

A Conversation with Rosie Thomas
by Frank Goodman (9/2007, Puremusic.com)

We always enjoy the opportunity to have one good artist turn us on to another. When we spoke recently with John Doe, he mentioned that he'd been listening to an artist that he liked a lot named Rosie Thomas.

When we looked the lady up, we noticed that she was, indeed, managed by our friend Christopher Moon, who also handles Josh Rouse and Kyle Andrews for Nettwerk Mgt. So he set us up for a conversation that had the feel of two people who were already acquainted, to understate the matter. It ran so long, in fact, that I had to chop it up substantially if I expected anyone to read it in its entirety. (We already get some flak about how long our interviews are, but that's what makes them unique, and sometimes uniquely revealing. We've often heard comments like "I've known this artist personally for some time, and yet found out things in your interview I'd never known about them." So what's a little flak, but water off a duck's back.)

Rosie first hit the spotlight in the 90s with a band called Velour 100. When Sub Pop heard her sing on a Damien Jurado record, they signed her to a solo deal, which lasted three albums. This latest recording, *These Friends Of Mine*, began, alternately, as a non-record project with her friends Denison Witmer and Sufjan Stevens, in their respective pads; just getting together to make music for its own sake, and for fun.

Luckily, it did ultimately turn into a record that was picked up for distribution by Nettwerk. It's a lovely acoustic pop document of three severely talented friends doing it for all the right reasons. We're sure you'll want to pick it up once you've made the artist's acquaintance in the following conversation, and audition the clips on the Listen page.

Puremusic: So how did your wedding gig go last night?

Rosie Thomas: It was great, actually. It was a long day. It was downtown, which was nice. I felt so J.Lo, I swear, because I got there, and it was a surprise for the bride so I was very top secret. I had to call the mother, she had to meet me on the corner. They had to kind of run me in without--like I came in disguise: I had a hat and sunglasses, I felt so J.Lo.

PM: So the bride's a super Rosie Thomas fan.

RT: She really is. Yeah, it was insane. And I had to kind of breathe. Like, okay, when she sees me, when the song starts she's going to freak out, and I have to know that that's okay, and that I feel comfortable and all of it. So I got there, and they hid me in this room. It was bonkers there. They had this security guy, and he kept saying like--

PM: What?

RT: It was nuts! Frank, I'm telling you, I was--

PM: They had a security guy?

RT: --you would think I'm Gwen Stefani, like what's going on? They had a security dude, and then they took me to this floor with an elevator open, obviously somebody had hit the floor to get on the elevator, when it opened, I think it was the groom and some of his guys--I don't know, the groomsmen--and the security guy was like, "Stay back! Get the hell out!" I'm hiding behind a guitar. I'm thinking, "What am I doing?"

PM: *Dude, don't look at me or you'll turn to stone.*

RT: [laughs] Yeah. It was fun. There was a lot of waiting around, and finally--she didn't even know I was playing until the song started. And then she looked kind of, "What's going on? That's not"--there's a piano playing, and there's supposed to be a CD or something. And she looked at me and then started bawling.

PM: Oh, my God, she started crying.

RT: I couldn't even look at her. I played the song "You and Me." I don't, again, know why they suggested--I had to change the end of it, whatever, to make it appropriate--

PM: You had to cheese it up.

RT: Oh, it was really kind of a cheesy change...

PM: They probably didn't even notice if she was bawling, though.

RT: Oh, no. That didn't matter. I did the first dance song, and then that was it. Well, we started getting bored. I mean, we didn't know anyone, so we were just kind of sitting in a corner drinking champagne.

PM: So did you meet any left-of-centers?

RT: No, it definitely didn't live up to that. The people were very nice, but I couldn't say left-of-center, no.

PM: Speaking of left-of-centers, you know who turned me onto you, quite recently? John Doe.

RT: Really?

PM: Yeah. I was interviewing him, and we were talking about music. And I asked, "Well, what are you listening to lately, who's turning you on?" He says, "I'm listening to this girl named Rosie Thomas. I like her a lot."

RT: No kidding! No way!

PM: And then I Googled my way into your life.

RT: Wow.

PM: And I found out that you were managed by my friend Chris Moon.

RT: That's crazy. Where does he live, John Doe?

PM: He lives north of L.A., kind of out in the woods somewhere, far from the madding crowd.

RT: Good for him.

PM: And he was a swell guy. So because he was such a down-to-earth cool person, I figured, well, if he's digging her, she must be cool.

RT: Oh, that's really neat. That's cool to see how--it's really funny, because you just don't know what kind of people really listen to what you do. And of course, as a girl, I just sort of assume, ah, girls like this stuff. I'm always flattered when men come to shows.

PM: Yeah. And he's not your classic sensitive dude, exactly.

RT: No.

PM: He's a very down-to-earth, far from the city kind of guy.

RT: Yeah, that's awesome. He's got a tenderness. I love him.

