



Interview: Todd Snider

by Craig Judkins

(Monday, 20th. April, 2004, 08:24) As a performer, and perhaps personally, Todd Snider is an utterly humble, gentle-natured observer of life and its accompanying cast of characters. With generous measures of both levity and melancholic reflection, Snider bears witness to truth, beauty, and all the ugliness life in America has to offer.

In his own words, Snider has been "driving around 15 years, making this shit up, singing it for anybody that will listen to it". And that seems to be quite accurate, apart from the years now number something like 16 or 17 as of 'press time,' and "anybody who will listen to it" represents 10's of thousands of loyal fans spread across the US, Europe and beyond. Like other veterans of his trade, Snider finds himself toiling away the years, hitting the road like the troubadours of old, guitar and skeleton crew (if any) in tow.



2003's *Near Truths* and *Hotel Rooms* allowed many of the previously uninitiated to experience Todd Snider live in their living rooms. His simple, poetic, semi-autobiographical tales drew in scores of new fans, charmed by his hip redneck demeanour and the grit, humor and beauty of his tales.

Recently, while on tour in Florida, Todd collapsed in a doctor's office as a result of what he calls his "dirty secret". A steady regimen of Oxycontin, a strong opiate-based painkiller, mixed with whiskey, or perhaps his beloved red wine, had eaten a hole through his stomach. He had hit the proverbial wall.

Not remembering the tour in Florida at all, he woke up in rehab and thought he might have been in jail. Relieved to find out that he could walk out through the door without anyone to stop him, he began to realize what was happening. Today, with the help of his family and friends, Snider is fighting his way through addiction so that he may continue to live, write music and perform.

I was able to speak with Todd via email last week. What follows will give you further insight into an artist that has managed to touch quite of a few of us in the ebong community. And for that we are grateful.

ebong.org: One of the questions a friend of mine wanted to ask you was do you give a shit? I'm fairly certain you do, so I would like to ask you what's most important? And what could you not care less about?

Todd Snider: I could care less about money.
I care about my wife and my family.
But that's about it.
Well, I have a few friends I would trust
with my darkest secrets,
and I suppose I care about them,
but that's about it.
Well.....
also making music,
but that's about it.
Well,
actually lately I've been
listening to all these politicians talking to me.
And I'm starting to watch them
cause for some inner reason
I really care about Alaska.
And I think queers should be able to get
married,
but that's about it.
(Being in show bizness, however, I know
show bizness when I see it.
And I see it on both sides of this new election
thing...so I also think about that some)
but that's about it.
I'm still voting for my side
the liberals.....
You know liberty.....like the statue
I think France gave it to us.
I doubt I'm right about that
but I am a liberal....
I respect and pull for all the presidents,
but I mostly dug the guy who could play saxophone
'cuz I think I like people more than I like stuff
but that's about it.
Well,
I like chicks with dirty feet,
I think weed should be legal,
and I dig widespread;
and I care about them,
but that's about it.
Actually

What I really care about
is unpaving the world and Bob Dylan,
but that's about it.



ebong.org: You've mentioned recently that you are writing quite a lot. What sort of stuff is finding its way into those songs?

Todd Snider: Well....let's see.... life, going to jail, finger prints, alcohol, pills, Fred Eaglesmith, Billy Joe Shaver, Politicians, The Kingsmen, Boxing, Conservative Christians, Judge Judy,

Nashville, near death and the beauty of life. It's a comedy record about a guy who can't even kill himself.

ebong.org: What song have you heard most recently for the first time that struck you in some way?

Todd Snider: A few months ago John Prime played me his new shit - it was a jaw dropping, if you ask me, but the last song I heard I fell in love with was a new one Will Kimbrough was working on that I think I might be beating him out of half of plus everything on love and theft (which I'm still digesting).



ebong.org: What kind of stories do you like to write? (Optional: Care to write a few lines as an example?)

Todd Snider: I don't claim to be good at writing short stories but I love to do it. The last one I wrote was about the worst fistfight I ever saw..... nobody won. 'cept the crowd, I guess.

ebong.org: Why does the telephone scare you?

Todd Snider: 'cause it means I'm gonna have to talk to somebody.

ebong.org: You've said elsewhere that the medical people believe something happened to you in 5th grade. How do you remember those years? Good, bad, ugly?

