



ENTERTAINMENT NEWS

Todd Snider back and better than ever after beating personal demons

By Jim Lundstrom
Post-Crescent staff writer

Posted Mar. 03, 2005

Exorcizing demons can be a full-time job, especially when they are the personal kind.

Say you're working on those demons while trying to maintain a career, say as a nationally touring musician on a prestigious indie folk label – which means not only touring, but being fresh, witty and ready to pound out a new record every 18 months or so.

And on top of that, you're just trying to be a human being, which also takes a good deal of work.

Ask Todd Snider about that sometime.

The 38-year-old Snider performs Friday at the Grand Opera House in Oshkosh.

The last time he was supposed to come to the area for a concert in Green Bay in November 2003, he had to cancel for a stretch in drug rehab for dependence on the pain killer Oxycotin, a synthetic morphine considered one of the most insidious prescription drugs on the market.

“Sometimes personal things get hard in life,” Snider said by telephone last week from his home in East Nashville. “I had a friend that was dying of cancer, and it was really painful to be around. That was the main thing bothering me.”

The friend, Kenneth Francis “Skip” Litz, was an East Nashville legend who spent the last six months of his life as Snider's tour manager before dying of cancer in July 2003.

Snider hit the skids shortly after that.

“I missed about 16 shows. It was very embarrassing,” Snider said. “I was hoping it would never happen, but I should have known it would.”

Hard truths brought him back from the edge to make the best record of his career, “East Nashville Skyline.”

WHAT: Todd Snider,
with opening act Peter
Cooper

WHERE: Grand Opera
House, Oshkosh

WHEN: 7:30 p.m. Friday

COST: \$16-\$28

INFO: 866-964-7263 or
www.toddsnider.com

“Two things,” he said. “I saw this look in my wife’s face that was complete terror, and I missed my shows. Those are the only two things I care about.”

Snider said he doesn’t know what the future holds as far as drugs, “but today it’s not even a difficult thing. Things are good now. It’s not even something that I crave anymore. But it was there for a few months, very physically hard. Once that was over, I got to feeling physically better.

“It wasn’t something I wanted to sit around and do again. It was something I wanted to stop doing for a long time. I was in that phase where a lot of guys get where you get high and sit there and wish you weren’t.”

Snider talks so frankly about his problems that you almost don’t want to share these things.

But then you realize this is a guy who says Bob Dylan is his favorite comedian, and who a few months ago released his seventh studio album – and his fourth for John Prine’s Oh Boy label – “East Nashville Skyline.”

He said it’s almost something of a concept album about his neighborhood.

“The politics and economics of my neighborhood, and the stupidity and self-destructive parts of it, too,” he said.

He even recorded “East Nashville Skyline” in his neighborhood.

“It evolved out of something, literally, while I was going on a walk,” he said. “I had a batch of songs in my head and I was walking past my friend’s studio (Eric McConnell). Loretta Lynn had just got out of there (with Jack White of The White Stripes, who produced Lynn’s last release, “Van Lear Rose”).”

Snider said he stopped by just to see what the studio was like. He recorded one song, “Play A Train Song” (dedicated to Litz, who famously called that line out at live shows like some still yell for “Free Bird”).

“It really was, like, when I woke up that morning, I didn’t know I was going to make a record. By noon I had found the studio to make that record, and that night by 7 o’clock I knew we were just going to sit there and make the whole record.”

Snider hired all the musicians and studio time without letting Oh Boy know.

“I called them when I was done. This was kind of a gamble,” he said. “They hadn’t even heard a song yet. They didn’t even know I had any songs. I wasn’t trying to be rude to John (Prine) and all those guys. I felt like by that time they trusted me.”

Jim Lundstrom can be reached at 920-993-1000, ext. 374, or by e-mail at jlundstrom@postcrescent.com