PM: I saw a beautiful video of yours on Youtube yesterday morning for the song "Red Rover," off your record from 2003, *Only With Laughter Can You Win*. That was really something.

RT: Was it the one that showed my whole family?

PM: Yep. [http://youtube.com/watch?v=_Pqmhezo5EM]

RT: Yeah. I love that one. My parents have filmed pretty much everything from the time we were born; our entire lives, we've just always camcordered, always had Super 8s of everything. And he had just made that--just put that onto a VHS.

PM: So he must have been amazed that it turned into a video.

RT: Yeah, how awesome it was that they were able to use it, which I thought was really great.

PM: Blew your dad away, I'm sure. Well tell us, please, about the family and the home you grew up in, and when music first began to take a hold of you, and at least in part, direct your life?

RT: Ah, let's see, the family I grew up in...

My parents are both musicians. My parents met in L.A. My dad was a full-time musician there. And at some point my brother was born. And my dad decided that being a good father and playing music until 2:00 in the morning and trying to be up early with your son wasn't going to work for him anymore. So he made a good conscious decision to move back to Michigan, which is where he was from, and get a regular job so he could have more financial support and just an emotional investment, really, in the family.

PM: So do you know what kind of musician he was in L.A. before he made the move?

RT: It was like surf rock, in the '60s.

PM: He was a surf rocker.

RT: Yeah, kind of. I mean, I'm trying to classify it.

PM: Like instrumental rock, and stuff like that?

RT: Yeah. I wish he were sitting next to me, because he'd have such a better description--but it's just contemporary rock, really, what was really big in those days. They all wore suits and--

PM: Early '60s rock, kind of pre-British Invasion.

RT: Yeah, yes, exactly. Pretty boy, clean, the whole--it's endearing. I have a lot of his records.

PM: Oh, sure, great stuff.

RT: Oh, for sure. He was in a band called the J.D.'s, and that was the big band that he played and toured in. But then once he moved to Michigan, he and my mother, who is also a singer, decided that in order to carry on doing music, they would do it on the weekends, together. So they just became sort of a cover band--what was it, David and Dee Dee--or David and Delores Thomas. And they got gigs at restaurants every Friday and Saturday night.

PM: Weekend warriors.

RT: Uh-huh, it was awesome. We had babysitters every Friday and Saturday night. My brothers were older than me; of course we had raging parties every weekend, and it was really great. I remember the biggest one they had; my parents left, and they seemed very anxious. I remember, they'd always leave the driveway, and we'd do this thing where we'd flick the lights, and then they'd flick their headlights as their goodbye. They'd go to work--it was about 6:00 o'clock they would leave every Friday and Saturday night. They wouldn't get back until about 2:00 in the morning. So one day, right after they left, I noticed the whole entire house was just completely empty. And I was like, "What is hell is going on?" And my parents bedroom was just filled with all the picture frames from the walls, all the mirrors, anything that could be broken--I was probably eight years old--

you know, "What's going on?" Well, then all of a sudden, like 300 people were at our house. It was awesome.

PM: [laughs] Wow, professional partiers, they took all the breakables down.

RT: They had it down. That was the flyer party. [laughs] And the neighbors came over, my brother was passed out drunk in the bathroom. And his buddy, who wasn't old enough to drink, of course, was drunk--I think he was eating cereal with beer in it, I don't know. And then I was in the back room yelling "Chug, chug, chug!" to some kid. And then we had to go to the neighbors'. And my parents had to come home early--that was an awesome party.

[laughter]

RT: My parents are very laid back, they're incredible human beings. They always taught us to do what we loved. That's the way I would describe it. I never second guessed that there was any other way to live my life, really. And we always performed together. We did family shows together quite often. They started us all on instruments when we were very young.

PM: So your brothers play, too.

RT: Exactly, yeah. My older brother Brian played piano tremendously. And then my oldest brother John just became a musician, really; he's a singer and a guitarist and, gosh, everything, and he did that for years, probably up until about three years ago. He got married and had children, and his life has kind of changed quite significantly. But any time we get together we always play music together. We always have little jam sessions at Christmas. But it was also something--they started me on violin when I was three. And then I started playing piano after that. And it was just always something that was encouraged, but it was never pushed. It seemed very up to us, and it just seemed the pattern--or the place in which we followed was to pursue music.

I don't know, there's a great period in my life where I'm not sure I ever thought I'd be a singer songwriter, but I knew my ambitions were going to be around entertainment. I always knew that. I didn't know what that would be. I didn't know if I would move to New York and study theater, musical theater and audition for Broadway, or if I would be into comedy, or what realm that would take, but I just knew from a very early age that there was a way in which I could not consider I would have a 9 to 5 job. I knew that my job would be impacting others; I just knew that.

PM: Through the entertainment conduit, right.

