

A Conversation with Garrison Starr
by Frank Goodman (1/2008, Puremusic.com)

Having just proofed this interview with Garrison, I'll set it up while it's fresh. This artist is so strong, so real, so talented. In these days where so many are completely manufactured, or just in it for the celebrity, or marginally gifted, it's getting harder to find these and other absolutely necessary qualities from which greatness and inspiration spring.

And a lot of people don't really care about greatness or inspiration. I just don't happen to give a damn about any of them. (Like they say in *The Godfather*, "They're animals, anyway, let them lose their souls.") But seriously, if you're looking for your next great thing and haven't experienced the music of Garrison Starr, her new record *The Girl That Killed September* is her best yet in a long line of singular recordings.

There's a lot of new stuff on this record for diehard fans of G's, too-covers of Neilson Hubbard and Jason Wilkins songs, great vocal percussion forming organic "loops" on which songs get built, less acoustic guitar, so the songs get a more pop feel. It's a brilliant step in the right direction, and a direction co-steered by Sharal Churchill of Media Creature/12x12, an L.A. publishing company turned multi-media label that sounds like the new music business to me. The new CD is only ten bucks, and the mp3's are only 75 cents- you can own the eleven-track downloaded version for \$7.50.

If that sounds like a sales pitch, it's not. It's about not following the example of the vanishing labels, or even iTunes. The new music business has to be dreamed up and executed by the musicians and their champions, because the suits are going away.

Get *The Girl That Killed September*, it's great. (That's a sales pitch.)

Puremusic: Hey, how you doing, G?

Garrison Starr: I'm doing pretty good. How about you?

PM: Ah, life is good. It's really, really good. It's complicated, but it's the holidays.

GS: There you go, it always is around this time.

PM: So what kind of a year has it been for you, looking back? Has it been a good year or--

GS: You know what? You just said it. It's been a complicated year.

PM: Yeah.

GS: It's been an interesting year. And I'd say for the most part it has been pretty difficult. I mean, there have been a lot of rewards, but it's been a lot of hard work. It's kind of been a nose-to-the-grindstone year.

PM: Yeah. And that's what it takes. And it's amazing how much of that it does take. It just takes that most of your whole life long, especially if you're an artist type. There's no blueprint and there are largely no cushy situations.

GS: Exactly.

PM: But I love the way that you manage to keep it real. You're really a killer that way, the way that you live and write with the kind of emotion that really keeps these love songs and relationship songs real and meaningful.

GS: Man, thank you.

PM: I really think *The Girl That Killed September* is your best record ever.

GS: Thank you. I appreciate that. I totally agree. I'm excited about it, and I know we will find a way to get it out there. It's just such a different climate out there, and it's so much about thinking outside the box.

PM: Absolutely.

GS: You can't rely on the traditional avenues and ideas to break a record. You can't do it. Or to break an artist.

PM: No.

GS: In a way it's sort of like guerilla. You know what I mean? It's like every man for himself.

PM: Oh, it's big time guerilla action out there.

GS: It's sort of like warfare. You know?

PM: Yeah.

GS: There's people hiding in the bushes and like jumping out and scaring people, and it's crawling your way to get what you can get.

PM: Yeah. I think that "Unchangeable" is a fantastic single.

GS: Thank you.

PM: Is anybody listening to that? Playing that?

GS: Well, I mean, we're still talking about the radio thing, honestly. We don't really know how to approach that yet.

PM: Yeah.

[For the sake of continuity, here we digressed into some specifics of AAA radio and certain stations nationally that must remain anonymous.]

PM: Tell me about the label, Media Creature/12x12, and its founder, Sharal Churchill.

GS: Well, I met Sharal through [cohort, co-writer, and co-producer] Neilson Hubbard. I met Sharal through Neilson because Media Creature is a publishing company mainly. They started a label after they started the publishing company. So Sharal pitches for film and TV, and they do licensing. And they do all the things that a publishing company does. Neilson administers his publishing through Media Creature.

PM: Are they in L.A. or somewhere else?

GS: They're in L.A., yeah. So initially I had joined a publishing deal, an admin deal with her. And that happened last year, around March we did an admin deal. Then she and Neilson and I were eating in L.A. one day, and she was asking me what I was going to do with my record. At that point, I had shelved it--I mean, I was doing it myself, so it wasn't like I had somebody pushing a hard sell. But at the same time, it's my fifth studio record, I don't want to play that game anymore. To be totally honest, I feel like I'm too good for that. And I don't like what it does to my self-esteem to feel like I'm constantly having to work the circuit and try to convince somebody that they need to put out my record. I have enough of a reputation in this business, people know who I am, and I just feel like I would rather be in a position to have someone come to me. That's just where I am in my life, and I don't want to have my hand out in this industry anymore, the way it's always been.

