

Wil Forbis: Country Gone Beautifully Wrong

Wil Forbis makes no effort to hide the improbability of his role as a country music songwriter. "As a kid, I hated country music," he states, perhaps too exuberantly. So what did he listen to? Show tunes. "My dad had a collection of all the great Broadway albums from the 40s and 50s — My Fair Lady, The Pajama Game, a lot of the Carol Channing productions. Growing up, I spent my summers living with him in a cabin he built near Flathead Lake, Montana. A lot of nights were passed gathered 'round the fireplace with those albums playing. Of course, once I became a teenager, I started listening to what was popular at the time — The Cars, Prince, Led Zeppelin, Rush... that sort of thing."

By his late teens, Forbis was not just listening to music but performing it. "I played guitar in almost every type of band possible. Punk rock, reggae, blues, prog rock, funk... I did it all. Well, everything except country."

So how did the country conversion finally occur? "In my early 30s, I moved into an apartment in Los Angeles that happened to be up the street from a bar called the Cinema Bar. The Cinema is ground zero for the LA alt-country scene — on any night of the week you can go there and hear really great musicians playing anything from traditional country to bluegrass to Americana. It just got into my blood, particularly those bluegrass instruments." Not long after discovering the Cinema, Forbis purchased a second-hand banjo. Later he started picking out scales on a mandolin. And all the while, he was writing songs, combining the styles of music played at late night Cinema jams with his more eclectic influences. The result was a sound that music critic Billy Shepherd labeled "country gone beautifully wrong."

In 2008, After several years of playing around Los Angeles, both as a side man and under his own name, Forbis assembled a crack team of local players that he dubbed "The Gentlemen Scoundrels" and recorded a CD. The result was "Shadey's Jukebox," a collection of offbeat country and Americana songs released by Rankoutsider Records, home of such roots rockers as Pat Todd and the Rankoutsiders and The Condors. The album received rave reviews ("5 out of 5 stars" from the alt-country print mag Maverick, among many others) and was widely praised by members of the L.A. country scene. Former Dave Alvin sideman and current solo artist Rick Shea stated, "Wil and his band show off excellent musicianship and remarkably clever songwriting chops." Television music composer Ben Vaughn ("That Seventies Show," "3rd Rock from the Sun") added, "Forbis has a badass attitude and the guitar chops to back it up, but he also knows how to slow down and engage in authentic self-expression." Jason Ringenberg, a longtime musical hero of Forbis and lead singer of the quintessential alt-country band Jason and the Scorchers, stated, "Shadey's Jukebox is the kind of CD that sticks with you through multiple listens. It has real bite and lasting



Photo credit: Didier Chevalier

Contact Wil Forbis:
310-621-2311

forbisthemighty@hotmail.com

www.wilforbis.com

www.myspace.com/wilforbis

Purchase *Shadey's Jukebox*:

www.cdbaby.com/cd/wilforbisatgs

Purchase *A Quarter Past Four*

www.cdbaby.com/cd/wilforbisandthegentlemen

power."

During the years following the album's release, life took a turn. Repetitive strain in both of Forbis's forearms limited his ability to play and work, and a strange malady ultimately revealed to be damage to his vestibular (balance) system incapacitated him further. Ultimately Forbis relocated to San Diego. But he stayed focused on music, returning with the band to the studio to record the just released, "A Quarter Past Four." The album, a collection of jazz numbers that owes more to Fats Waller and John Coltrane than Willie Nelson or Steve Earle, would be considered by many to be a serious left turn. Not to Forbis who states, "Music is music. Jazz and country are far more alike than different." The composition of the album's material was also eerily fluid he recalls. "Some of these songs had been around for years, but some of them just poured out of me. I wrote the tune 'Nightflowers' in about 30 minutes over the course of two days."

Forbis is back to enjoying music. The album, also released by Rankoutsider Records, has already received radio play in San Diego and is generating a buzz in the local music community. Forbis is playing often, both as a solo artist and as a sideman in projects across a wide spectrum of music styles (including dates opening for major touring acts such as The Motels and John Waite.) What's next? "I'm saving my money," Forbis states, "to get back into the studio and record another country album!"