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Businessman preserving an iconic scene for the next gen.

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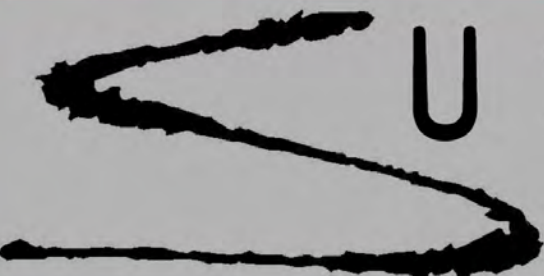
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The Resurgence of Tragedy

William "Tragedy" Yager has brought back a local institution for new crowds.

BY ROB SMITTIX

William "Tragedy" Yager. Photo provided.

So many have already interviewed William "Tragedy" Yager about his purchase of Albany's legendary night club Fuze Box (formerly the QE2) but I waited for all the other formal interviews to be over with so I could just have a nice conversation with the man. We met in his office area at his Howard Street location of Patsy's Barber Shop and had a nice chat.

RRX: The day we received the call that you bought the Fuze Box, I was speaking with a friend and I said, "man I wish someone would buy it". It honestly hurt my heart to see the building just sitting there with a for sale sign on it. What was it that made you go ahead and make it official?

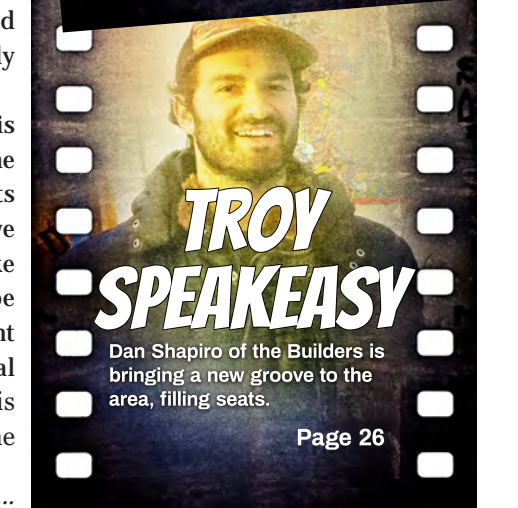
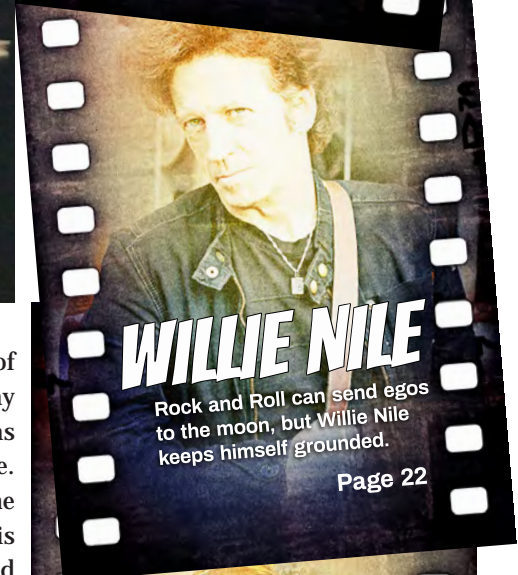
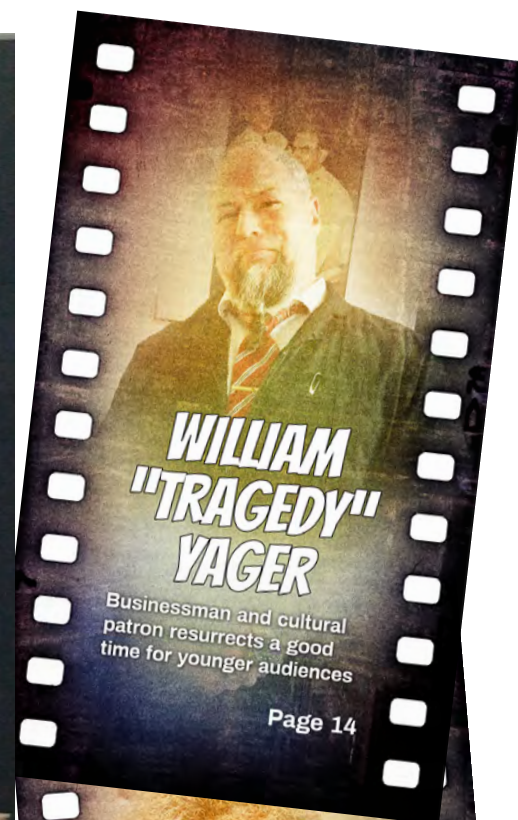
WTY: I thought I was saving it from the wrecking ball or a Starbucks

or something of that nature. I know the developers that were looking at it, were actually looking at maybe even having to move it because it's on the National Historic Registry as one of the last five White Tower Hamburger buildings in the country. My formative years were there. I'd like to say I grew up in there, but I didn't grow up anywhere, I haven't grown up yet. I feel like as soon as you grow up God's like, 'good, you've grown up, get the f**k up here and play a harp or something'. I wanted other kids to have what I was able to have from (previous owners) Charlene and David Shortsleeve and from what they have built. They orchestrated such an amazing vibe and this is way before the Internet. Char had given us her blessing, which is amazing!

I built the Fuze Box in the back of The Power Company (across the way from the current location), that was mine, so I felt like it came full circle. And I don't know if being back at the beginning of the circle you started at is a good thing or not but I positioned myself (I guess) to probably be the only person that could do it.

This is the building part. This is supposed to be the fun part getting the calendar together and what the nights are going to be. Wednesday night we want to do industry night, kind of like the old Alibi's. Thursdays I want it to be emo night, because emo is huge right now. Friday is going to be the normal QE2ian/Fuze Box Goth night. Hex is the first Friday of the month and the

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third Friday of the month is Resist The Club. Now we're structuring where other DJ nights might fall in. So, my vision now is kind of like the original QE2, where it's live music until 10 P.M. and club night from 10 P.M. on. A smooth transition of music, so people can stay as late as they want as new people come through the door. That's the vision. Saturdays will be house, EDM and all those different genres of an electronic DJ style. These things are for the young folks, so they can be the new us!

It's not just about us remembering when this was the QE2. We can't do that, we're old. (Laughs) We're going to make a cool viable space for the new generation.

RRX: I had so many great memories there as a young adult. Of course, we'd love to relive those days but making it a place for the next generation, I

think that's a great way to put it.

WTY: That's what the goal is. The Fuze Box/QE2, the Q Z Box 2 or whatever the f*** it is, has to remain a safe place for everybody in our community. When I say community, I'm talking about punk, gay, trans and everybody down the line. A comfortable place for them to be them and us to be us.

RRX: I respect that, safety is key. Now, I'm sure you saw as soon as the news broke that you purchased the club how happy the community was.

WTY: That's great to have all of that support but getting them out of their houses is another thing. We own barbershops, tattoo shops, laundromats and The Bull and Bee Meadery. The nature of business and how business is conducted has changed. It used to be consistency is everything and location, location, location, it's not like that anymore. Now it really depends on social media, marketing and branding. As long as your cyber presence is there,

that's what the new location is.

RRX: In the heyday of the club there wasn't social media at all back then. Times sure have changed.

WTY: We own fuzeboxalbany.com but it's as much the QE2 as it is the Fuze Box to me. Although Fuze Box is my thing, the QE2 is what I see when I walk in there. It's even hard for me to call it the Fuze Box, I'm still that old guy. I bought the Q, I mean the Fuze Box, I mean... what do I own?

(Both laugh)


RRX: Yeah, I think we, "the older generation" all call it the Q.


WTY: Generation Q.

So, we're trying to book local acts mostly, we want to support the local scene but also want the local scene to support itself.

Things are different. Lucky for me, I'm very open-minded and very malleable. This is how it is now, fine let's make it work the best we can. It's a build, so now we're building the

business that was already there. We have a good foundation and a good reputation and a lot of support from the community. Now to get them to turn that support into showing up. I've got a lot of great press; it hasn't always been that way for me in my life. You're only one step away from being a sh**head again so... I keep that in mind. Everybody's like you're a hometown hero. I'm like, 'uhhh, no don't do that to me, you're setting me up to fall'. So, we'll support the people that support us and everybody else whether they like it or not. We're hoping on having a nice symbiotic relationship with Lark Hall, Empire Live and all the venues. Kip from Pauly's reached out, that was nice of him. It has to be an all for one, one for all situation, otherwise you won't get that scene back.







