

Greg Trooper – A Career Overview

Greg Trooper was born in Neptune, New Jersey during 1956. Raised in Little Silver, he attended High School in nearby Red Bank. Located a mere forty miles south of New York, during his teenage years, Greg regularly went into the City to attend concerts and visit folk clubs. *“Everything from Artie and Happy Traum to Van Morrison to The Band. I saw Dylan play at the Garden, at the Bangladesh concert – that was the first time I ever saw him and it blew my mind. I saw The Beatles play at Shea Stadium in 1966. The Cyrkle and Bobby Hebb supported them.”* Greg’s father worked for a local radio station, one of the sponsors of the Shea Stadium show.

Greg’s father, a graphic artist, hailed from Brooklyn’s Jewish community, while his mother was born in Pennsylvania and came from an Irish/German Catholic background. I asked him how he inherited his love of music, *“That probably came more from my mother’s side. Her mom played organ in church and my mother sang a bit.”*

The sixties were a golden age for radio in America, as Greg recalled. *“It was awesome and nothing like it is today. There was R&B, Motown, Stones and Beatles – a great way to learn about music. They didn’t play a lot of country music. I got interested in country music as I got a little older. I was attracted to singer/songwriters in the seventies, and their influence from a country music angle caught my interest.”*

At the age of fourteen Greg, raised on a diet of radio station music, picked up his first guitar. *“In High School, there was a small group of us that listened to the same kind of music. We’d try to figure out songs on guitar.”* During his High School years Dylan, Van Morrison, Loudon Wainwright, Randy Newman and John Prine became his heroes. Then country music entered the frame....

“We had a Gram Parsons country rock/Austin, Texas influenced group called the Ravioli Brothers.” The band was a short-lived musical experiment and Greg left home at the age of eighteen and moved to Lawrence, Kansas. Later, he relocated to Austin and was joined by Richard Scott, a former Ravioli Brother. Trooper and Scott worked as a duo for a while, then Greg worked as a solo act. Reflecting upon his year in Austin, *“I was drawn there by the artists I was listening to. Townes, Guy Clark and Jerry Jeff Walker. I saw Willie Nelson play in a bar. I saw more shows than I played while I was down there.”* Returning to Lawrence, Greg enrolled as a Music major at the University of Kansas, then swapped to English. *“After a couple of years of college, I had “ants in my pants.” I wanted to move to a situation where I was doing music professionally, so I moved to New York. That’s where I spent the next fifteen years.”* Second time around in Lawrence, Greg formed the Eleventh Street Rhythm Method that included former Ravioli Brother, Jim Paschetto.

Greg initially worked as a singer/songwriter in downtown Long Island clubs. “I eventually put the Greg Trooper Band together. Larry Campbell was in that band. He’s now with Dylan. The drummer was Walter Thompson, and Greg Shirley played bass. Greg is in Nashville now and still plays with me. We made one record together, toured Scandinavia and did some gigs in London” A 1986, vinyl only release on the Wild Twin label, the album was titled **“We Won’t Dance.”** The recording was co-produced by Greg and Carter Cathcart [ex- Laughing Dogs]. “He went into record production and I was introduced to him by The Roches.” The following year Greg won the New York Music Award for Best New Male Vocalist. Gary Tallent of the E-Street Band presented the award. Gary and Greg began work on a new album soon afterwards. Titled **“Noises In The Hallway,”** although completed in 1988, a further eight years elapsed before the recording was released.

Through the late eighties and into the nineties, Greg signed a series of song publishing deals. They paid the rent, put food on his table and allowed him to pursue his career as a musician. Signed to CBS Song by Earl Shuman, Greg’s contract was subsequently transferred to Tree Publishing in Nashville. *“I would go down there every few months and write and gig. I got most of my cuts – they add up to maybe fifteen – during this period. I did three years with CBS, and went over to Polygram for two years. Finally, I had a co-venture with Sony Tree and that ended in the mid-nineties.”*

Vince Gill covered Greg’s “We Won’t Dance” on his 1989 MCA album **“When I Call Your Name.”** *“It was never a single, but it recouped all my publishing advances at the time.”* “The Heart,” a Trooper/Tom Russell collaboration, appeared on Sarah Elizabeth Campbell’s 1994 album **“Running With You”** for Steve Wilkison’s now defunct Dejadisc label. *“Steve brought the song to Sarah. He actually wanted to put my records out on Dejadisc, but the timing was never right.”* Lucy Kaplansky’s solo debut **“The Tide”** also

featured the latter tune. Tom Russell's semi-concept album "**Box of Visions**" included another collaboration, "Hong Kong Boy." *"I did a few gigs with Patricia Hardin and Tom Russell in Austin during the mid-seventies. Tom and I got reacquainted in New York, as we lived around the corner from each other in Brooklyn."* Greg's has also written with Robert Earl Keen, Sid Griffin, Willie Nile, his wife Claire Mullally, Duane Jarvis, Don Henry and Steve Earle. Among other artists covering his song have been Maura O'Connell and Bill Lloyd.

