

**Chip Taylor & Carrie Rodriguez**

**Red Dog Tracks**

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**The making of the album.**

In January of 2003, Carrie & I first saw the amazing jazz guitarist Bill Frisell play a show at the Village Vanguard. We loved the show. But what took me by surprise was to what extent a gentle country-soul thing had crept into Bill's styling (Carrie already had an inkling of that).

Right after the show, I purchased as much of Bill's back catalogue that I could find. It seemed like Bill's musical world was divided by the year 1996. Before that time, his styling was more ambient and experimental with little melody. After his Nashville album in 1996, there seemed to always be a hint of country flavoring and melody somewhere in all his work. Carrie & I particularly loved his 2002 album, "The Willies", highlighted by his tender treatments of "Cold, Cold Heart" and "Goodnight Irene".

In the summer of 2004, I contacted Bill's manager, Lee Townsend, and inquired as to the possibility of Bill joining Carrie & me on our next album. Lee thought Bill's schedule would not allow it, but invited us to send our previous CDs to him, so that Bill and he would understand better the nature of what we did. As Bill tells it, Lee became an instant fan and rushed the CDs to him. Bill loved the stuff as well. We then worked out a three day schedule where Bill would make time to record with us in September, just before taking a well deserved rest from touring.

**THE SESSIONS**

We decided to record at the Rolls Royce of studios in New York, Avatar, as Bill had recently recorded there and loved the place. Our engineer Huck Bennert came in from Maine to handle the recording chores. It was a terrific set-up as all of were able to have eye contact with each other while still having sound separation for the instruments. The musicians were:

- Bill Frisell – guitar
- Jim Whitney – bass
- Kenney Wollesen – drums
- Carrie – fiddle/vocals
- Chip – guitar/harmonica/vocals

Carrie & I had rehearsed the songs in concert for the past several months so we were comfortable with them. Jim Whitney had played with us on several of those shows, so he was fairly well prepared. Richie had come down from Maine the previous week to get a bit familiar with the material & Bill had come over to my apartment two days before the session for a brief rehearsal with Carrie & me as well.

As it is during our shows, Carrie & I did not dictate a specific form (particularly beginnings & endings) of the songs during the rehearsals We thought we'd kind of let the parameters develop at the studio & leave some of the form to be determined by the vibe of the recording – as it was being recorded.

In the large studio area of Avatar, the band huddled around near the drum kit and went over each song. After about ten or fifteen minutes, we went back to our mic positions and recorded each song with live vocals just as we had done on our previous album. The sessions could not have been more inspired. Every one of the musicians got lost in the vibe. This was serious, passionate playing. For the most part what ended up on the final album was the first or second take of each song.

By mid-afternoon of third day of recording we were pretty much finished with the album. We relaxed and listened for much of the day, totally forgetting to record one song, *Son Of Man*. Without Bill, a few days later, we recorded that song. And, after his vacation, Bill overdubbed his part in Seattle.

One of the extra pleasures of the sessions was Bill's terrific daughter, Monica. A professional photographer, she silently documented these sessions. We said our goodbyes at a spirited wrap party, where I introduced Bill to "Bombay martini – no Vermouth – straight up – olives – very cold, please!". Now, he loves the stuff!!

### **About the songs:**

I'm a stream-of-conscious writer. I rarely think about what I want to write about when I pick up the guitar. I just let emotion dictate nonsense sound and melody. If something that's evolving gives me a chill, I'll let it evolve further and then try to make some sense of it. So the comments I'll now make about the songs are after the fact and may have nothing to do with original intent.

1. *Must Be The Whiskey* – this is certainly a personal song, inspired by some events and new friendships made during our recent Alberta, Canada tour. Kendel Carson & The Paperboys, Brave Combo (and their funky "Hokey Poky" song), an offer from our new friend John in Turner Valley for a hit of moonshine as we left the venue, a fast approaching electrical storm in Edmonton (that would interrupt Rodney Crowell's show) – are all in this song someplace.

On the recording Bill Frisell's soulful vibe in the intro combined with the interweaving of the understated drums & banjo set the stage for a mood that will continue throughout the album.

2. *Keep Your Hat On Jenny* – Just a few weeks before our session, I started chugging along with this Balfa Brothers-like groove thing and, although I'm not usually a writer of story songs, somehow this one evolved. In this imaginary story, Carrie's big sister, Jenny (she actually has none), is my cheating wife who we won't let in the house. In one of the choruses, Carrie tells her:

*"Keep your hat on Jenny – keep your hat on Jenny  
Little sister's got her sugar daddy  
Keep your hat on Jenny – keep your hat on Jenny  
We ain't gonna let you in"*

3. *Big Moon Shinin'* – This has become a fan favorite as well as a favorite of ours. I wrote it shortly after we released our last album. It's kind of two songs forged together or one song with two movements. In this song, two lovers apart share their intimacy by becoming thoughts and objects placed in close proximity to their partner.

Note: my scotch of choice is Macallan and one of my favorite song writers of all time is Townes Van Zandt.

I say:

*"I am a twelve year old Macallan scotch - on the third shelf of that bar  
waiting for you to drink me up"*

Carrie responds:

*"I am some sweet words from the sky – floating down from a Van Zandt star  
Waiting for you to think me up"*

When the words above came, I knew this would be an important song to me. However, it's eventual length (over 6 minutes), left me with doubts that anyone else would put up with it.