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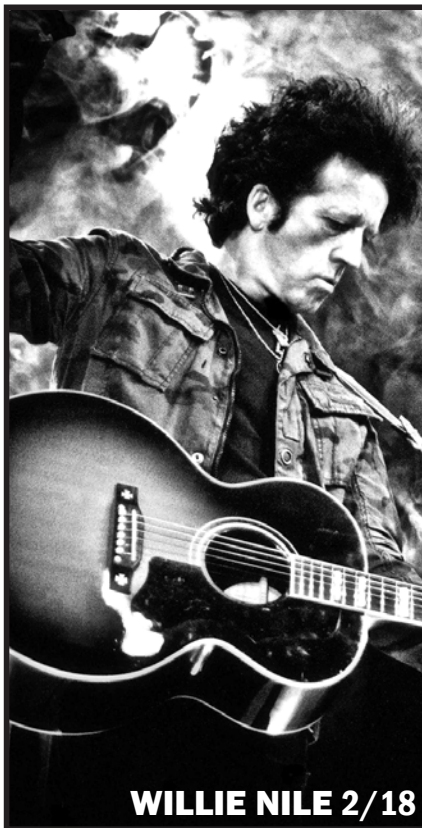
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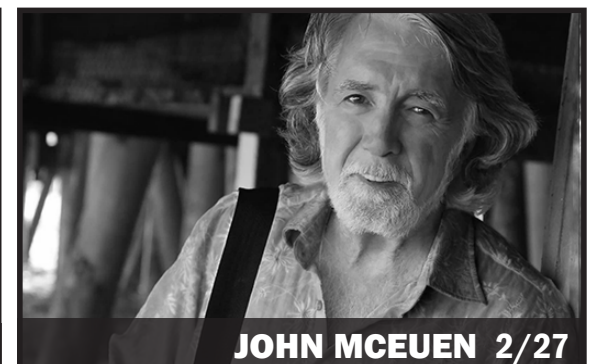


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In My Own Special Way

Psychic Ann Fisher makes a difference in the lives of those around her with the power of her mind.

BY LIAM SWEENEY

Photo by Pixabay

At the boundaries of empirical science lies the larger universe, which has been described by groundbreaking physicists and a crash of probability. If you believe this, then you have to take into account that anything has some probability, which means that anything has possibility. Long way of saying that the paranormal is not so para- if you think about it.

Ann Fisher is a nationally renowned psychic and medium. And the cool thing is, she's one of ours. She shows

people their past lives and helps the police find the ends of current lives. And we are glad to have her.

I reach out to Ann and we discuss the best clubs beyond the Pearlies.

RRX: You've been on the show *Psychic Detectives* a number of times and have helped the police solve homicides. You've also done readings and past-life regressions. So, you've run the gamut, so to speak, between seeking justice for a person and helping them find comfort. Or is it all comfort? Do you differ-

entiate, and if so, how?

AEF: When I found I had this psychic ability I was so glad I was able to help others solve problems in their lives and give them hope for the future. When I do a reading, I combine astrology and my clairvoyant ability by feeling their emotions and seeing their aura. It makes me feel that I'm helping mankind in my own special way.

RRX: You, of course, have had your abilities your whole life, but nothing big was made of it, so you didn't have

capital 'P' psychic as a part of you growing up. But you did have little 'p' psychic going on. Was it difficult in school? Did your abilities give you an edge with other kids, or did it separate you from them?

AEF: As a child I felt like I had some special connection to the psychic world. I had an especially strong connection with the departed and can remember being drawn to the local cemetery in my childhood hometown, where I would take my cousins with me

on picnics. We would sit on my grandmother's tombstone and talk to her. We kept these sessions a secret among ourselves.

Still, I led a normal childhood and school life. When I got to college I majored in psychology because the connection of the mind to the outside world interested me very much. But I didn't fully recognize my full psychic abilities until I was a bit older.

RRX: Psychic phenomena, and the supernatural in general, is not believed by everybody. I can imagine that some people come to you and maybe try to 'trick' you because they just don't believe in it. Rotten thing that that is, it's a barrier, I imagine, to what you do. Is there something non-believers can get from you?

AEF: Some people naturally resist the idea that there could be a psychic dimension in their life. Their fear of the unknown keeps them from seeking my guidance. The people who come to me are generally people who have accepted their psychic side and want to more fully explore it with me.

RRX: Past life regressions are fascinating. And again, this is something that is controversial depending on peoples' belief systems, but we're pretty open minded in these parts. Common thing about past lives is that everyone believes they were Caesar or Genghis Kahn or something, but what do you see more of?

AEF: People who seek a past life regression with me have almost always had some deja-vu experience in their lives which indicated to them that they had another lifetime dimension. They feel they have been in a place before and knew someone before their current lifetime. They don't think they are Caesar or Genghis Khan, but they know that they have a connection to a past life and ordinary people from that life.

RRX: Most people probably aren't coming to you for a parlor trick; most

people want to hear about someone, or from someone. And you are also a medium, so that about fits the picture. Since, and I'm guessing here, most people want to hear from a loved one, is there a common type of communication that you get back from the other side?

AEF: Most people want to know about loved ones who have gone before. They want to know that their loved ones are in a good place in the spirit world. They want a message of hope and comfort from the other side that can help carry them forward in this life. And they want to be reassured that for the spirit there is no death, only a passage into another dimension.

RRX: My mother has gone to you a few times, and once since my father died. She gets depressed because, a little bit of a psychic herself, she doesn't feel him around. Does this happen to you at all, spirits that just don't want to talk? I can't imagine how difficult that would be to break to someone. Have you ever had to?

AEF: When a person is deeply grieved, they can block the psychic energy around themselves, thus blocking communication with the departed. Someone like your mother would have to let go of their grief and reach out to the beyond. It can take some time, but it can be done.

RRX: This is where you answer the question I didn't ask. Educate, enlighten, emote – the floor is yours.

AEF: I believe that all people have some psychic ability whether they recognize and accept it or not. Being psychic is a creative ability, like the gift a musician or artist is given. These gifts come to us from God. That's why I am a deeply religious person in addition to being psychic. I thank God for the gift, which I have made my life's work on earth.



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Dalla Cucina/ Una Tribù di Cuochi

From the Kitchen/ A Tribe of Cooks.



BY ED RINALDI

Photo by Pixabay.

How does one begin to write about how we come to transform matter and time when we cook? What legerdemain explains to us, how our hands and minds work in concert to produce, some say, the most primal music? Food on a plate, canvas and sate, I am not sure there is a proper way to relate all that goes on between hand to mouth. As eating is more than pastime and necessity, we can pour over time tested recipe books. We can love and admire every method

explaining what carries hunger/desire to any feasted moment, ritual or emotional escape.

There are proper ways to carefully facet beets into deep rubies of similar size...but I like to think there isn't a proper way to tell you what magic happens when passion and skill meet unseen when we take a seat at a restaurant table. What happens behind the scenes, where does the transcendence come from...it is more than myth even if the thought of it is fleeting. They

remind me of Virgil, a friend said, can you write about them for us?

Of course, there is no saying no to certain friends and payment comes in many forms, for this poet who cooks for a living. I know all too well never look a gift meal in the mouth.

I sat down to a conversation with a local chef, bitten with this idea of interviewing someone plying rustic food presented with sublime grace. Fed a description from a mutual friend that this chef was an incanted Virgil. A chef

who seemed as much a guide through the hell our modern "food-scapes" have become. I too carried a lantern and hunger in hand, intrigued.

I suppose to many, Virgil was allegorical, "reason" thrown against the range of appetites humankind displayed as Dante observed. What better way to have a tactile feel of our appetites than by listening to someone talk about eating and drinking in concert with craft and desire. I listened for an hour or so at McAddy's on Broadway in

Troy a few Mondays ago and came away quite sure, our mutual friend was onto something. The chef led the conversation with a compassion for humanity, their own firstly, letting energy feed each house they plied and subsequently improved their trade in.

Rather than get into each dissection and avenue of inspiration and discovery, as there were many, I let the conversation unfurl. Like a napkin taken from its fine fold and place setting, letting it billow over lap and clothes, I waded listening. I heard tales of cutting teeth and learning ways up through the ranks to running the whole kitchen. I kept thinking, the mistakes we make along the way must be part of the process of wearing wisdom without having to try to. I found myself listening more than asking questions finding why the shepherd metaphor works in every back of the house.

