

HONEST TUNE

13 Questions with...Todd Snider

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Todd Snider stands out as a unique songwriter and storyteller, combining humor and pathos often as one and the same. He plays consistently to energized, standing room-only crowds, and shares the spotlight and stage with many singer/songwriters working hard to pay their dues.

His new Oh Boy Records release, Peace, Love and Anarchy, is a collection of rarities, B-Sides and demos. Honest Tune magazine caught up with the Nashville resident following his latest tour.

Honest Tune: How did Peace, Love and Anarchy come about?

Todd Snider: I don't know, most of the recordings that ended up on this were either done at Peter Cooper's or Eric McConnell's. Some are even outtakes from The Devil You Know that Universal was kind enough to give up for the good of art.

HT: John Prine is a tremendous inspiration and amazing songwriter. How has the dynamic of being a part of his label worked for you?

TS: John is tied with my father-in-law for coolest person I know. I wish I was John Prine. I wish I was more like John Prine. He'd be done with this interview already. Talk about short-winded. If he'd never written a song, his class and grace alone would still make him my hero.

As a music fan I can honestly say, I love every song on every (John Prine) record.

He's the only guy in my record collection I feel that way about. Being part of his label, I got to, a, watch him work (and hopefully learn from it a little) and b, make records I look back fondly on.



My favorite John story is from Europe. We got picked up after a ten hour flight by a young guy who talked our ear off as he drove an hour and a half the wrong way. John Prine didn't just keep his ruffles to himself like the rest of us did. John Prine was just flat out not ruffled. Undisturbed. You could feel it. The man can not be knocked off his square. He's a rock. I think about that drive now every time his lyrics throw me a new way.

HT: Have you two approached getting together on anything?

TS: He asked me to help him with a song about a black box once. But I froze in the daunt of it. Couldn't a rhymed cat with hat that day. I was just so stunned by the offer. My awe of John has always been a hard part of our friendship. He says good morning, and I faint.



HT: There's a Jerry Jeff Walker connected number on the new release. Can you relate to Honest Tune's readers the how, when, where, and why of Jerry Jeff's impact on you and your music, and when you recorded the Todd sings Jerry Jeff material ?

TS: I saw Jerry Jeff at Guene Hall 20 years ago (and again last Saturday). I decided about half way through the set to be a folk singer. I got a guitar the next day, and started following him and his kind of music around. This is what led to John Prine, Kris (Kristofferson), Billy Joe (Shaver) and all my other heroes. He and I are very close to... But it's the same as John. You don't really get to "have dinner" with someone you had walls full of pictures of before you even met, and not have it be awkward. If you think about it romantically, you'd tell the girl to run.

But John, JJW, Kris and Billy Joe have all been kind to me. And patient with the obsessed fan in me.

As for the Jerry Jeff record, I was just up at Peter Cooper's house, he hit record and I played about 15 Jerry Jeff tunes from memory. We made a Kristofferson recording that way too.

HT: The music industry is struggling to sell recordings, blaming illegal downloading amongst a long laundry list for it's woes. Have corporate interests and greed had a hand through the incorporation of shady business dealings with artists' rights, and has the balance been tipped away from the real reason that music interested people in the first place, and got them actively involved?

TS: I have to admit that I'm pretty blind to all the money and everything. I've always given mine to this guy named Chuck. I went to the Jerry Lee Lewis school of music business. You can have my publishing for a bong hit and a ride back. Which some people may think makes me poorer than I should be. But I'm cheaper than free hoss, and that makes me richer than I should be. Always.

A guy with a guitar doesn't need a boat. What rich guy in his right mind, doesn't want some drunk scamp with an acoustic guitar on his boat?

I got into music by giving up on that part of the world, and promised myself I'd keep it that way. I knew when I was 19 that I wanted to forget about money forever. Tell stories and sing songs, sad ones and funny ones. People have tried to talk me into particular parts of all these promises.

But, I've never even come close to budging, or wanting to budge on any of 'em. And, lucky so far, I've still got a little gambling money. But, it's never been from wanting some. So, personally, anyone who wants to try to sway my buzz by taking my money better bring a lunch.

HT: I first saw you perform at a Widespread Panic show along with The Why Store and G. Love. What do you think of the grass roots music movement and its impact on its listener's lives?