The day after I wrote it, I kind of nervously played all six plus minutes of it for Carrie. To my great surprise, she absolutely loved it! We started playing it in shows ever since. I'm always thinking...." this is going to be a marathon... people will get bored". But somehow they don't.

4. *Oh Set A Light* – This is another that has become a total fan sing-a-long favorite (if we don't explain the title at the shows, many will sing along, "Oh Satelite", which is fine with me – and maybe a better title! ). I actually wrote two versions of this. One was a story song set in Robin Hood times about an evil prince and a captured beauty needing rescuing. One day I played it for Carrie and she loved it. Then, a few days later, I played her another gospel-like more personal version and told her it was her choice. After much thought, she chose the second version. At our shows it's always a warm, special thing to hear the chorus coming back at us from the audience.

*"Oh set a light now free me free me  
oh set a light don't let me fall  
Oh set a light now see me se me  
Climbing over your garden wall"*

5. *Once Again, One Day... will you be mine* – This personal, highly emotional song is a prayer for forgiveness from a loved one you have wronged. Carrie & I wrote this almost a year ago. We sing it every show and I always get a chill when we do. It often brings me to the point of tears. Bill plays such a beautiful, tender solo on this recording.

*"If rainbows can chase the clouds away  
If prayers are answered in good time  
And if sins were meant to be forgiven  
Once again , one day... will you be mine"*

6. *Private Thoughts* – I think this is the best kind of writing I do. Because it's really no writing at all. I'm just a total conduit here. This is just Carrie & me thinking things that we've thought before – and never verbally shared until now. And so this song becomes the ultimate truth and extraordinarily therapeutic.

Talking to myself, I say:

*"Oh don't you go there, don't you say that  
you are just like your mother.... You're mother was beautiful  
but she had a short, short fuse sometimes.... take a deep breath...  
don't say nothing' you'll regret in the morning"*

Talking to herself, Carrie responds

*"Oh there he goes, he started to say something  
and he held it back.... damn, I hate when that happens...  
it's so frustrating ...take a deep breath ...  
don't say nothin' you'll regret in the morning"*

Together we say to ourselves:

*"Here we are together – thinking private thoughts... mmmm  
there's a hole in the weather... the summer breeze is laced with frost"*

7. *My Bucket's Got A Hole in It* – Carrie & I both love this old Clarence Williams song. I remember it as sung by Hank Williams, then Ricky Nelson. Those were great records. But I think the song works extra special as a duet and we love singing it at our shows

Here's Carrie's second verse:

*"No use in me workin' – workin' so hard  
'cause the boss man's daughter – she's waitin' for me in the yard".*

8. *The Wonder Of You* – This love song, particularly in the bridge, has the same honest conversational thing that "Private Thoughts" has. This is a Bill Frisell favorite – certainly one of mine as well.

In the bridge, Carrie says:

*"Should I stay – or should I go  
maybe I should get me back to Mexico"*

I respond, half talking:

*"Oh no, no, no, no, no ... please don't go!  
Oh the wonder of you"*

9. *I Can't Help (If I'm Still In Love With You)* – Carrie & I love singing this old Hank Williams song. The chill I feel from our two voices rubbing against the other is as strong as it gets on this one.
10. *Red Dog tracks* – As I've mentioned before, I don't often write story songs. But there I was, all of a sudden lost in this mystery. I wasn't sure what exactly was happening. Before I found out, I needed desperately to know where this was taking place. I reached for my atlas and there it was – just east of Biloxi, not far from the Alabama border – The Pascagoula Bay. Oh man, some scary stuff happened down there!  
*"Did you tell your momma just what you done  
I seen you last night by the Pascagoula Bay  
The wind was howlin' – it was long past 1:00  
.... What were you doin' down there!"*
11. *Elzick's Farewell* – Although Carrie's singing became the musical blessing of all time for me, I love showing respect to her fiddling since I originally hired her to do just that. This old PD fiddle tune is a favorite of Carrie's. The swamp-like mysteriousness seemed like a continuation of the preceding song, "Red Dog Tracks", so we placed it here. Almost like some evil celebration deep in the back woods. There's amazing stuff from Bill, Richie, & Kenny on this track!
12. *Son Of Man* – I saw the amazing gospel group, Bells Of Joy, perform last year at SXSW. Their producer asked if I would consider writing a song for them. The next day I picked up the guitar and within minutes this not-so-reverent gospel song arrived. Since the Bells decided to release a previously recorded album, Carrie & I began performing it at our shows. It instantly became a fan favorite. The chorus begins:  
*"If The Lord ain't lookin' – just sneak on in  
sit yourself down – make yourself at home  
and when he asks you – the nature of your visit  
just tell him – I am here to roll that stone"*
13. *Jenny Reprise* – It was Carrie's idea to do an off-the-wall reprise of "Keep Your Hat On Jenny", featuring solos by all. She thought we were rehearsing it (as you can hear at the end of the recording), but our engineer Huck Bennert had the tape running. The boys all liked the loose spirit of it.. so here it is, mistakes & all.

Hope you enjoy the listen.... chip