and harmony vocalists/songwriters Sally Barris and Kari Abate. Initially recorded during the 2005 Champaign-Urbana sessions, *Annabelle #2* and *Dark Highway* were reprised on *LINCOLN'S MAN*. Apart from *Harley Albright*, co-written with Abate—she became Mrs. Ben Bedford during September last year—the other compositions were penned by Ben. *LINCOLN'S MAN* reached number 8 on the US Folk-DJ Chart during March 2008 and number 23 on the Euro Americana Chart in October last year.

Bedford had become acquainted with Nashville based Barris in the Spring of 2005, following her appearance at the Pleasant Plains, Illinois house concert series, the Cabin Concerts. Barris invited Bedford and Abate to stay with her in Nashville, if they ever came to town. As their friendship developed Barris helped critique Bedford's new compositions. When Ben enquired about a studio where he could record *LINCOLN'S MAN*, it was Barris who suggested that he contact Chas Williams.

During May 2007 Ben travelled to Gotland, Sweden having been invited to take part in the Listening Room International Songwriting Retreat. American writers invited to past retreats include Richard Berman, Dana Cooper, Michael Friedman and Tom Kimmel. Following the retreat, Ben undertook a concert tour of Sweden and Denmark. Stateside, at the outset, Ben toured the adjacent Midwestern states performing in cafes/coffeehouses and undertaking house concerts. Following the commercial success of his debut album, last year Ben began touring nationally. While he has yet to perform in all fifty states, last summer he traversed the western United States undertaking dates in Kansas, Colorado, Idaho, Oregon,



Montana and South Dakota.

Released during the first week of January last year, like its predecessor, *LAND OF THE SHADOWS* was recorded at Robert E. Lee Studios. Co-produced once again by Bedford and Williams, it featured eleven songs of which Bedford penned eight. The album title song was co-written with Kari, while the closing number *As Long As Your Eyes Are Blue* is based on a poem by Banjo Patterson, and Williams' penned the guitar instrumental *Ten Paces*. *LAND OF THE SHADOWS* reached number 1 on the Folk-DJ Chart during January 2009, and is to be released to Euro Americana stations early in 2010.

Bedford has intimated in print that his current musical inspirations include the late Townes Van Zandt, Gordon Lightfoot, Guy Clark, Patty Griffin and Richard Shindell. In-concert he plays a new Martin D28 guitar (having recently retired a 1971 version), and is often accompanied on harmony vocals by his wife Kari. He has opened shows for Butch Hancock, Paul Burch, the Gordons, Wil Maring and Greg Garing. Andrew Calhoun founder of Waterbug Records, an imprint whose output I rate highly, recently added Bedford to the label's roster of artists. It's a move that will undoubtedly bring Ben Bedford's music to a wider audience. At your own peril, miss this engaging performer on his debut UK tour. **Arthur Wood**