TS: Touring with Widespread is one of the best memories I have. I even played with them. And, if you're talking about those festivals where all the chicks got dirty feet, and all that.....like... hippie jam festivals, they are my favorite. Those young dreadhead people, like High Sierra or something like that, I like the bluegrass side of that family too. Yonder Mountain String Band is one of my favorites.

Simply put, those festivals make me feel like I'm living in the '60's. And I like to. It feels like people really come for the music, and I kind of think they do. Most of them. Sometimes at festivals, it can feel like the crowd drew the crowd. And you're just playing next to it. But not at the chicks in hippie dress festivals.

I think it might be the 'shrooms or acid they take, which is something I used to enjoy myself.

HT: Take us back to where it all started for you. How much work did you put in until you were approached to record?

TS: I started playing my songs in bars for a living in about the fall of '86 in both San Marcos and Austin, Texas. In 1989, I moved to Memphis and made my living playing bars until '92 when I got signed by Capitol Records. But I never stopped working bars.



By '93 I'd been let go...(with no album they fired me). Later that year I got a record contract with Margaritaville, and put the record out in '94. Which is when I went out and stayed out on the road. Still playing bars some, theaters some, festivals, all kinds.

So I guess the math is eight years of local bars before I made an album, but six before I was approached to.

HT: How did you put together the Nervous Wrecks?

TS: Right after I got my record contract, I put a band together. I wanted to try it while I was young. And, I figured I could and would always go back to solo. How often is some rich guy gonna pay you to form a band and tour? I mean boat rides are one thing... You know what I'm saying.

So, I formed a band out of my musician friends in Memphis. We played up until the day our first record came out with other guitar players, losing them all to other bands and/or drugs and things. Will Kimbrough auditioned the night before the Daily Planet record came out, and joined the day it did. The last Memphian quit in '98. And, while we still play as a band sometimes, I have to be honest and say I've never gotten a real grip on it. Or had a vision of a place the band could go.

Since Dr. Joe quit (I should add that Mucklewain was like the old days), I may have a full time band again some day. But not until it shows up as an idea that is as formed and consumes me as much as the solo shows do now.

HT: What are some of the side projects you have started?

TS: I made a recording of Kristofferson songs, and I also made one of Jerry Jeff songs. I also record poetry when I'm really in the can.

Plus I got a band called Elmo Buzz and the East Side Bulldawgs. It plays at a place in East Nashville called the Three Crow Bar. But, that's the only place we play. We do my songs a little, but mostly covers and stuff.

HT: Are you releasing the material from those projects?

TS: There's a song on Peace, Love and Anarchy called "Stoney" from the Jerry Jeff record. And also a song called "Maybe You Heard" from the Kris one that got on the tribute recording to him.

And also two of the poems are on the Peace, Love and Anarchy record. That's the part Peter Cooper brought to the record. That, and "East Nashville Skyline" and "Cheatham Street Warehouse" and "Some Things Are." Which are actually Devil You Know outtakes.

HT: Who would you like to collaborate with?

TS: Mick and Keith, Robert Hunter, Drive By Truckers, Jay Z, Kings of Leon, Courtney Love, Matt Groening, Britney Spears, Widespread Panic, Mike Tyson, Julian Casablancas, Michael Lauren.

I'd say Dylan but that might be like staring into the sun.

I'm kidding about none of these.

HT: What's your most requested song?

TS: If pressed I'd say "Beer Run".... But people don't yell for "Beer Run" as often as people who don't attend my shows and crave to dismiss them would think. I've been really lucky with that. When I say, "What song is it you wanna hear?" it's a big chorus of a ton of different titles.

And usually by the time I take requests, the girls are all buzzed up and yelling for love songs. "Conservative Christians" also gets yelled for a lot. But, no one's ever made me feel like I gotta play one song more than another.

My crowd is really gracious with me. We have a history, and to a degree I think they trust me. In fact, I hear the request, "Do whatever you want" as often as I hear any other request.

HT: Finally, are you liking any team in particular at the beginning of this baseball season?

TS: Always the Giants. We Giants' fans work hard to stay in denial about Barry Bonds. Just long enough to still root for the rest of the guys and the organization in general. It's hard to be a Giants fan now. But always the Giants.

Side teams...Kansas City, God love 'em. And the Mets, Cubs and Yankees. My favorite thing in the world besides being married and singing is drinking beer, eating peanuts and blazing joints in the empty tip top section of some major league ballpark. God bless America and parts of Canada.

In closing, I say mass gratitude for your grass attitude, Honest Tune, from yours truly, the tipsy gypsy.