RT: Yeah, exactly. I just knew that that was the route I was to take. And when I discovered that, it became a very serious endeavor for me at such a young age, that I didn't feel like I could be a normal kid. I always felt like I had to write, I had to always be in pursuit of being prepared for that time when I could leave the house and really begin doing this. And it made me a very serious child, which is funny, because I think most people think I'm such a clown and silly. And I certainly am. But there's a serious side to

me that's always been there, about this pursuit of how am I going to change or impact people, how am I going to be vulnerable enough to share my heart with others in the hope that I help people see themselves or get them through something. I really wanted my life to be that vessel for someone else.

And I'm very thankful, of course. I really can't believe some days--we all have high expectations for ourselves, but there are moments when I allow myself to sit still and realize that I'm very proud of myself, and I'm very proud of my bravery, because I think there are times when there's that road less traveled that you take, and you have no clue what it's going to look like. You have no clue if it's really going to lead you to anything but chaos, and just let-downs, and you're going to get so far into it that you're not going to be able to turn around in time to actually get on the road you need to be on.

I was in Germany one time, I was backpacking and I was by myself, I was walking around--this was years ago, I decided I was going to go to Europe by myself for a month, and really seek myself out. Brought a journal, and three T-shirts, and whatever. I was backpacking. I found out some friends were going to be playing a show there. When I got off the train where they told me to, I had no clue how to get to where I was going. And I was only on foot. I got off the train. I didn't have a cell phone or anything. And I was like, okay, here I go. And I just started walking, and it took me probably about four hours to find this place where they were. And you know that moment when you've walked so far, and you're so confused, you've no clue where you are, every sign is written in a different language, nobody speaks English, anybody I tried to talk to couldn't really tell me--couldn't even understand what I was saying, couldn't really direct me. And at that moment, I thought, I could turn around now and walk back, but that'll take a good hour, too. I can keep just going in this chaotic mess that I'm in, and hope that it leads me to where I'm going.

PM: Wow.

RT: And it finally did. But I feel that way about life sometimes: there are those crossroads where you think, shit, do I need to turn around, or do I just keep moving forward and plunge through all this garbage to get beyond this, there's got to be something good beyond this. And I think Sub Pop came along, that was the first time I really felt that sense of relief.

PM: What was the occasion that turned Sub Pop on to you?

RT: It was Damien Jurado. We had become really good friends, really by accident. I was singing in this band called Velour 100 in Michigan for a year. And I'd been in California before then. I went home for about a year. I took a break, saving money, basically, to figure out whether it was either New York or Seattle that would be the next place for me to go. And this band Velour 100, this friend of mine told me they were looking for a vocalist. I thought, while I'm here that'd be kind of fun, to audition. If they liked me at least it would be a fun thing to do while I was home. So I auditioned for them, and they said, "Yeah, we really want you to sing for us." So we went on our first tour that October. And I said, "So who are we touring with?" And they said, "We're touring with Damien Jurado and this band called Pedro the Lion. I said, "Okay." I was kind of a hippie then. I

had all my homemade clothes on. I said, "Pedro the Lion, are they like a Rastafarian band? If they are, I'm going to love them." They were like, "No, Rosie."

So we got to the show, and it was Damien and Dave Bazan and all those guys. And I was just really on the verge of: "Am I going to Seattle or not?" And I had no clue where these guys were from. And I said, "So where do you live?" They said, "We live in Seattle, you should move there." And I just took that as a sign. I was like, "I can't believe all of you are from Seattle."

Damien had this big thing at the time, he wanted everybody to move to Seattle. He was like, "There's no other city." So he sold me on it. We toured for about a week, and then I fell in love with them, and they were so nice to me. They said, "Rosie, come on tour with us, now that you're done with your tour, just come with us. Just hang out in the van with us, like drive with us for a week or so until you need to go home." And so I did.

PM: Wow.

RT: I just got in the van with them, and I went on maybe a week or so more, and then I took a bus home from New York, I think. And I almost lost my job over there, but it was worth it. But basically after that I decided it would be Seattle. So here I'd been about to move to a city where I wouldn't have known anybody, and I ended up moving to a city where I already had a handful of great friends.

PM: So do those guys, Bazan and Jurado, still live in Seattle?

RT: Yep, they still do. They're loyal Seattleites, for sure. Yeah, they're all still here. When I first moved here I actually lived in the house that Pedro the Lion lived in. I stayed with them throughout the summer. So it was Damien, it was that *Ghost of David* record--

PM: Right.

RT: --first year at school, right, that I came out here. He said, "Why don't you come by, and I want you to sing on my songs." I said, "Okay." I thought I was just going to put some harmonies on them. I remember he said, "All right, I'm going to play the song for you until you get the melody down." I said, "All right. But I'm just going to harmonize, right?" He said, "No, you're going to sing the melody." And he just left the room.

And I was like, "All right." So I sang it by myself, and he left it that way, which I thought was very--

PM: Ah, it's just a solo vocal. See, I got to go back and hear that song.