I was left knowing why Dante chose Virgil as a guide through Hell. It takes

a soul born before God took charge to give us this perspective. An innocent soul can be born too early to be saved by a church and needs a faith placed in all of humanity to find solace and sate. Sometimes the best we ever find of this these days, this purity of joy, is in tiny bites from hot or cold plates.

I left the conversation hungry and wanting to feel how an interview would view itself being viewed as a poem or some other kind of prose. Would there be just enough form and information to tell a story or two. What was it I wanted to write, describing to you how a chef does this or does that? How does one write about how a chef leads their people, that a tribal identity often braves the newbie to food. A spiritual experience often ensues, a chance to become more than a sum of their parts. This was not lost on me, fancying myself a poet carrying around a thousand recipes and pens yet still wanting to know more, to eat more. I suppose I am

writing about what we know and we come to feel eating not just as perfunctory but a feeling as to how we seem to feel ourselves in the shoes, aprons and bloodstreams of others. A part of a community, a tribe we become, especially when heading out for dinner. Anne Rice died last night, and I thought about her vampires and the dulcet charm of a roasted garlic globe on this warm plate with olive oil, peppercorns and a toasted quarter of a Tuscan style sourdough bread in front of me... Albany NY, nascent Saturday night, in what was to be a short drive from Troy to Madison then Dove turned into circling the blocks trying to find a parking spot.

Dinner companion and I laughed, making our way down Dove towards Rosanna's Italian Kitchen having parked more than a few blocks away. We passed blocked off streets then bisected through a moving mass of hundreds of Christmas-garbed, boisterous

5Kers seemingly delighted to be outside while it was so balmy. They were running and walking under a street lit late afternoon, a dark skied, early December, still so oddly warm. And all I remember right then upon seeing them, is being Christmas party hungry, aware of how much I love food as a way of identifying my soul. To say the food was sublime would be a disservice to the experience. I recommend the bread course right away. Share a few appetizers while having a quaff then dig into the menu. The plays on polenta are worth the trip alone. The bar is cozy, the dining room warm and every moving piece a restaurant is, is attuned to why we enjoy going out to them. Why we enjoy being members of this tribe.

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A Feral Gentleman

When Gregor Samsa woke up one morning from unsettling dreams, he found himself changed in his bed into a monstrous vermin.

—"Metamorphosis," Franz Kafka

BY IVAN "IVY" EFFING-RYOTTE

Franz Kafka. Photo provided.

This is a tale of devolution and decline. Whether it is a tragedy or a comedy is yet to be determined, and is largely a matter of taste. Traditionally, tragedy is the realm of kings, queens and the high falutin'; and comedy, the domain of the plain, homely and just barely falutin' at all. Pride and ambition bring down the aristocrat who mistakes himself for a god; ignorance knocks down the clown who mistakes one bedroom for another, or his romantic rival in a wig and wheezy falsetto for the hottest chick in the kingdom.

But I'm neither noble, nor entirely base. Like so many of us, I'm of middling status. I'm of middling age, height, weight, talents and accomplishments. I used to be a kind of someone and now I'm a regular, everyday kind of no one. On the one hand, I have no

idea how I got here. I thought for sure that by this age and stage, I'd be a comfortably retired, grandly mustachioed, library-ensconced, smoking-jacketed, cognac-preserved Colonel Mustard kinda character annoying my children with tales of my fantastic exploits and the great wisdom they'd instilled in me. That is not the case. My child is annoyed, but instead with my mundane exploits and the bluster with which I relate them. World of difference.

On the other hand, I know exactly how I got here. I know how the world has changed; how institutions have crumbled; and which bridges I myself kindled. I know how a personal combination of brashness, naiveté, adventurousness, bone-idleness and an unwavering willingness to commit to a bit have taken me from the status of Public Voice to Customer Servant.

You see, I was, in days gone by, that most exalted of things, a published Cultural Critic. Not a journalist, mind you. I was not hampered by fact (as, nominally, journalists were in those days). I was an opinionator. Welcomed - indulged, even - in bars, clubs, theaters, restaurants for the promise of my favorable assessment. Oh, such heady days. Oh, such opinions I opined: on bands, plays, movies, meals. I interviewed the greats of my day - or those of the sort of greatness pinned at the intersection of upward and downward fortunes that made for a mid-week stopover between New York City and Boston: I talked to Nancy Sinatra about astrology and her dad; to Laurie Anderson about the Amish and McDonald's; to Leif Garret about, well, mostly about David Cassidy; and to Nikki Sixx about why Nikki Sixx's bodyguard had

me in a headlock.

I watched successive waves of Albany bands crest, crash and recede against the hip indifference of the Capital's audiences - even those audiences who were actively enjoying themselves. (Saratoga fans bopped and danced; Troy fans thrashed; Colonie fans threw horns; Delmar fans overdressed for VFW shows and worried about where to park their parents' cars, but we'll get to that. But, Albany fans, we were a tough audience. We were so spoiled back then.)

And I got paid to tell people what I thought about it all.

It couldn't last. It didn't last. Blame the Internet. I mean, why not? It's more complex than that, and in reality had as much to do with short-sighted publishers, confused and skittish advertisers, shifting consumer priorities in the

face of stagnant wages and diminishing economic expectations, and the warped demographic context of the evidently immortal Baby Boom generation - but what are we, historians, sociologists . . . journalists?! Let's just blame the Internet and be done with it. Clubs closed, arts mags folded, artists hied to academia, a few bands split for more vital cities and the rest were absorbed into civil service and Gen Pop. It was an un-rapturous Rapture, an alt-culture Armageddon.

What were we critics to do? We pivoted. You've run across us, no doubt, here and there: in college communications offices, in the public-relations departments of health-insurance companies or making newsletters and running Twitter channels for area not-for-profit businesses. We found ways to write, for a while. Some of us still do. The opining, though. Those gigs were few and far between, usually poorly paid and often enough centered in the crosshairs of a website's comments section - an area so foul as to make Dante pollute his pantaloni.

I served in a succession of those roles, as well. Well, "served" may be inexact. I served to the extent that the scorpion served as a passenger to the frog. You can take the boy out of opining but you can't take the opinionating out of the boy, it turns out. I've been fired, laid off, let go, made redundant and hustled "the hell outta here" from all sorts of LinkedIn pastimes. In retrospect, it seems almost inevitable I would end up in my current gig, which draws upon many of the foundational aspects of my aforementioned life: culture, history, art, cuisine, storytelling, persuasion.

Yes. I'm a salesperson - a salesperson of that other foundation of the ink-stained opinionator's existence: booze.

I am salesperson of fine wines and spirits in one of the moderately upscale suburbs of our shared Tri-City stomping grounds. I don't know if that's

absolutely apropos and or wholly nuts. I spend some significant time thinking about it. I'm thinking about thinking about it at you: inviting you into the ongoing egocentric investigation of this progression - is it a Hot Take, is it a Cold Case? I don't know. It boasts a star-studded cast, though. As you've seen, I'm not above dropping the names of the famous. I will drop the names of the local characters, too, though they'll be pseudonyms. I'm happy to tell you that the Pixies' Black Francis's press agent is completely wrong about how eager he is to do a phone interview at 9 AM Pacific Coast Time; but I'm not going to publicly shame Duck Hennessey of the local band Amuse Bouche by revealing that his band never once allowed his guitar to be audible in a live mix. I mean, I still sometimes have lunch with that guy.

So, this is no classical drama. It's real life, give or take few poetic liberties: some omissions, exaggerations, and some outright inventions; some sneaky score settling; some roundabout, present-day slander; some veiled, outdated but still juicy gossip. It's a busy, digressive tale of artistic aspirations, trivia and distraction. It's a tale mostly of failures - as most essentially honest tales must by necessity be. Is it a tragedy? Is it a comedy?

Steve Allen said, "Tragedy plus time equals comedy." Mel Brooks said, "Tragedy is when I stub my toe. Comedy is when you fall in an open manhole and die."

Kafka, wisest of them all, thought it was hysterically funny that Gregor Samsa woke after unsettled dreams as vermin.

And wise Kafka, funniest of them all, worked as a freaking claims manager for the Worker's Accident Insurance Institute for the Kingdom of freaking Bohemia.