PM: I hear you.

GS: So that's a decision that I made. I was at that place in my life, emotionally I was at that place. And Sharal said, "Well, why don't we put it out?" And I talked to Neilson about it for a while, and at first we were like, well, let's try to send to a few more people. I had gone back and forth in talks with an upstart label in Houston that didn't work out. I had to turn that down because we just couldn't come to terms. I had been in negotiations with them, and I had sent it out to a couple other people that I was interested in label-wise that I thought seemed to have a good catalog, and I know this person, and this could be good, kind of thing. And nothing panned out.

And I talked to Sharal, and she's like, "Dude, the business isn't the way it used to be, you don't have to do it the same way, and you shouldn't be afraid that we're not going to have like the traditional four months to set it up." She's like, "Let's just go for it." And so we did.

So that's kind of how it came about. I wanted to do something new and different. Sharal is so excited. I mean, she is just *excited*. And that's what I was looking for, someone who would champion the project and champion me. And Sharal has done that. And she's just excited about music, and she's excited about this record and she believes in it, and she wants to make something happen. And I feel like that kind of energy is what I've been looking for for a long time--like since I was on Geffen--well, no, that's not true, because

when I was on Back Porch they were awesome, and they were so behind me and my record. That was a great label, too, but...

PM: Yeah.

GS: But I've been looking for that at least for the last few years, because I didn't feel that way--I mean, I felt so unappreciated at Vanguard for the most part. So it was nice to at least be in a situation where I felt like me and somebody else were on the same page and that we were looking to really make something happen with this music.

PM: Yeah--if somebody is not excited about your music and your record, you're so screwed.

GS: Yeah, totally, you're right.

PM: But I like this Media Creature's self-description: film, TV ads, games, compilations, lifestyle campaigns and special markets--because I mean, your music so belongs all over the TV and film--

GS: Yes.

PM: --they look at least like they're oriented in that direction--

GS: Yeah.

PM: --because Sharal was in music supervision for a long time and seems to have those kind of connects.

GS: Yeah, she does. I mean, and I'm telling you, she's an eternally optimistic person, which is kind of annoying sometimes, because I'm a pessimist and a conspiracy theorist--

PM: [laughs]

GS: --so she's really a good balance. She's such a good person for me because she's like, "What? What's your problem? What is it? I'm not down. I'm not discouraged. What is there to be discouraged about? We're doing great." And I'm always like, "Oh, we are? Great. Okay, whatever you say." She'll leave no stone unturned.

PM: Because the kind of artists that are getting their music in major TV shows and films, they're on your track. They're right in your family of song. And most of them are not as good as you, first of all--but that's another issue.

GS: Thank you.

PM: But I mean, you're making the right kind of music to get on the TV and to get in film.

GS: I agree. I think you're right. And I mean, I feel like this record--I feel like it's more-- even though I love *The Sound of You and Me*, I do feel like this record is more acceptable than that.

PM: I do, too. I think it's more acceptable, I think that's a good word.

GS: Well, and I think that's because it's so much more kind of pop. I think that kind of makes it--it kind of leans it more toward some of the stuff that you're talking about, the licenses and that. And I really--that's kind of what I--that's a big goal for 2008. It's just to license the hell out of the stuff. And Sharal is on that wavelength. So I'm really hoping that we're going to--we've already got a couple of licenses pending, and we're hoping that if those goes through that's going to lead to more stuff. So we'll see.

PM: Yeah, because a lot of those deals are very lucrative.

GS: I know.

PM: I mean, some people we know landed some songs and did very well on various shows.

GS: Do you know Courtney Jaye? Surely you do.

PM: I do, yeah.

GS: Well, she's a good friend of mine.

PM: She's a great person.

GS: She and Kristen Hall and I wrote a song probably like a year ago called "Sweet Ride," and that just got licensed for *Brothers and Sisters*, which is one of my favorite shows. And I can tell you that it's good money.

PM: Well, that licensing stuff, that's just good.

GS: *Grey's Anatomy* is tough. I don't know, man, I'm working on it. I would love to get a song placed on *Grey's Anatomy* or *Private Practice*, because the same person licenses both of those shows, or she supervises for both shows. That's a tough one.

PM: Brett Dennen nailed a bunch of songs on those shows.

GS: I know. Once you get it, it's great. But it's tough to nail it. Everybody wants it.