RT: Yeah, it was just me by myself, and that was it. That was what he wanted. And it was a very interesting idea for him to do that. And then once he turned the record in to Sub Pop they started inquiring about, "Who's your friend Rosie?" And he said, "She's a singer songwriter." When I moved to Seattle, he and I would take these drives in his Volvo, and he would say, "All right, Rosie, what is it you want to do?" And I'm like, "You know what I want to do, dude, I want to entertain people. I want to do this for a

living." He was like, "I'm going to help you." It's funny, he really did. It was that record. I would have never thought that would--when I sang that song that day in his house, I didn't think that was going to lead to anything. I just thought it was a really fun opportunity for me to be with my friend.

PM: Yeah, just one of those experiences you had no idea was going to kick a door open.

RT: Oh, no way. No way.

PM: That it was going to kick *the* door open.

RT: Yeah, for sure. But I mean, to think that Sub Pop would be interested in a hippie type singer/songwriter that sings all this sort of folk pop...I mean, Damien was one of the first sort of singer/songwriter type folk artists that they really had on their label. There was no way I ever would have thought--

PM: Yeah, because it was a pop label, right.

RT: Yeah. It's not like I came to Seattle thinking Sub Pop Records was going to--it wasn't even a thought in my mind. I just enjoyed playing shows for the sake of performing. That was big enough for me at the time.

PM: So maybe before we're done you'll give me Damien's email, because I tried to send him one, and it popped back to me, because I kind of came on to him through researching you, and when I looked into his career a little bit, as soon as I realized that he had a song called "I Break Chairs," I just sat down and wrote a letter to him.

[laughter]

PM: It says, "Damien, if you wrote 'I Break Chairs,' I want to interview you."

RT: He will make you laugh your ass off. He's a funny man.

PM: That's just unbelievable, "I Break Chairs."

RT: I think if you do an interview with him, you'd have to ask him, but if I remember correctly I think it's because he literally was sitting somewhere one day and the chair broke beneath him.

PM: Oh! He breaks chairs like that. Well, that's even funnier.

[laughter]

RT: And he completely centered a record around that. But you'd have to double check with him on that, but I believe that that's where that came from.

PM: So I really like your most recent record, called *These Friends of Mine*. That's a really good disc. And naturally, because of the title and because of how I know now how

you are, I want to talk about some of your friends. I assume that the two guys drawn into the back cover are Denison Witmer and Sufjan Stevens.

RT: Uh-huh, correct.

PM: Can you tell me what each of those guys are like? I know they're very important friends to you.

RT: What they're like...

Denison is very passionate. He's very organized. He's been playing music for years, and the drive he has blows my mind. He tours mostly by himself a lot of time, or he did for years. He helped me get through a summer before I even met him. I got a record of his, when I just moved to Seattle. I went through my first breakup. I was here, and I was just so sad. And I thought, *what am I doing living here? I'm so far from home.* And someone brought me back his record, one of the guys from Pedro the Lion that played a show with Denison. He said, "I think you'd really like this." And I just fell in love with his music.

And somehow or other we became friends. We emailed each other. We ended up playing a show together in Seattle a month later. And I picked him up from the airport. We'd never met face-to-face. And then I lost my car--poor guy, he had two guitars, and was like--I got so nervous and excited to meet him that I couldn't remember where I parked, and that was devastating.

PM: That's such a classic start. *Oh, my God. I can't remember where I parked.*

RT: Isn't that great? But he's a very passionate human being. When we befriended each other it was just instantaneous. We still talk for hours on the phone. And one of the greatest things I remember Denison told me when I first--God, it was years ago. He was in town, we were doing a short tour together, it was my first record. And we were laying on this pull-out bed, we were all--there was three of us having to sleep on it, because we were all sort of crashing at someone's house. I remember he said to me--it was late at night, and the person next to us was sleeping and we were just gabbing, talking like schoolgirls. And he said, "You know what Rosie? If I weren't playing music I think I would just be a social worker of some sort." I said, "Why?" He said, "Because it's no different to me. I mean, isn't that why you do it? To help others, right?" I said, "Yeah, you're right."

PM: Wow.

RT: He said, "So if this all stopped tomorrow, I bet that's what I would do next, because to me it would be the same." And I remember thinking I loved that about him. I believed it. I really bought it. Like he really is dedicated to this for the sake of being available for people to feel something from it, to be changed from it. He's just one of the most sincere, hilarious--he's hilarious. He's like a little kid. He's neurotic, as all of us are, in his own way. But he's been playing, writing and playing, making records since he was a teenager.

PM: Now, he's a currently a Philly guy. Was he always?

RT: I believe he grew up in Lancaster. Yeah, I think he grew up in Lancaster. Gosh, he went to school for--where did he go--he grew up Mennonite.

PM: Wow.

RT: Yeah, he grew up Mennonite. And I think his parents are still in Lancaster. And then at some point, maybe--I know he's lived in Philadelphia for a long time. He just bought a house there for the first time, but he's been there for quite some time. And he's very loyal to Philadelphia. But he thought of moving to Seattle. He came out and visited, didn't know what he was going to do. And he just can't seem to leave that city, he really has such a love for it.