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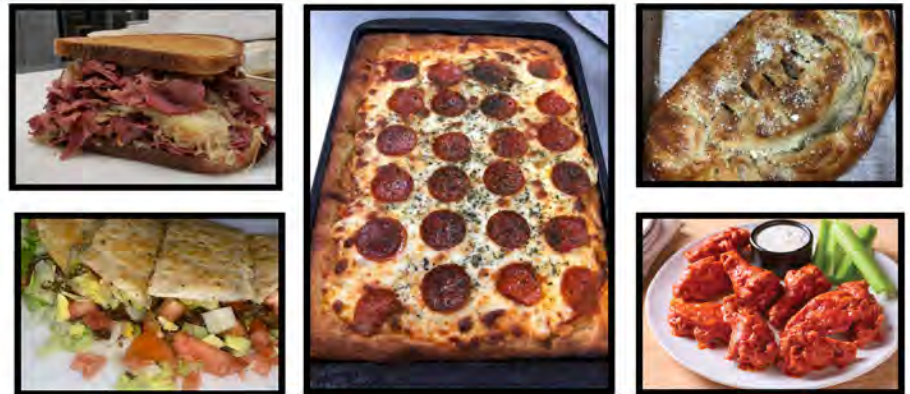
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Klaatu barada nikto is a phrase from The Day the Earth Stood Still. Willie Nile's latest release plays homage to that film. He comes to The Linda on February 18th and this is part of the story.

RRX: We're speaking with Willie Nile, who has been described as the troubadour of New York City. We thank you very much for joining us here for Xperience Monthly.

WN: Thanks for having me, Rich. Happy to be here, buddy.

RRX: You're a Buffalo kid.

WN: Born in Buffalo. Born and raised, yeah.

RRX: So, I like to start these with where you're from and influences. Your house was a pretty musical house to begin with.

WN: Very much so.

RRX: Is that the start of all this? Were you writing when you were younger, before you moved to New York?

WN: I was writing before I came to New York but that's where it began,

really. There was a lot of music in the home I grew up in. There were eight kids. There was a piano that was being played by my older brothers. My grandfather was a vaudeville band leader for over 20 years. I saw him play when I was very young.

So, I had a lot of ragtime, boogie-woogie stuff growing up. There'd be parties at the house. It was always a very lively, Irish-American world, with a lot of music and a lot of laughter. My older brothers were bringing home rock and roll records, and the radio stations were on in the house. The TV was on when Elvis Presley was on. I was just a little kid. I saw the beginnings of the counterculture, the rock world. I saw the beginnings of all that.

RRX: Of course, I have to ask the obligatory food question. I'm a big fan of Schwabl's on Transit Road for a beef on weck. How about you?

WN: Wow. Schwabl's. You know, beef on weck. There's some great local foods there. Beef on weck is probably my favorite of them. It's just a peculiar

thing. Sponge candy is another. Buffalo has sponge candy. I'll mention this to people in New York. I go sponge candy and they go, what's that? It seems to be local to western New York.

Went to school one year in Ohio, first year of college. My roommate had a guitar. There was nothing to do in the middle of Ohio, so I learned to play the guitar. Then, my poetry turned into songs. I've been rocking ever since.

RRX: Did you stay in college in Ohio.

WN: I went one year. I fooled around. I goofed off in high school. I never needed to study; I was smart enough where I could just get by.

RRX: Oh, I know that trick.

WN: Most of us do. But, when it came time to go to a decent college, I couldn't get in. I had a decent average, but not good enough. So, there was a school in Ohio, Walsh College. They had just built a new dorm, so they were looking for out-of-state students. So, all of us losers and troublemakers went to Walsh College.

Willie Nile knows a thing or two about music... and humility.

Willie Nile. Photo provided.

I'll tell you what. You never know where the road's gonna lead you. It led me to a place where I met my guitar player, Denny Wentz. The next time I play Pittsburgh, I got to look him up. Hey, look what happened with you teaching me the guitar. I started writing rock and roll songs.

RRX: You had, I guess it would be called a residency at Kenny's Castaways in the Village.

WN: Yes.

RRX: I am certain that that is no longer there because as so many other places are not.

WN: It was there for a long time. The Smithereens came out of there. Steve Forbert, the Roaches. It was a great scene there. It was what you hope for when you come to the City, a club. Locals would hang out late. After the show was over, locals would get up and just play new songs. It was a real cool Bohemian scene. I dug it. Then, CBGB opened, and I was always over there in the very beginning, seeing the bands play there. It was just such an interest-

ing, fertile time.

RRX: Was it just because it sounds cool, but how did you decide on the name Willie Nile? That is not your given name.

WN: No, no. My born name is Robert Noonan. I wouldn't get on until like two or three in the morning. I didn't like the guy. Didn't respect him, didn't care for him. I'm in line. He looks up, I'm giving him my name, he's writing down the names in order. "Hi, my name is Robert Noonan, Bob Noonan." He goes, "Oh, I'm sorry, I couldn't hear you. What was that?" I go, "Oh, it doesn't matter. You can just make something up." He goes, "Oh no no no, it's really important what your name is." He gives me this little one-minute Las Vegas lecture. I go, "Oh, really? Oh, okay. My name is Huey Rosinbag." Off the top of my head. He goes, "Rosenberg?" "No no, Rosinbag. Like the pitcher's mound." So, this guy writes, "Huey Rosinbag."

The week after that, I was Umberto Snorts. The week after that... I kept changing. Osgood Pequod. That was my favorite. I kept changing my name just because I refused to play the game and take this fame thing seriously. It's not what I'm about. It's a good rock and roll name, so that's how...

RRX: Moving forward. The good news is that by the sounds of it, the 21st century has been good for you with respect to – well, except for the pandemic, which is its own craziness – writing and recording and performing.

WN: Oh yeah.

RRX: Do you feel that the 21st century has maybe been a bit of a reemergence.

WN: Absolutely.

RRX: A rebirth of the things you've been doing?

WN: It's been a renaissance for me. I've put out four albums in the last five years and nine in the last 12. It's not about how many. It's the quality. In the last five years, I've put out World War

Willie, Positively Bob, the Dylan cover album I made. Children of Paradise, New York at Night and The Day the Earth Stood Still. I'd hold those records up against anything. That's the last five years, nine in the last 12. House of a Thousand Guitars, The Innocent Ones, American Ride, If I Was a River.

RRX: Official plug time. The lucky thing for my region is that you're coming to play at The Linda in Albany. I know that we are in for an absolute treat.

WN: Thank you. Thank you, Rich. It's been a couple of years. I love coming up there. I've played The Linda many times. But it's been a few years. I love it. I love playing there. They've got a great piano. The sound system rocks. It's gonna be a storytelling night. I'm gonna tell stories and play stuff. I'll play fan faves. I'll play really obscure stuff. I was playing the piano the other day and I played the first song I ever wrote. I went, that's pretty good. I'm really looking forward to it. It's gonna be a unique, special night. The Linda rocks. It's great. I love coming up there.

RRX: In the background, I am currently playing The Day the Earth Stood Still because that has been on my repeat list.

WN: Thank you, buddy.

RRX: One of the really fascinating parts is that it shifts between rock and roll or folk or something melodic. By the titles of the songs and the lyrics that I've been reading – because I got the kit from your lovely publicist – this entire pandemic, for someone who wants to get out and do what you do, had to have been traumatic.

WN: This past year, we started playing in April 2021. We've been playing, not as much as usual, but we've been playing a bunch in Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, all over Jersey, New England, Boston, thereabouts, Buffalo. We did a Midwest tour in October, the

Continued on Page 28...



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Troy Speakeasy

*Building a better community,
one show at a time.*

BY JOSHUA REEDY

Dan Shapiro. Photo provided.

Dan Shapiro is a guitarist and vocalist in Builders, a band with a philosophy that matches Shapiro's own fierce work ethic. Shapiro is also the owner of the Troy Speakeasy, a local venue that really puts the 'y' in 'do it yourself.' Shapiro has been working on rebuilding what was once a stripped down, barren house into a full blown music space with its own stage, equipment and charming outdoor sign. Over the months, I've seen the Speakeasy grow and build itself (quite literally) from the ground up, and sat down to speak with Shapiro himself about his band and how his background in construction has benefited his musical endeavors.

RRX: So first, give me some insight into the background. Does the band (Builders) come first or did the

Speakeasy location come first?

