

FROM THE HEART

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Staff

TODD Snider's latest CD release, "East Nashville Skyline," has been described as "shock therapy." Indeed, the artist himself states on the liner notes, "All the songs on this record are true songs about true people I know and the opinions they have, the ones I have, and just some of my own personal stories and feelings."

he 12 tracks on the album, mostly originals with a couple of covers thrown in, make for compelling listening.

The 37-year old Snider's road has often been hard, including stints in rehab and the death of a close friend, and he is open and honest about it all while never forgetting to raise a laugh.

On Saturday, he celebrates the release of "East Nashville Skyline" with a concert at the Rio Theatre in Santa Cruz.

Snider was born in Portland, Ore., but grew up in Houston after his family relocated there. At age 15, he decided he wanted to go back to Portland, so he and a friend ran away there. After high school, Snider decided he would seek a career as a harmonica player and moved to Santa Rosa.

His career aspirations changed when his brother, who lived in Austin, Texas, invited him to move there. In Austin, Snider saw Jerry Jeff Walker playing a solo show and realized he could pursue a career as a singer-songwriter.

Snider was a great fan of Jerry Jeff Walker and John Prine, and he noticed that a Keith Sykes kept popping up in the "Thank You" sections of Walker's and Prine's album covers. Snider figured if he could track down Sykes, he might get introduced to his heroes. He was not having much success finding Sykes until a chance conversation with his father.

"My dad was in construction, and he was working in Memphis, and he remembered that Keith Sykes was one of those people I was obsessed with," Snider recalled. "He overheard this waitress say her sister was married to him so he called me up and said 'I know where Keith Sykes lives,' and I went to his house and stayed there for three years."

Sykes and Snider became firm friends, with Sykes helping Snider make valuable contacts in the music business, including Prine. When Prine began recording his album "The Missing Years," he hired Snider as a runner in the studio. At the same time, Snider had a weekly gig at a local club called The Daily Planet. Prine came to see one of Snider's shows and, a year later, asked Snider to open for him on his tour.

Snider released his first CD, "Songs for the Daily Planet," in 1994 on Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville record label and received critical acclaim for his song "Talkin' Seattle Grunge Rock Blues." At around this time, he was on tour with Prine and began looking to him as a mentor, asking his advice on songwriting, recording and performing.

In 2000, he signed to Prine's Oh Boy record label, where he has released three CDs, including his most recent.

Snider is typically honest and humorous about his success: "My goal in life was to be as good as John Prine," he said, "but he wrote 'Sam Stone' first. So that's just not gonna happen - it's already too late."