PM: My brother has his entertainment office in Philly and I go there a lot. He does a lot of TV in China and stuff. Next time I go to Philly maybe I could hook up with Denison.

RT: Oh, yeah. He's a Philly dude, you guys should hang out. [laughs]

PM: So what about Sufjan Stevens, where did you run into him, and what's he like?

RT: Sufjan, we both grew up in Michigan. I'd heard of him through friends. I played a show in Grand Rapids once, and a good friend of mine had given me a record of his. And I took it home and listened to and I thought, wow, how unusual, I really like this. And I can't remember the title of this record, it may have just been self-titled. It was his face on the cover of it. And somehow or other I was trying to think, *how am I ever going to put a record out? Will I ever be able to share this music? I'm playing all these shows at these coffee shops. Will I ever have something to give to people?* And a friend of mine said, "You know what? You should call Sufjan's stepdad, he runs Asthmatic Kitty--they don't have a ton of distribution, but still, it would be chance, if they wanted to take you on, to maybe get some records made." So I did, I had a phone conversation with his stepdad.

He said, "I'm very interested in hearing your stuff." And somehow I got the ball rolling and decided to move to Seattle and I just kind of didn't keep up, didn't really look into it. A couple of years later I decided I was going to go to New York, because I thought maybe I should move there. I went out to play a show and Sufjan showed up, and we finally met face-to-face, and I just thought he was so adorable and hilarious and eccentric. And I ended up going out to New York for a couple of months to feel it out, I took a couple months off. And we hung out quite a bit and just really befriended each other. Shortly after that we went on tour together in Europe, where I was headlining, which is hilarious.

PM: Wow, you were headlining in Europe.

RT: Can you believe that? And then, of course, he just blew up.

PM: He did, didn't he?

RT: Ah, he sure did, man. I keep reminding him of that, "There was a time, there was one week I did headline for you, you bastard." He goes, "Whatever, dude."

[laughter]

RT: But so we went to Europe, and we toured it together, just the two of us, and just became friends. And we've been friends ever since. That was before everything took off for him, and one of his first tours on Seven Swans Records. He was very nervous about it. He thought, "I don't know if I'm going to really like touring." Like Denison, he'd been playing music and making records for years, never with the intent it would ever go anywhere. On that European tour, though, I could tell then and there that something was about to happen for him, because every show just seemed to get more and more people wanting to buy his record, and more and more people were freaking out about it.

PM: You could feel the momentum.

RT: Absolutely. And I could see why. He was that captivating, and his lyrics were that moving, and his performance, too--he just had such a presence about him. It was on that tour that I think we just talked about making a map for Michigan because he was talking about the Michigan record that he was doing, I believe. And so it's really neat to see how that developed and just the whole performance of it, and how much it changed, after making that record, from seeing him as a solo artist to seeing him with this huge band; it's really neat to watch that development. But I cherish that time I had with him. I always do. Those moments you have with people before things really take off. You just look back and you realize that your friendship really did begin when you were more simple people. And there's more trust in it, because you know you were friends for no other reason than because you liked each other, liked who you each really were.

PM: Along with Denison and Sufjan, it seems, looking and listening from where I am, that Josh Myers was also very important to this record.

RT: Josh Myers, I would say, saved the record. Because when Suf and Denny and I put this whole thing together--I'm sure you've read this in bios--it wasn't a plan to put a record out. It was just time that I had to get away from Seattle and Sufjan needed a break from music just to do something for fun. And we had a long phone conversation, which led to the beginning of recording this record, where he just said, "Come up to New York, let's just record for fun. Let's write stuff together. We don't have to do anything with it. When is the last time you did that, Rosie?"

PM: Just for fun.

RT: Yeah, just to hear it and learn from it, and think, *wow, if I really had the money, I sure would really like to put trumpet on that or drums.* And so that's how the beginning of the process came about, and basically we recorded a couple of songs that time around. Then I came back again, and we ended up, I think, recording the rest of it. And then Denison got involved, he heard that--"Are you guys recording stuff?" We said yes. He was in Philly, of course. He said, "Well, Rosie, do you want come see me in Philly, because I'd love to hang out with you. I'll pay for your bus ticket if you come down here."

I was like, "All right." And so I went down there. And then he said, "Hey, I've got a couple songs I want to record. Can we do 'Songbird'? I've always wanted to hear you sing it."

PM: Wow.

RT: All of a sudden, we'd recorded five songs together while I was there with him. And then he decided, "I'll come back to New York with you, and we'll do a couple more with Suf." Then all of a sudden we had nine songs.

PM: So what were each of the guys recording on? Did they have Protools on their laptops?

RT: Protools, that's it, in their bedrooms, recording all the songs. Sufjan still uses an 8-track. We recorded most of the songs on his 8-track player.

PM: Ah. A reel-to-reel, or a cassette machine?