DS: Actually, the band came first. I was trying to do a location in Kingston but the market was nuts. James, who's in Grampfatherrr, and I were living together in Kingston. We didn't own the place we were at so we didn't have the full flexibility that we wanted; we had to worry about curfews and doing what we wanted so yeah, the band came first while we were in lockdown at this rehearsal space we had and that's how the idea of Builders came about.

RRX: And the name has a very literal interpretation.

DS: Right, I've been in bands for years and want to do music full time but as you know, it's hard to make a living that way. I've had lots of odd jobs that I didn't really care about because it wasn't music and I don't think that

was the most healthy outlook. With construction and building though, it's like you're still making something artistic with your hands and your heart so it was a way for me to combine both worlds.

RRX: That's a cool way to look at it, I'd never really thought of it that way. And so now, you own this place?

DS: Yes, this is my venture. The rest of the band is based in Kingston, part of that is just making things work; I'll go up there or they'll come over here but this is my space.

RRX: Give me insight into the process. It's very interesting coming back and seeing what's been done, I assume you just got it the way it was and decided to just do all the renovations yourself?

DS: Yeah, I had a checklist when

looking for places in Troy; I knew I wanted a space that's dedicated to music. What inspired me with DIY shows, even in dingy basements, is just having a space that's multi-functional: I can rent it out, I can live here and do shows here. Seeing this place, I knew I could live upstairs and the downstairs needed work but the first thing I thought when I walked in was: "There's an archway and I can put a stage right there!"

RRX: And you've got it on the ground floor, so you don't have to worry about the struggles of getting the sound right in a basement. And the backyard is cool too.

DS: I wanted to do outdoor shows at first, it was more when COVID was a bigger concern and people wanted to be more comfortable. I built a portable stage outside and the first two events I set up got rained out so I quickly realized it would be weather permitting.

RRX: And we talked the other day about the idea of a multi-stage event too.

DS: I'd love that, I'm talking about building a half-pipe and potentially doing an outdoor show with that. The shows have been getting a lot of momentum so I almost base what repairs I need to do around the shows at this point.

RRX: And that's really unique to me, you can say "well I might need that for a show" and you have the skills to just go and do it. Tell me more about the band though, I know you guys are working on something.

DS: We're working on a self-titled EP. It's about halfway done. It's a three piece project with vocals, we try to keep it barebones. Our recording process is about bringing a laptop and some mics and foregoing a fancy studio in order to get something out there so we can get some momentum going.

RRX: For sure, and just working on music with just your friends gives things a personal edge as opposed to

hiring some professional producers. I haven't seen you guys live yet, so if you have any references for the sound please share.

DS: I grew up playing jazz, we don't play jazz but I've always liked the idea of playing to each member's strengths. Our bass player is really into stuff like Kyuss and Clutch so he likes to play loud and driving. I grew up listening to Django Reinhardt and now I also like sort of shoegaze-y stuff or Mac DeMarco, the War on Drugs, Father John Misty. My music tends to have a lulling effect. And Colin grew up playing in metal bands but he's also softer. We have a song called "Shy Guy" that comes out as Neil Young but more driving, and we've got a Bob Dylan cover. I've worked with some of the older musicians in the area so trying to incorporate that into a modern approach is cool for me.

RRX: That's cool, and if you have a background in jazz have you played around in that style a lot?

DS: I haven't recently, but I'd like to get back into it. I've played a few weddings out with my dad. Now I've been more busy with booking and hosting shows.

RRX: How many have you had so far?

DS: About 12. The past few months have been almost every week.

RRX: Something else unique here is the community outside of the venue, I know other folks from the neighborhood tend to just show up.

DS: So I had cleaned out the backyard completely and built a fire pit that I let people hang out around during shows. I wasn't around to see it but people told me that a guy pulled up to an alley connected to the back and said something like "hey I'm dumping all this stuff, want some wood to burn?!" Which seemed nice, but there was metal and some other weird stuff in there (laughs). Another neighbor asked me about our sign, and he thought we were

having some weird sex party. I said "no, we're having concerts," and he just said "oh, ok."

RRX: Well historically, speakeasies were pretty raunchy events, right? To move forward though. Is there anything you have planned coming up?

DS: I want to work on a Planned Parenthood benefit show, and something else that I think is cool is the community between DIY venues. I'd be excited to work together with some other venues, and I think that benefit show would be a good one for us to coordinate on.

RRX: And something else that's cool is how easy it was to communicate and for new bands to get a show with you. I just directly sent you a message and you responded so quickly.

DS: Providing an opportunity for people is important. Just reaching out without worrying about numbers is how you eventually get the big numbers. And then you also have show trades where a band may play here and then offer to get us a gig where they're from, so it's an investment in its own way; an economy of music so to speak.

RRX: You mentioned a garbage cleanup event too.

DS: My friend Danielle is starting a yoga place, and she organized a garbage cleanup on the bike path in downtown Troy that we called "garbage patch kids." The idea would be more events like that but with music of some sort or maybe sponsored by a venue. It's about thinking more broadly about our impact with music.

RRX: Anything else you want to promote to the people?

DS: Well, I'm open to talk, if you're a band we're Troy Speakeasy on Instagram and my band is Builders band on there as well. I'd say keep an eye out and keep in touch!



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Continued from Page 23.

band and me. So, I had been playing.

It was during the course of this year; I made The Day the Earth Stood Still. So, I'm making a record, there's a lot involved with it. They couldn't have come out any better. It couldn't have. If the baby Jesus was playing on it, it wouldn't sound better. The guys played great on it. So, I had that going on, working on it. This year, there's been a bunch of shows.

RRX: There are two songs on this that I would like to hit with you, they seem to be the yin and the yang of the entire deal. It's prescient that it's playing currently in the house, "The Justice Bell."

WN: Oh yeah.

RRX: Wow.

WN: Thank you. I'll sing that in Albany. Yeah, "The Justice Bell." I met John Lewis. He's a hero of mine. This brave man, this courageous man, trying to speak up for voting rights. A very humble guy. I like humility. Humility is a very underrated virtue. He's all of that.

RRX: Because I do have my own little twisted view of the world, the yang to that yin is "Off My Medication."

WN: I'm working on a video for that.

RRX: You can see how I flip those. I read the lyrics first and then I listened to it. I went, uh, okay. That's a little disturbed, but...

WN: That's completely disturbed. I was writing it thinking who are you? What planet did you come from? It's so much fun. I'll write about anything. Like "The Justice Bell." I was moved to write that song about John Lewis and the struggle for some people. "Off My Medication" is like a Saturday night rock and roll party song that's nothing but fun.

RRX: I showed my wife – I had her read the lyrics. She kind of looked and I said, "Somehow, I think Willie Nile

was channeling Warren Zevon."

WN: Oh yeah, God bless Warren. That is a bit Warren, you're right. I met Warren. We had a day together in the dressing room we shared in Providence, Rhode Island, mid-1991. I had a record out with Columbia Records and he had a new record out. We were at, I think it was HJY, if there's any brain cells left in my head. Providence, Rhode Island, a great station, great people.

I got there early. They were petrified. They were real scared by his coming 'cause his reputation precedes him as a wild man. He couldn't have been nicer. He wasn't drinking; he had been through that. We shared a dressing room. We swapped albums. It was a pleasure and an honor. When he was dying – if you remember, he was on Letterman.

RRX: Amen. I have a way I end the public part of this. I am always interested in what would you say to the world? If you had any platform anywhere, what would you say are words that you would like the world to hear that would be the lasting statement about your philosophy about life, and about people, and about anything?

WN: Follow your heart. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Look out for your neighbor and your loved ones. My father had quite a line. My father is 104. He's still going strong.

RRX: Good lord.

WN: Oh yeah, it's great. I saw him. I was with him last week in Buffalo. He said, "You walk a straight line. Do the best you can." He would say, "Leave the rest in God's hands." Treat people good. Follow your heart. Do the best you can and what you can't control, you let it go." Somewhere in there is the answer. Do unto others as you would have them do until you.

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You Can Go Home Again

Stephentown's Mike McMann's new release 'True' demonstrates a deep connection to hometown living.

BY AMY MODESTI

Mike McMann. Photo provided.

Fourteen years has passed since Stephentown resident, Mike McMann, released new music. 2007's Streamside was McMann's final album heard in listener's ears until True came along.

RRX: I listened to your album!

MM: Oh good!

RRX: Out of the songs I heard, a few of them you performed at different gigs. I was familiar with "Kayak", "Streamside", "Walleye Vision", and "Fast Train to Georgia". "Stephentown" was cool.

