

Cuz's Corner

By Dennis Frost

Welcome, one and all, to the April edition of Cuz's Corner! Having just walked inside to start this article, may I ask just one question? How in the world did we jump from one of the coldest and nastiest winters straight into summertime? I do have to admit that, for the moment, an 87-degree-day does feel mighty good!

The fact that my wife and I lost a good friend this last week got me to thinking how folks can have a dramatic impact on both the planet and the human condition even without power and money. Our friend was a certified organic farmer and organizer of the Davidson Farmer's Market. What a gift to us all it was for him to take a plot of land, farm it, and pass it on to future generations, chemical and pesticide free for a very minimal compensation – he simply believed that this was the right thing to do. There are many amongst us that share belief systems with our friend when it comes to the music we love and enjoy. It is hard for me to imagine roots music surviving without all the volunteer hours spent in assuring that the music is passed on to the next generation. It is a simple fact that our music owes much to all the “organic farmers” that work the concerts, festivals, tirelessly promote the music, and host those great house concerts for no compensation. Our friend's name was Dave Ballard and this article is dedicated to his memory, his wife and farming partner, Suzie, and all the organic farmers of the musical world among us!

Charlotte has been fortunate through the years in having bars that provided the area with some amazing music. Over time, though,

the cigarette smoke seemed to affect me more and more until it got to the point that I mostly avoided these venues. Alright, I do have to admit that being the total music addict, there were certain performers that warranted smoking a couple packs, but these exceptions became rarer through the years. Well, I think it just dawned on me that the new smoking ordinance opened up another world to us non-smokers. Bars like the Comet, the Double Door, the Visulite, and others supply the area with a steady diet of roots music and are now smoke-free - yes! Hats off to the Evening Muse for always being a non-smoking alternative in the music scene and giving local and regional artists a home!

Speaking of roots music and such, did you guys see where **Led Zepelin's Robert Plant** will hit the road with a group called the **Band of Joy**? Evidently, Plant and John Bonham used the name for their '60s group from Birmingham, England that eventually morphed into **Led Zeppelin**. The cool thing about this tour and subsequent recording is the fact that the band members on this project include singer-songwriter extraordinaire **Patty Griffin**, bassist **Byron House** (**Sam Bush Band**), multi-instrumentalist/songwriter/vocalist **Darrell Scott**, drummer **Marco Giovino**, and the incredible **Buddy Miller** on guitar. Having been involved in Americana music over the years, I find it extremely fulfilling the way that talented art-

ists like Robert Plant and Elvis Costello are embracing the music. In a related note, Elvis Costello will be performing at **MerleFest** with the likes of Stuart Duncan, Jim Lauderdale, Mike Compton, and others. As always, MerleFest begins on the last Thursday of April and runs all the way through Sunday, May 2.

In addition to MerleFest, the concert season is also heating up along with the spring weather. Shows that get the Cuz “seal” of approval include: the **Farewell Drifters** at the Evening Muse on April 10, humorist/

satirist/songwriter extraordinaire **Todd Snider** at the Visulite on the 15th, soulful guitarist/singer **Kelly Joe Phelps** at the Muse on the 22nd, and the eclectic old time band **Crooked Still** the next night on the 23rd at the Visulite. (www.maxxmusic.com)

Things also heat up at the Neighborhood Theatre with three nights of amazing roots

music. The **Carolina Chocolate Drops** return to NoDa on the 16th of April, followed the next night with **Mike Cross** on the 17th. **The Wailing Jennys** of **Prairie Home Companion** fame visit town on the last night of the 'Hood's three night folk extravaganza for an April 18th gig. (www.neighborhoodtheatre.com) Cuz's gig of the month, however, would be the **Loud & Rich** show at Knight Theater on April 19th. In case you are confused, **Loud** is none other than recent Grammy winner **Loudon Wainwright III** (**The Charlie Poole Project**) and **Rich** is acclaimed British folk-rock legend **Richard Thompson**. Just a Richard Thompson show is enough to get my heart racing, but adding Loudon to the evening might just do me in! Wow! (www.maxxmusic.com) No doubt the co-gig of the month is



“Cuz” and Little Bit

CFS's April 9th Gathering, which features the music and poetry of Ireland. This one showcases favorites **Little Windows** with **Dr. Ed Wilson**. I caught this performance in a house concert setting and I must tell you that it was simply amazing. Not only is the singing and playing of **Little Windows** breathtaking, but also Dr. Wilson's knowledge and his readings of Yeats have earned him near cult status here in North Carolina. Please read the cover article for more in-depth information and insight into this unique program. The 2009-2010 Charlotte Folk Society season comes to an end in June, and hasn't it been a fantastic and eclectic year? The Programming Committee will be finishing up the 2010 - 2011 season's schedule soon and it looks to be another stellar year at the Great Aunt Stella!

Quickly, there were a couple of CDs that caught my ear this month that I would love to pass on. Although nearly a year has passed since its release, I was taken at first listening by **Solas** alum **Karan Casey's** new release, ***Ships in the Forest***. This recording is a sparse affair with the instrumental backup being predominantly the rich piano playing of Caoimhin Vallely. Karan has an ethereal quality to her voice that cannot be easily described, which works wonderfully well with the old traditional ballads she has chosen for this outing. This CD is just plain beautiful! You can catch the **Karan Casey Band** live in Asheville at the Diana Wortham Theatre on May 14th with guest artist, **John Doyle**. (www.karancasey.com)

I just love it when a great recording from an artist I'm not familiar with suddenly drops out of the sky! Such was the case when **Black Prairie's *Feast of the Hunter's Moon*** was pushed into my CD player last week. This

string band hails from the rich folk traditions of Portland, Oregon and could be described as cross-pollinating the various branches of folk music. This disc is much like a folk travelogue, sometimes traveling around the globe in merely one song. Very fresh and unique music - highly recommended! (www.blackprairie.com)

There were several other CDs this month that I will have to cover in May, as I'm about to get the proverbial hook. Please go through the concert calendar and check out some of the great live music coming to the region this month. This might be a good warm up because May's concert schedule is even hotter! Enjoy those spring flowers and those warm temperatures!

Cuz

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