RT: Cassette.

PM: Wow. He's got an 8-track cassette machine?

RT: Yeah. That's what he used for most of his records.

PM: Are you kidding me? I had one of those with my brother in Germany; they sound pretty fat.

RT: Yep, it's crazy. And then I believe he then dumps it down to Protools so he can edit it. That's what we recorded on, all those songs we did, I would say a good half of them were with that.

PM: So his master machine is a cassette machine.

RT: I'm telling you, it's his state of mind. He doesn't want to own anything. I think for the first time he owns an instrument. He used to borrow them from people.

PM: What?

RT: He's a minimalist. He does not want to own anything. Like if you went to his apartment, he just doesn't--

PM: What's his religious orientation, or spiritual orientation?

RT: He's Christian. And he has photos. He keeps his photos, he's always taking photos, that's his big thing. But he doesn't really own anything. He's very much a minimalist.

PM: Not into things.

RT: And he doesn't get into material things. So he's got an 8-track, he uses that 8-track still. And it's hilarious. If I'm not mistaken, the *Michigan* record was made on that 8-track, and then he just dumps it onto Protools. But that's mostly where he got all his sounds from. He has a way of capturing sounds. When we did the record we would sit on his couch, just put the microphone in the middle of the room, press record, and just sing.

PM: Get out of here.

RT: I swear to God. Most of it was--it was the laziest, most hilarious recordings I've ever done.

PM: Do you know what mic he was using?

RT: I don't think he even has a lot of expensive equipment, that's the thing. Denison is a little more of a tech-y dude, more of a gear head. But what we did is Denison came down with his laptop, he had Sufjan dump all of the 8-track onto his laptop, so that did it all in Protools sessions. At this point, still, there was no point in doing anything with this record.

PM: It wasn't making a record, just organizing the songs.

RT: Just organizing the songs, and like, "This would be fun to have. Maybe, Rosie, you could give it to your family, or you could do something with it." And Sufjan said, "Jeez, Rosie, maybe Asthmatic Kitty should put it out." I thought, well--my contract with Sub Pop was pretty much at an end, and I thought, well, that would be kind of a neat detour for a record. And I came home and kind forgot about it. And then Denison finally sent me the files. Because he'd worked on it, he started mixing things. He said, "I think you're going to be blown away at what we've done. I don't know how, I don't even remember recording some of it, but it's pretty amazing."

PM: It's a beautiful record.

RT: I mean, we did this stuff so casually, and so loosely, it was hilarious. I wrote a song in the kitchen and ran out--

PM: Which one?

RT: Oh, gosh, "Why Waste More Time?" It's the first one on the record.

PM: Right.

RT: I just wrote it in the kitchen, and I came running out and was like, "Yeah, I just wrote a song. Let's record it." They're like, "What?" I'm like, "Just follow me." Denison punches "record." I think I went through it once, and then I wrote down the lyrics really quick. I just threw the lyrics together, passed them to Sufjan. And we literally just started recording, and Suf was like, "I'll play banjo on it." Denison said, "All right, I'll pick up the electric guitar, I'll put that on it." Suf was like, "Should I put recorder on it?" "No, just play the banjo, dude." Denison brought a couple more microphones, so we just set one

mic up in the middle of the bedroom. I'm sitting on Sufjan's bed. Suf is sitting on a chair. Denison is standing up. And we just place these microphones all over the room and just recorded it. And that was it.

PM: And you didn't even move the mics up to the guitars kind of professionally, just room mics.

RT: No, we just got a room--it was a live recording, we just all three played at the same time.

PM: [laughs] That's even more casual than I thought. Well, there's obviously something to be said for that approach.

RT: And I needed it, that's the thing. It was the first time that I ever approached a record that way, and it was great because it wasn't really approached as making a record, it kind of happened accidentally. So here's the longwinded answer to your question about Josh Myers.

Josh Myers is a good friend of mine who I've known for years. He lives in L.A., and he's a composer. And he's been doing that for years. Well, he finally moved to Seattle. He's also a great engineer and producer. And when I got those songs back, I thought, jeez, perhaps we did make a record, and perhaps we could do something with this. Well, of course, I was hesitant because of their involvement, there's no way I wanted to make Sufjan feel the least uncomfortable if I put this out, or Denison, for that matter. I got their consent, certainly. I said, "How would you guys feel if I did share this with people?" And they were 100 percent behind it, and said, "I think you'd be silly if you didn't. It's your record, Rosie, it's not ours. It's your songs. We just helped you put it together."

PM: That's very generous.

RT: Yeah, totally. They said, "You wrote everything except the covers, it's your record, and we're happy just to help make it with you, put it together." Of course, it was wonderful for them to look at it that way, but I do always look at it as the three of us, because they brought such a uniqueness to it that it really does feel like such a project to me. Had I done that with any two other people, it would not have been the record that it is.

PM: Of course not. They're very big on the record.

RT: Absolutely.