MM: I'm hoping to get WGNA to play that for me. PYX 106 played half of it, and WEQX played a few of my songs. That was cool. I'm trying to get some interest in this darn thing. Jimmy Barrett got a copy, Melody Lemony has a copy. I'm steadily plugging along.

RRX: "Stephentown" was a favorite and "True" was cute. That was a tribute to your wife, Kim, right?

MM: I always wanted to write a disco love song. I'm confident I wrote a good love song. "Kayak" is dedicated to Kim cause she's in the kayak quite frequently. We started recording this project in 2018. I started it and I didn't like the version that we did. I wrote a couple

songs, ditched songs, and Caroline Isachsen passed away. Jeff Prescott, Kyle Esposito, and I re-recorded again and then COVID hit. Last year, we started back up again doing all the overdubs, having everyone add their parts to it, and finished it up at the end of this summer (2021). It took two and a half years, but we got it the way we want. We had plenty of time to change anything and listen to it to death to make sure it was right.

RRX: How did you come up with the songs you wrote?

MM: I was lucky enough to know a lot of great musicians around here. It's been a while since I put a record out. Five years ago, I quit drinking. So that freed me up a little bit to think about writing songs. Maybe I was inspired a little bit by that and stuff that's going on in the world. I'm not sure where the hell the songs come from. They come from somewhere.

RRX: They come from your life's experiences. Congratulations on your sobriety! That's awesome!

MM: Thanks!

RRX: Why did you create True?

MM: I was due to put something

out. There's a lot of great musicians that I'm fortunate enough to play with and they were all interested in it. I talked to Sten about recording at his studio, maybe record a bluegrass album or record more stuff with The Nellies. Then I decided, I got these songs I should do a rock album. I hadn't done a rock album in a long time. My last album was bluegrass acoustic. True is more of a rock album or more pop-rock.

RRX: You have some catchy hooks!

MM: You gotta have that in a song.

RRX: What was your inspiration behind "Stephentown"? You're originally from Center Brunswick.

MM: I was born in Troy, and I lived in Center Brunswick. I've been in Stephentown for 18 years. Some friends of ours used to run this event that they stopped during COVID. It was called Celebrate Stephentown. They have a lot of local vendors, musicians, and others that create, do crafts, and have different businesses in Stephentown. It was a big town thing they would do for a whole weekend. I played it before, and Matt Mirabile played it before COVID. I wrote this song for that and played it a few times, but I didn't have a recorded

version of it. So, the town has an official song. They have the sign. It's about the sign that you see, and it really is the only Stephentown on Earth. Even though I'm out in the f***** middle of nowhere and it takes forever to go anywhere, it's nice living out here and it's a cool place. For the people of Stephentown, I wrote a song about Stephentown, the sign, and the event.

RRX: It gives you that great sense of hometown pride.

MM: Good, and Kevin Maul playing the pedal steel certainly helps. I was lucky to have Kevin play on a few songs on the record and "Stephentown" was where he really shined.

RRX: That's awesome.

MM: I think about the bluegrass jam I used to do at the Ale House and as much as I don't miss that, sometimes I do. I met Peggy Lecuyer, Karen McEvoy, and Gene Lemme. The Nellies were formed at either the bluegrass jam that Mark Jones and I started at the Ale House or the Hill Hollow one that started at Babson's. Jeff Babson was running the restaurant in North Petersburg.

RRX: Right at the intersection of Route 22 and Route 346.

MM: Jeff Babson used to run it every Wednesday or the first Wednesday of the month. Their jam was legendary. When Babson's closed, the jam moved to Brunswick BBQ & Brew. So, between that jam and the one at the Ale House I got to meet and play with a lot of musicians. The whole community thing was kind of gone cause of COVID and some open jams started back up again. I go to Family Tree once a month. There's a whole big community in this area and that was a big part of my album. What great musicians I know would come play on my record? I was lucky. If you look at the back of it, I got a good group of musicians. I hog the guitar parts.

RRX: You're the guitarist after all.

MM: I did well on that end. It was cool having Sten play on "Gypsy Girl". With the horns, keyboard, bass, percussion, and vocals, these guys filled out the record nicely. I'm pleased with what everyone played on it.

RRX: Everything worked out well.

MM: Sten did a great job engineering and mixing. We spent as much time mixing and mastering as we did recording. We did a lot of cutting and splicing. Some of the guitar and saxophone solos weren't played the same. You take the parts, patch them together, and make it sound like you're playing it that way. Sometimes you play the first three quarters of it great and then you blow it at the end. If you miss a note, we'll fix it. Having Sten at the helm made things smooth. We had time to get it right and everybody played great. The songs are decent. I wrote good songs. "True", "Future?", "Birdie", "Kayak" kind of goofy but it's still a good, catchy song. "Streamside" and "Walleye Vision", I wanted to do updated versions with Luke McNamee on saxophone.

RRX: Luke was dominant on those songs live.

MM: We switched it up a little bit. We went with some Eric Johnson guitar and Luke added harmony. "Walleye

Vision" had a new intro. The new intro wasn't long enough to be a whole song, so I tacked it on "Walleye Vision". "Fast Train" is a song I'm known for. I finished it with "Walleye", "Streamside", and "Fast Train". Sten played mandolin and Kevin on dobro. They are two top notch guys when it comes to playing bluegrass. The first seven songs are all new. The other three songs are three or four years old.

RRX: Where can people buy your album?

MM: It's at the River Street Beat Shop, Mike McMann's True on iTunes, and Spotify. They can get the CD from me by mail or at my gigs. They can reach me at my website www.mikemcmann-band.com.

RRX: People can contact you directly on Facebook?

MM: They can go through Messenger. I've advertised on Facebook here and there. We do what we do and hopefully somebody will take notice. I wrote

some good songs. I got the best guys I could. We put out the best record that we physically, possibly could. I'm proud of what everybody did and what Sten and I put together. We'll see what everybody else thinks.

RRX: If you're happy with the album, that's what matters. You're stating your reason why Stephentown is your home.

MM: That would probably be the hit of the album, but we'll see. I appreciate ya taking the time to bull**** with me.

True is a ten-song solid album mastered and produced by Sten Isachsen, with nine of ten songs written by McMann. It features McMann's musician friends, Ted Hennessy, Jason Maloney, Jeff Prescott, Kevin Maul, Sten Isachsen, Luke McNamee, Drew Costa, Kyle Esposito, and Brian Patneau. True was produced in memory of McMann's brother, Joseph George McMann.



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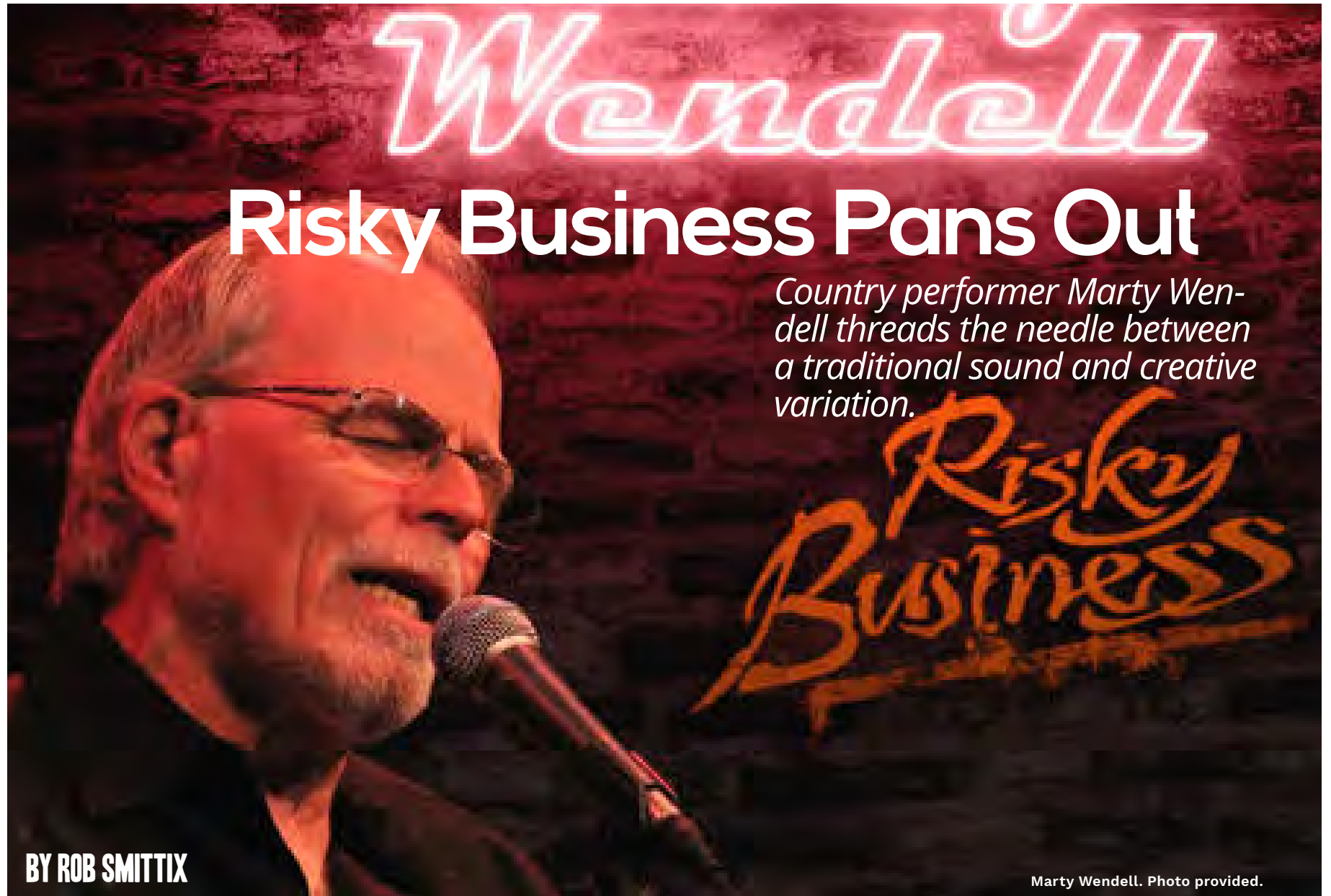
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Wendell

