

# Cuz's Corner

By Dennis Frost

Welcome to another edition of Cuz's Corner. Springs in the Carolinas are simply amazing and the fact that we had five inches of snow since our last visit seems all the more astonishing as I look out my window at a sea of greenery. Music is the reason we're meeting here, and March gave us a couple of performances at McGlohan Theatre that may be tough to beat for the rest of 2009. As she's been a folk hero of mine for many decades, I was understandably psyched for the **Joan Baez** performance, but had I known how good the show was going to be, there would have been no containing me. For not only was Joan at the top of her game, she also brought an exquisite band composed of **Todd Phillips, Dirk Powell,** and **John Doyle**. It was almost as if the trademark Joan Baez sound had been reinvented that night. Her new material from the **Day After Tomorrow** disc sparkled and the songs that were so much a part of the '60s were given a wonderful new voice, too. Artists that have this kind of creative longevity simply amaze me.

If you guys have never seen a **Richard Thompson** solo acoustic show, I feel you owe yourself this treat. Not only does the man have enough great songs to play a six-hour show, his guitar work is just simply unsurpassed in terms of tones, textures, and nuances. His show late last month was that of an icon still at his peak and demonstrated how powerful a performance can be when the artist can connect with an audience on this level. It's extremely difficult to describe in words what this man does live, so I guess you'll just have to check him out next time through!

Known more as a legend and musical entity than a band, childhood friends **Joe Ely, Jimmie Dale Gilmore,** and **Butch Hancock** have put a total of four records out in about 40 years as the **Flatlanders**. I have long been a fan of these Lubbock characters, not only for their sound, their passion, and amazing songs, but because of the fact they have always made music for one reason and one reason only – the love of music. It was actually 29 years after their legendary demo recording that the boys went back into the studio to record the soundtrack for **The Horse Whisperer**. Now the longtime buddies are on a roll, having put out a whopping three discs in the last eleven years – did I mention they do this for the love of the music? The new **Hills and Valleys** disc may very well be their best and most indicative of their real life political activism. The really cool thing about this disc is that it has the flavor of a modern-day Woody Guthrie record from the opening song, **Homeland Refuge**, which addresses the current housing crash, to a wonderful cover of Woody's **Sowing on the Mountain**, which closes the proceedings. The chorus to the first tune creatively conjures up the spirit of Guthrie activism in a present-day context: *I'm leaving California for the Dust Bowl. They took it all, there's nowhere else to go. The pastures of plenty are burning by the sea. I'm just a homeland refugee.* The more I listen to this CD, the more

overwhelmed I am by the power of this work. In fact, it may well be the best thing I've listened to in the past couple of years. This one gets the Cuz Five Star Rating!

Speaking of prolific artists (Hah!), **Jesse Winchester** has a brand new disc. I always thought this artist was poised for "folk stardom" at about the time he left the States as a conscientious objector for Montreal in the Vietnam days. Since that time, his recordings have been few and far between, which is all

the more reason his new **Love Filling Station** is so welcome. His soulful voice, well crafted songs, and his undeniable groove are a welcome addition to any collection – welcome back, Jesse, and please pay the Charlotte area a visit with one of those rare live shows!



**Cuz and Little Bit**

Since his days with the legendary **New Grass Revival**, **Bela Fleck** has taken his instrument where no man has gone. More than a performer, Bela has been engaged in an ongoing exploration of exactly how far the banjo could be pushed in the world of music. In addition to the jazz/world fusion of the **Flecktones**, he has performed the music of India, explored Chinese music with **Abigail Washburn and the Sparrow Quartet**, transposed classical music on the banjo, and performed with the likes of Joshua Redman and Edgar Meyer. Now, on the wonderful **Throw Down Your Heart**, Bela has taken the banjo back to its original homeland in the various regions of the African continent. Taking advantage of a year's hiatus from the **Flecktones**, Fleck and a video crew made stops in small villages in Uganda, Tan-

zania, Senegal, and Mali, and recorded over 250 hours of music with local instrumentalists, percussionists, and vocalists. The eighteen songs on this disc are unbelievable and a must for world music fans and available at [www.ThrowDownYourHeart.com](http://www.ThrowDownYourHeart.com). The entire DVD of this epic musical journey should be available soon, so watch for it! One wonders where Bela Fleck's adventures will take the banjo next.

The story of the banjo and black musical history was taken to a new generation locally the first week of April as the **Carolina Chocolate Drops** conducted an inspiring workshop for a predominately 5<sup>th</sup> grade audience at Northwest School of the Arts. It was absolutely magical how Justin Robinson, Dom Flemons, and Rhiannon Giddens conveyed the history of black music and dance to a generation of kids that might not otherwise be exposed to this important aspect of their cultural heritage. Even with the popular success of this band over the last couple of years, these stellar folks are still all about passing on the tradition of Joe Thompson and those that brought this musical legacy over from the African continent long ago. Hats off to the **Chocolate Drops!** If you are at MerleFest later this month, they will be playing the Watson stage on Sunday afternoon - don't miss them.

Quickly, there are three shows coming up in April that I would like to recommend to you. On April 10<sup>th</sup>, catch some wonderful family bluegrass with the **Cherryholmes** at McGlohan Theatre. This is bluegrass at its hottest. ([www.maxxmusic.com](http://www.maxxmusic.com)) **Earl Scruggs** will be performing the next evening, April 11<sup>th</sup>, at Ovens Auditorium. ([www.neighborhoodtheatre.com](http://www.neighborhoodtheatre.com)) Even at 85, Earl is still tearing up the

five-string banjo and is a must see. On April 18<sup>th</sup>, one of the most brilliant and satirical songwriters of our time, **Todd Snider**, will be at the Visulite. The man can take his stories, songs, and humor and compose a two-hour masterpiece like no other. ([www.maxxmusic.com](http://www.maxxmusic.com)) As usual, try to go out and catch some of our great local music at a venue near you! Have a great month and we'll see you in May!

Cuz

**To share with Cuz about your favorite music, contact him at 704-532-8846 or [dcmfrost@mindspring.com](mailto:dcmfrost@mindspring.com).**