PM: And so where did Josh Myers come into play?

RT: Well, I contacted Josh. He's busy all the time. I said, "Is there any chance you'd have a couple weeks off in your summer?" And he said, "What's this for?" I said, "Well, I can't give you a ton of money because there's no funding behind this, but could you do something for me, could you take these songs and mix them, to sort of mix it down? I don't want to lose the grittiness of this record. However, I do want to add some parts to

give it a little bit more fullness." And he said, "Bring me over the files, I'll listen to everything." And he called me the next day and said, "There's no way I could pass this up. It's great." At this point there were so many friends that were already a part of it, that I thought, why not keep going? So we got Jeremy Enigk, Dave Bazan, and Damien Jurado to sing on it. We hired string players. And Josh coordinated it all. He worked his ass off composing--he wrote all the string parts.

PM: They're really good.

RT: Oh, they're beautiful. And then Tim Walsh is another singer/songwriter that played with Dave Bazan for years. We got him to add some percussion on it. I'd always had that dream of putting on a record all these people that have been a part of my life. Obviously, it's only small bits of Dave and Damien, but to have their involvement on such a special project just sealed the deal for me.

And then I wrote "These Friends of Mine," because I had been working on the arrangement, piecing this whole thing together. I started thinking about what this record really was about for me, and all these friends of mine. And you've asked me about all these people, and I told you that they're people that have inspired me, who have always encouraged me. And I know their hearts are in the right place, and that they're doing this for the good of others. So I was thinking more about that, these great friends that I have, that all play music, that struggle, that have struggled to get the rent paid on time for the sake of living their lives with passion. And I just thought, that's really what this record was for me, was a chance to get together with these people and celebrate that with them. That's how we titled the record.

PM: Yeah. And it's obvious that your friends are crazy about you, too, just by virtue of how much they put into this record. And you put this one out yourself, and Nettwerk is distributing, right?

RT: What happened that summer is that my contract was up with Sub Pop. And Jonathan Poneman at Sub Pop had told me, the first time we took a walk together, "You got a three record deal, as much as I love you." Jonathan has a saying that when he signs an artist or a band, that he just wants to be a launching pad for them. He said, "All I want to be for you is a diving board."

PM: Wow.

RT: "And to give you a chance to jump off of it so that other people know that you exist. That's all I want to be in your life, I want to give you the opportunity, and others, to know that you are alive, and your music exists. And when this contract is done, I want you to move forward."

Yeah, he's awesome. If it weren't for him I would not have had the experiences I've had. I wouldn't have my rent paid, I wouldn't have a creative outlet to finally not feel like a madman anymore, and somewhere to put something, something to say to share with people. But he always said that from the very beginning, that, "I will only be that for you. And as hard as it will be when this time is done, I believe in you so much, Rosie, and I

love you so much, that I know it will be time for you to move on to something else." And so I knew that after that last record, that this would be it. We had a good conversation about it in Philly when I was there with Denison. I mean, I called him really upset. They became my family, really. And he said, "I know it's hard. But remember we talked about this four, five years ago--this is a launching pad, Rosie. I want you to see what else is out there. I don't want your music to get stuck into a like a box with Sub Pop. I know there are so many bigger things, so many different avenues, and outlets."

It was a hard departure for me. But at the same time, that summer, Chris Moon, emailed me, somehow, out of the blue. His timing was perfect. There was no way I was going to promote myself. I thought, well, I don't know what I'm going to do now. I'm not going to knock down people's doors and say, "Hi. Have you heard about me?"

PM: How did Chris know about you, do we know?

RT: From what Chris tells me, he was just a fan for some time. I did a tour with Josh Rouse years ago. I think Chris was there at one of the shows, and I had met him very briefly. And he and his wife just became fans of my music. Perhaps he'd heard through the grapevine that my contract was up with Sub Pop. I said, "Listen, let's go for it, because the timing couldn't be more perfect. I need somebody right now to continue this, because I'm not going to do it. As much as I love people, I certainly don't want to bother anybody, either. If you could bother people for me and share my music with them, I sure would appreciate it." And then he told me about Nettwerk, and said, "Rosie, Nettwerk is such a big corporation, and did you also know that we have an artist-friendly agreement that we do put out records through Nettwerk. And for the first time you could own a record of yours. How would that feel to you?" And I thought wow, jeez, I've never known what that's like to own a master copy, to maybe make some money off of records for the first time in my life by doing it this way.

PM: It's a beautiful thing.

RT: Yeah. And I just thought, *you know what, why not try it?* I tried Sub Pop and that was great. If this is landing in my lap, I just thought it was a good sign.

PM: So how has it been going with this record and with Nettwerk distributing?

RT: Good.

PM: Is it working? Is it moving some copies? Is it making you a little money?

RT: Yeah, it's definitely doing all those things.

PM: It's just a whole new day for the music business, and everybody's got to figure out a new way to do their business. And Josh [Rouse] is certainly doing it for himself. Because one's got to make it work, obviously.