Risky Business Pans Out

Country performer Marty Wendell threads the needle between a traditional sound and creative variation.

BY ROB SMITTIX

Marty Wendell. Photo provided.

Marty Wendell has been making music for 58 years now. His latest release *Risky Business* has brought the true sound of country music back. Today I have the pleasure of speaking with Marty about his latest project.

RRX: I've been listening to your new album *Risky Business*, and I am really digging it. I have the CD here, but this would sound really good on vinyl.

MW: (Laughs) I don't think they plan to do that.

RRX: The album just has that true

country sound that I can appreciate.

MW: Well, that was kind of the object. In the last few years several people have come up to me and asked what's happened to country music? They were used to the golden era of the music, you know, the 60's and 70's. They can't handle what's being put out of Nashville for the most part, it just doesn't relate to them.

My last album before this was *Rock and Roll Days*, it was original rockabilly and some rockabilly classics that we did as a celebration of the music from Sun Records. I had the honor of

recording there. That was a highlight of all of my years in music to record in that room where all of my heroes recorded. *Rock and Roll Days* was really well received and it was my first album that made the Grammys as a contender for Best Americana Album.

RRX: That's quite an achievement.

MW: If you had all of my albums, they wouldn't all be alike, I like to make them different. I was thinking, what would an album sound like that would still be considered authentic country Americana and at the same time not be totally out of step with

contemporary music. So that was my goal to create that kind of an album and the thing that made it even better was Chris Scruggs. Chris is the grandson of Earl Scruggs.

Did you ever watch the *Beverly Hillbillies*?

RRX: Yes, of course.

MW: Earl Scruggs played the theme song. He was the legendary innovator of the picking kind of banjo. Before Earl Scruggs people just wailed on a banjo, they didn't do all that picking which is now the mainstay of bluegrass music. So, Earl Scruggs was very

influential.

So anyway in 2018 my son and I were guests of Marty Stewart when he came up here on the Chris Stapleton tour and he introduced me to Chris Scruggs as his bass player. I kept in touch with Chris, just about country music, songs and knowledge. Any communications back and forth was just about that kind of stuff, very informal. Then I got a note from him that said he was off the road. He had some time on his hands and wanted to know if I'd be interested in working on a project. And there was the whole answer to making a country album. This guy has more country credentials than anybody.

So, I sent him the songs that I envisioned. He liked what I was writing and wanted to do it. One night we talked over two hours and together created the vision for the album. Then we got to work on it, that's why it sounds the way that it does. It was done in Nashville. The second thing that made it good was I thought it would be a great opportunity to reach out to people to be guest artists. I haven't done a lot of that. It really worked out.

Jerry Fox, he's an old friend from back in the 70's. He went to Nashville and worked with several big names such as Merle Travis and Crystal Gayle. In the 80's he formed his own group which was called Bandana. They were on Warner Bros. and had six or seven top hits, a good selling album. That was the time the business people were taking over and when they went back to renew their contract, Warner Bros. said we're not going to renew you. They were kind of stunned because they have really done well. They said just tell us what we did wrong, they said you guys didn't do anything wrong, but we like new faces. So, in other words, you've had your ten minutes, we're moving on to somebody else. He continued to work until later years, he does mostly solo work and he does some studio work. So, he was willing to do it

and then Judy Rodman who had a number one song and several big hits, she even wrote a number one song for LeAnn Rimes, I've got her on the album and then some regional people Mel Guarino from the Bluebillies, we'd do a lot of double-billed shows together. She's a real talent. And a guy who's a national recording artist out of Vermont, Tim Brick, he's a real talent. So, we brought in some people like that as well as the Nashville people.

RRX: I noticed every song has a feature on it and believe it or not? I don't know the response that you got but the Grandpa song is powerful.

MW: Oh, thank you, that's my granddaughter (Emily Quinn) that is with me on that one. That's a true story. I only knew one of my grandfathers, my father's dad died when he was only two. My grandfather was exactly as described in the song. I heard a couple of songs about grandfathers and they were like, "my Grandpa was a wonderful guy". I thought, "Gee if I write a song about my grandfather it's not going to be warm and fuzzy but maybe I need to write it". So that's what I did.

RRX: There was the generation gap, I feel a lot of grandfathers from various backgrounds shared the same kind of feeling back then. It was a different time.

MW: He would've fit in with some of the people around today. You know?

RRX: Exactly.

MW: But then the other great talent is Lindsey Scruggs another grandchild of Earl Scruggs, she's on two of the songs, "Cutting Room Floor" and "Like a Ghost". Linda McKenzie is another singer songwriter from Nashville on the album. It just worked out great then I recruited my granddaughter and my son on a couple of cuts. We pulled it all together and I'm really glad we were able to do it.



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It's All About the Opening



BY ART FREDETTE

Photo provided.

Standing on a corner, suitcase in my hand, Jackie's in his corset, Jane is in her vest and me honey, I'm in a rock-n-roll band" the opening line of "Sweet Jane" by The Velvet

Underground.

Sometimes, the opening line or verse of a song says it all. It can set the stage for everything that follows. The theme, the feel, even the music can be

defined by one phrase, one verse, a perfect introduction as to what follows.

"Sweet Jane" fits this bill perfectly. You are introduced to Jackie and Jane, two young professionals with a seedy

side and their view of the world. Right from the get go there is a hint at cross dressing and a skewed world view. References to forgotten brands of cars, scrimping money and jaundiced view

of children, ladies and poets. None of this could follow if the first line didn't set the stage. You immediately are inserted into the lifestyle of both Jack and Jane and what follows is enlightening.

"Screen door slams, Mary's dress waves. Like a vision she dances across the porch as the radio plays" as a young kid from New Jersey pulls up to the front porch of his girlfriend's house with a head full of dreams and fears. He has little in the way of options but believes in the freedom offered from an old car and the idealistic belief in love. "Thunder Road" unfolds, as both an actual thoroughfare and a metaphor for escape. Star crossed lovers searching for a way out of their dead-end future, a realistic view of the averageness of the lives they lead and the possibility of a fresh start. Some would say it is a "car" song and it may well be but what other American cliché has offered more freedom and hope?

England in the mid to late 1970's was an island steeped in history with a bleak future. The figurehead and the monarchy were little more than window dressing, the economy was in the toilet, most of the working age population was on the dole and tensions were high. Insert "I am an Antichrist. I am an anarchist. Don't know what I want but I know how to get it, I wanna destroy passer-by" the howl from an entire generation of disillusioned youth. Tired of bloated swinging London, rock-n-roll heroes with Bentleys and lip service revolution claiming to be the actual hammer of a god, and the fact that their prospects are nil. "Anarchy in The U.K." not only throws down a gauntlet it burns with resentment. Punk rock as a genre is a populist movement made up of outcasts and The Sex Pistols capture that anger perfectly from the start. The song goes on to reject pretty much everything in society including political groups like the I.R.A and U.D.A. and entertainment

stalwarts like the N.M.E, basically these guys are picking a fight.