Todd Snider: I don't really remember those years before sixth grade I mean I remember some Santa Claus shit, but I flunked that next year....sixth grade. I remember that year more.....but I forgive everybody whoever did anything wrong to me, period, and pray that people I've hurt will do the same.

ebong.org: Do you ever find yourself cracking jokes when you're the only one there to laugh at it?

Todd Snider: It's a constant... I say the funniest shit I say when I'm alone. Mostly just to not show off. Musically also: I do my best stuff in private. Also not to show off... You should hear me play guitar in private as well, I'm as good as anyone - way better than Will Kimbrough. Probably the best there is... but like I said I'm a humble man, so I leave most of my talent at the hotel.

ebong.org: What's the best thing about being dirt poor?

Todd Snider: There was never a best thing about being dirt poor, but... to me dirt-poor means having to sleep in dirt. I mean I think that's what we're talking about, right? And I've only been so poor I had to sleep in dirt once, really, and only for few days. It was in Santa Rosa, California - about four street people took care of me... we really slept in the dirt; they showed me an almost built house to sleep out of the wind. And they showed me how to beg change for the bus fair to San Francisco where my brother had left me a ticket. He had a construction job, I was about eighteen... I guess the first six months in Texas were the poorest I ever was. I had to find a couch every night, but I always did - especially after I learned those three chords... and near other one.

Since I've been twenty-one I've been making a fair living singing my songs...(well that depends on what your definition of fair living is.) My dad used to say he could be a millionaire for about 30,000 dollars and I thought he was a greedy freak.

ebong.org: Where is your favorite place to people watch? Do you have any favorite characters, someone who you've watched from a distance that you've managed to remember for a time?

Todd Snider: I try to people watch everywhere I go and I'd say my favorite place to do it is a tie between where I am right now and everywhere else. I've met a lot of characters but I don't watch them from a distance... I introduce myself... My best friends are always characters... My three favorite friends were all a lot older than me and had fought in Vietnam... Two of them are dead now... in there fifties they died... I don't know how the government expected these guys not to be crazy, but it sure has made it easier for me to find drinking buddies... Great stories that'll make you sad, glad, and mad, and laugh all at once.... without ever laughing themselves... but that's as far as I'm going... Nothing good came from Vietnam.... especially a V.A. hospital plan. And like I said, right now most of my buddies are dead... so I think about them all the time.

ebong.org: Are you anxious to accomplish anything? Basically, do you feel like you've got to do one thing or another before too much time passes, or some yearning to achieve some set goal?

Todd Snider: Part of the gypsy religion that interests me so much is there lack of a need to be somebody or do something and or achieve something... they see it as papers to fill out, shit to count, stuff to carry, and strangers in the house - and not to sound rude, but I AM going to do one thing or another for the rest of my life, and time will pass right on by as it happens; then like muddy waters said, "You got to take sick and die one of these days". To answer your question, though, no. I'm philosophically opposed to goal setting and golf.

ebong.org: I ask this question a lot, and it's not always answerable, but why is music important to you?

Todd Snider: For the same reason a crack addict likes crack maybe, but really I don't know... I just know it is important to me like family. So is studying it and learning more about it. I have no formal training. But WHY it's so important feels, honestly, like that sorta higher power thing that everybody is always using different words to talk about. I feel closer to whatever all this is when I'm performing.

ebong.org: Do you enjoy the outdoors? Camping? Fishing? Anything like that? Do you have a favorite spot to vacation?

Todd Snider: Mostly when I'm home I like to stay home; cook at home... play with the dogs... go walking. I have a favorite town and a favorite hotel but I'm not saying where it is anymore because some people take this music shit really, really seriously, and I don't want to be around people like that - or people who ask a lot of questions and all that, so I'm keeping my favorite spot to myself now, even though its a little late now. If it keeps one person away it will be worth it.

ebong.org: Are you reading any books at the moment? Anything you'd like to recommend?

Todd Snider: Going to movies and reading have never really captured me. The last book I read was about Yoggi Berra... My favorite book is Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas. As for reading this may sound a little pretentious 'cause I may be a little pretentious, but I love to read encyclopaedias and I hate fiction.

ebong.org: Are you getting any sleep?

Todd Snider: No