RT: Yeah. It's not just fun, this is the work. And you look at that, and you take that seriously, and you want to financially be able to do it because you care so much about

people that you really want to find a way to be able to continue at it, not get burned out, or not get jaded by it. The last thing I want to do is get pissed off at what I love doing for a living. That's ridiculous. So I try to nurture that as best I can by living in basements, by cutting corners, whatever I can do to keep doing this for a living. But there comes a point when there's an offer to perhaps make it a little bit easier on you financially, sure--unless you're selling your soul--then, sure, why not try it. It's really like I went from Sub Pop to owning my own business. So that's quite a leap, and quite a different position for me to be in, through Nettwerk, to have my own label through them now. But it's very gratifying, because it feels like me. It feels authentic to me, like it's the right thing.

PM: How have you been gigging behind this record, solo or with other people sometimes? How do you do it these days?

RT: The biggest two tours were April and May. For this record, Denison did the whole tour with me, and Sufjan joined us for the East Coast, which was really cool. So we actually got to pull it off, the three of us, and perform it. When you're with your friends you think you're invincible. There were times on stage I forgot we were on stage. There was one time Sufjan just left the stage, he decided he didn't want to sing on this song. And then I laid on the ground...but I think it brought us right back into that living room at Sufjan's, or the bedroom at Denison's, where we just forgot there was an audience. I was the most present I've ever felt performing in my life, having those two on stage with me, and the most calm I've ever felt, and the most confident I've ever felt, because you're up there with your friends. I felt like we were invincible; if ten people or thousands showed up, it wouldn't have mattered, because we liked what we were doing, because we believed in what we were doing, because we're having fun doing it. So that was one of the most enjoyable tours I've done in a long time.

And then we went to Europe, and Denison did that portion as well. And my boyfriend went, too, Jeff Shoop--he also plays with Sufjan Stevens.

PM: What does he play?

RT: He plays guitar. And he was also on that tour. So it was Jeff Shoop, Sufjan, Denison, and I--mostly just Denison, Jeff and I. Sufjan was very kind to commit to a couple of the shows on the East Coast. He played New York and Philadelphia with us, and it was great.

PM: Online I've run into your comedic alter ego, Sheila Saputo.

RT: Oh, yeah. What did you think?

PM: I liked it.

RT: Uh-huh. She's gorgeous. She did that whole tour, Frank, because the whole theme of it was friendship, so she made friendship bracelets, and then she opened every show and talked about what friendship meant to her.

PM: Really, Sheila opened all the shows?

RT: Yeah, she was actually on the bill. It was like Sheila made it. She opened up every one of the shows. She just went through the whole thing of what friendship means to her because she's obviously completely out of her mind. It was hilarious. I enjoyed that so much. I used to bring her on tour, and I kind of stopped doing it for a while, but then I fit her in again.

PM: Well, you've got comedy in your background, you've got theater in your background. Have you auditioned for movies, too, or have you done film work?

RT: When I lived in L.A. I did a couple independent films. But I've always kind of leaned more onto the stage work and being live. But certainly, like any girl, you daydream about that, wow, what it must be like to do that. That would be one to check off, wouldn't it, that would be fun. Sometimes I laugh and think maybe Sheila will get that role before I ever do.

[laughter]

RT: Which is fine, I'd let her have it.

PM: I saw that one of your songs turned up in a classic episode of *Grey's Anatomy*.

RT: That's right, yeah.

PM: And it was so well used in that very classic episode. Have your songs been turning up in other TV shows or films?

RT: Yeah. No films yet, it's all television. *Alias* was the first one, and then *Grey's Anatomy*. I wish I could kiss the person who found my music, because they changed my life financially.

PM: Really?

RT: Absolutely. That's the thing, man. I'm so thankful I write my own music because when that stuff gets placed, and you have your publishing, it's quite a good day when that check comes through. So someone at *Alias*, one of the music directors there--my first placement was with them. And then they got loyal and they used another song for a different episode. And then *Grey's Anatomy* has used at least two or more songs. Mostly *Grey's Anatomy* and *Alias* were the two. And I think I had one, I can't remember, on *One Tree Hill*--I can't remember if that happened or not.

I think I had one on *Tarzan* that was probably around for a month, that was awesome. The episode that the song was in, Tarzan was like he was in a Gap outfit in the middle of the woods. I was like, "Um, why does he look like a model? And I think he's wearing khaki pants; this will last about a week. Thanks for the placement, anyhow." It was awesome.

So those two would be the biggest ones that I got. And it really does help quite significantly because there are women that come to the shows, and you're right, it does make a difference, it's like, "We heard you on *Grey's Anatomy*, we looked you up."

PM: Television is breaking artists today, it's unbelievable.

RT: It's crazy.

PM: It's one of the new ways to make it.

Well, you've been very kind with your time today.

RT: Well you're easy to talk to, Frank. Let's get together when we come to play Nashville in October.

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