But it isn't only rock-n-roll or punk that can stop you dead in your tracks with an opening line or verse. Take into consideration the opening verse of "Morning Glory" by Tim Buckley. "I lit my purest candle, close to my window. Hoping it would catch the eye. Of any vagabond who passed it by. And I waited in my fleeting house." The narrator of the song sits in the semi-darkness of his home beckoning anyone to break the silence. His light burns small, wavering in the darkness that is not only his house but his soul. The beacon works and the narrator is now locked in a conversation with the "hobo" that shakes him to his foundations. The vocals soar with pain and finally acceptance, then despair. In many ways the song is a cautionary tale. Be careful what you ask for, be wary of summoning life, an incantation to the darkness might just conjure up yourself.

Is all popular music poetry? No. Is every opening verse or line a masterpiece? No. But when an artist captures the moment, it can be magic. I am sure I have just scratched the surface with my few examples and I am sure you, dear reader, can come up with hundreds more and that is exactly the point of this exercise. Look deeper into the songs that move you. Take the time to truly hear them. Read the lyric sheet. Make them your own. Could I be off base with my interpretations of the examples above? Absolutely, but this is what I felt and to me, it rings true.

Go out and explore for yourself!

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It's Monkee Time!

BY JOHNNY MYSTERY

The Monkees. Photo provided

Shortly after I turned in my first column for *The Xperience*, word came down on the passing of Mike Nesmith. This came as no surprise to me, as I'd recently viewed some clips of the final Monkees tour he had done in the Fall. Mikey wasn't looking too good. Now, whenever the subject of The Monkees comes up, it's a given that we're going to hear about how the Pre-Fab Four, as they were known, didn't play their own instruments, didn't write their own songs, blah, blah, blah. You've heard it all before.

Anybody making records in L.A. in 1966 knew that 90% of the hits rolling out of that town were being produced by The Wrecking Crew. A group of top-notch session players who

operated out of Gold Star Studios. Most of these players, you may not have heard of, except for Glen Campbell and Hal Blaine.

The Wrecking Crew could knock out a number one hit in three hours or less. As opposed to three days if the actual band was allowed to do it.

This group of studio pros provided the back-up instrumentation for The Beach Boys, The Birds, The Mamas & the Papas and Sonny & Cher, just to name a few. They're also playing on nearly everything Phil Spector recorded.

The Monkees all but lost their minds once they realized their primary function would only be acting, even though all four of them possessed at

least a marginal amount of musical ability. However, they eventually made enough noise to get their way and had the all-powerful, all-knowing, Neil Sedaka lookalike, Don Kirschner removed as their musical director. Don got the axe when he brought them a song called 'Sugar, Sugar'. That song was eventually released by the comic book cartoon band, The Archies. Yes, another fake band. Do you see a pattern developing here?

The Monkees did manage to become something of a real band, though. Eventually recording an entire album on their own, and they even managed a tour with acts such as Jimi Hendrix opening up for them. I would have loved to have been in the crowd myself

to see the expression on parent's faces as Jimi used his Stratocaster as a phallic symbol.

In the end, the hits dried up. The TV show was cancelled, and their attempts at a film flopped.

Interestingly enough, one of the guys who got it, was from a band that they were being compared to. John Lennon once said "The Monkees are like The Marx Brothers. If you like the record, just enjoy it. Who cares how it was made?" Can't argue with Dr. Winston O'Boogie.

And with that, I'm out! Get out to the shops and hit the bins!



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Observations and Ramblings From a Cranky Old Guy

BY JEFF SPAULDING

Greetings all, hope you're surviving 2022 as best as possible.

Personally, I always feel optimism at the start of each new year, then before you know it, it goes right down the crapper. Technically the flush happened about a week from Christmas, but the pain still lingers.

When you're an old bastard like me, you expect many things to happen to you, especially once you start hitting say you're 60's. You don't have the drive to work as much. Body parts don't work as well as before, or perhaps need to be replaced if you can. And more people in your circle die.

I have spoken of the first before, and while, as I have said, I can see retirement in my future, I still get a chub doing what I do for a career after 45 plus years. At my age, that might be the only one I can still get. (Note to self, look up the definition of TMI).

Speaking of body parts, I ain't 21 anymore. Hell, I wasn't 21 when I was 21, but that's another issue.

As for people who die, at my age you expect parents, older relatives, friends you grew up with this, high school and college chums. But never someone who hasn't even made 40. That happened to me in December. I found out my oldest niece, Sarah Jean, died quite unexpectedly at 37 years old. How the f*ck do you explain or justify that? As of this writing, no one fully knows exactly what happened. Her younger sister went to her room one night and found her on her bed.

They say no parent should live to see their child die. It's not any easier

for an uncle either. What makes it such a tragedy is that her family has been struck by sorrow over the decades, this is just the latest. What makes it so damn unfair is that this is a great family, loving, caring, good people. These people took me in during one of the lowest periods of my life, and they get crapped on.

Sidetrack, I am having a hard time with this, emotions are pouring out with every word, please understand this is therapy in part for me. And I am more than thankful to the "staff and management" to allow me this forum. So, don't worry, the true asshole in me returns soon.

Before I continue with Sarah's story, a flashback to a few months ago. You may remember I wrote about my friend Mike, who I knew for over fifty years. In his case, we knew his death was more than likely coming, but it was still a stab in the heart. And Mike was close to my age. With Sarah, I just ask why.

Sarah is the daughter of a long-time friend from Shaker High School, Mark, and his wife Gloria. They married the same day as I did to the little snipe who I call Ex Wife Number Two. In her case (EWNT), I dealt with nearly 20 years of mental illness, psych hospitals and suicide attempts on her part. Another issue for another time.

It was such a joyous occasion when Sarah was born, followed by her sister Emily, her brother Tyler, and finally Brandy, who the family took in.

Mark accidentally died at a very young age. A few years later, so did Ty-

ler as a teenager.

Brandy moved out on her own, Sarah and Emily lived with Gloria. They live in Columbia County, as "small town" (not an insult) of a community as you'll ever see, Funny, Sarah is exactly one month older than my daughter Megan, but you could never meet two so completely different people. Remember in the early days of MTV, they ran a promo featuring two sisters separated at birth? One was a rocked-out chick who was a little party girl who wants her MTV. The other was an Amish girl on the farm. That's Sarah and Megan.

Life goes on, and I will in time get over the loss of Sarah, but I will never get over the thought that life simply is not fair in many cases.

Thank you again for your time to let me tell you about a special person in my life. She deserves that at least. Rest in peace Sarah, Uncle Mike loves you always.

Be hearing you.



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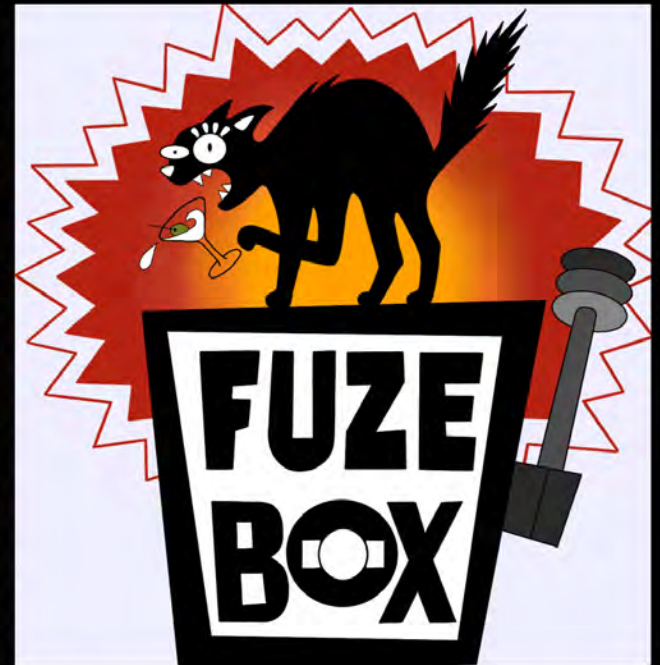
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