Introduced to Stewart Lerman by Willie Nile, Trooper began working on some publishing demos at the Lerman's studio. *"My 1992 album "**Everywhere**" started out as those demos. We picked some songs, brought them back into the studio, fixed them up, mixed them and put it out as a record."* "**Everywhere**" initially saw the light of day on the Black Hole label, then moved to Ripe and Ready Records and was reissued by Koch with two bonus tracks a couple of years ago. Promoting the album, Trooper and his band toured the States for two months supporting the Joe Ely Band.

Four years later, the D'Ville label issued "**Noises in the Hallway**" Greg's 1988 recording, but the label went into liquidation soon afterwards. In the late nineties, Koch planned to reissue the album with bonus tracks, but nothing came of the plan. *"When D'Ville Records folded I asked Buddy Miller if he would be interested in producing a record with me."* Miller and Tallent had mastered the tracks on "**Noises.**" Although Miller agreed to undertake the project twelve months elapsed before Greg was offered a deal, by Koch. *"They were pleased as could be to have Buddy produce it. Steve Wilkison was working at Koch by then. He's always been a great supporter, although it was John Porter who signed me."*

Released in late 1998, "**Popular Demons**" spent over twenty weeks in the Americana chart Top 10 and was nominated for Folk Album of the Year by the Nashville Music Awards. Nanci Griffith took the title with her tribute collection "**Other Voices, Too.**" A Nashville resident for the past six years, Greg Trooper retains a pragmatic view of business in his adopted home. *"Mainstream country music is the weirdest thing. They keep writing one song over and over again. They can't figure out that you've got to have good music to sell it. In Nashville you could take a stone and throw it in any direction and you'd be able to hit a man or woman who can write unbelievable songs. And write great traditional country songs. Music Row acts like they don't exist. Doesn't know that they're there. There's such an enormous well of talent there."*

In parallel with relating Greg's story, you will have noticed that we've been tracking the movements of Steve Wilkison. At the dawn of the new millennium, Wilkison arrived in Nashville to head the Eminent Record label. In rapid succession he signed Kate Campbell, Eric Taylor, Rosie Flores and Trooper. Produced by Phil Madiera, with guest artists that include Julie Miller, Maura O'Connell, Steve Fishell, Claire Mullally and Bill Lloyd, Greg's "**Straight Down Rain**" was released by the imprint in April this year. *"To me the process of writing songs provides a simple way to examine complex issues. I'm always trying to find some semblance of truth through the characters. While there's usually more than a little of me in each of my songs, I try to let each character write the song through their own voice,"* is Trooper's synopsis of his current approach to songwriting.

As for his new label, Trooper added *"I'm thrilled to be working with Eminent Records. For a long time now I've been looking for a label that has the resources, the commitment and the passion to take my music to a whole new level. I feel like I've found a home here at Eminent."*

Arthur Wood.
Kerrville Kronikles @ 11/01
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Out-takes

In addition, the living conditions left little to the imagination, *"We lived in a trailer. It smelt like a sewer."*

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That year Billy Bragg's rendition of "Everywhere," co written by Greg and Sid Griffin, was featured on the soundtrack of the Bob Hoskins movie, "**A Room for Romeo Brass.**"

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Greg's main co-writer on "**Popular Demons**" is John Sieger, formerly of Milwaukee bands, The R&B Cadets and Semi Twang. And let's not forget Jon Walmsley. I'll let Greg explain *"A friend of mine in Los Angeles asked if I would do some co-writing with this acquaintance of his, so I agree to meet this guy. I*

said, "Let's go get some lunch and get to know each other." I'm talking to this guy, and thinking to myself, "There's something familiar about him." Seems he played in this television series for twelve seasons. It turns out he was Jason in "The Waltons." He's a very talented guy. We were thinking about The Band on "Light in the Window," as it was an influence we shared."

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Was "Ireland" written after you'd been there.

Never been there when I wrote it. I've been there since. A lot since, actually. Like I say when I introduce the song onstage, "This song is called "Ireland," and it's about a girl from Brooklyn who I'm now married to."

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"Around late 1994, just before I moved to Nashville, Eric "Roscoe" Ambel and I got together and cut a record. I was doing a lot of demos with him and we did this record which is a rockin' cool record. We re-recorded about six of those songs, on the Buddy Miller produced record. We raised some money and had a whole band play on it. We made it at a studio where he works all the time, or at least he used to."

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