PM: Yeah. Well, Sharal sounds like she's got some connects, and God bless her, I believe you belong there, and I hope she can get you there.

GS: Thanks.

PM: I was looking at the marketing part of your label's insider one-sheet when I came to a phrase like "picture and text widget pushed to opt in fans." I had to get my high-tech girlfriend to translate that for me. I didn't even know what the hell it meant.

GS: Oh, my God. I don't even know what that means.

PM: Well, apparently what it means is that if you sign in to some kind of a contest or promotion, that they've got a text and a picture thing that gets pushed to your phone.

GS: Yeah. Well, that's what we're about to start doing. We're about to start doing this mobile social network and technology thing. I'm not sure how it's going to work yet, but I know that she's been talking to this company for months. Some of the publicity we intended for this record hasn't really worked out the way that we planned, which has actually kind of worked in our favor. Because if the record sort of stays under the radar, we can do some new things next year, and it won't seem like, "Oh, well, we already heard about this three months ago."

PM: No, no. You can do a more formal release of it, and all that stuff.

GS: Yeah. And the way things are now, it's like, who really cares?

PM: Right. Nobody. It's good or it's not good.

GS: Right, exactly. We're going to do some of this stuff--like we're going to do a Borders tour. We're going to do a small one on the website, just see how that goes. And if it's successful we might try to do some more markets. Borders is giving us three dates for now, and they're going to get behind it and do some promotion and some marketing. So those are the kinds of things that Sharal is real creative about, reaching out to people and sort of making some interesting things happen. We're going to do that and try to kick in this mobile network social technology thing. She's having me like do podcasts and put them up on my Myspace page, and just talking about things. We're talking about--you know Don Was has that My Damn Channel website?

PM: I just kind of got onto that the other day, that new Buddy Miller song, a friend sent me a link about that Julie wrote. I never even heard of it before. It's great, that My Damn Channel. [<http://www.mydamnchannel.com>]

GS: I know. Well, it's spreading around. But Sharal and I are talking about doing something like that that we do about me. So we're kicking around some ideas about just doing some different things like that, because those kinds of things, like reinventing yourself in a way, really putting yourself out there like that, those are the things that are going to get people's attention. And this viral marketing is really where it's at.

PM: No doubt.

GS: Buying ads in *Paste* magazine and stuff, I just don't how effective that is these days, because people are all on the internet. So it's like trying to figure out how to make yourself a presence there. I hate to use this example because I'm sure it gets used all the time, but that Colbie Caillat thing, I mean, that was a Myspace thing. Who knows what

they did to create that kind of buzz? I'm sure it wasn't just that people randomly discovered her. There was some kind of push going on.

PM: Yeah, there was some cyber-muscle behind that somewhere.

GS: But they figured it out. Whether it was a program that goes and like hijacks people's friends, or whatever it was, they figured out a way to make a presence. And I think that's what you got to figure out how to do.

PM: Right.

GS: Whether it's on Myspace or Facebook or YouTube, or whatever it is, you got to figure how to do that.

PM: Although I do not like that [Colbie Caillat] song, but whatever.

GS: Right.

PM: I thought that the four CD-size cards inside the CD case for *The Girl That Killed September* was a really ingenious little idea.

GS: Did you like that?

PM: Yeah, totally cool, because I realized once I took the cards out that oh, you can make a different cover every day. "Oh, I'm tired of that cover, now I can use this."

GS: Exactly. Well, that was her idea. I can't take the credit for it, I have to say. I don't know if everybody has understood that. That was strictly a commercial thing, so the promotional gifts and copies have that, but the regular CDs don't.

PM: Right. Yeah, I wondered about that.

GS: But that was Sharal's idea. So it's nice to have somebody on my team who thinks like that, because I don't.

PM: Someone who has those kinds of ideas.

GS: Exactly. Well, I haven't really had a manager or anything at this point. I mean, Sharal is not my manager, but she does a lot of managerial duties because I don't have one. And she has done that, so she thinks like a manager.

PM: Well, if she comes to Nashville, or when I'm in L.A. next, I hope to meet her sometime, because she sounds like a real character.

GS: Well, I can give you her information. You should track her down. She would love that.

PM: Great, because my brother just got some new digs in Santa Monica, so I want to go and check it out...

It's the curse of advance copies that you never have any credits. So I want to talk about who cut these amazing tracks with you.

GS: Sure. I mean, Neilson Hubbard played and co-produced.

PM: Yeah, he's your partner in perfect crime, all the time.

GS: He's my brother, pretty much.

PM: But he not only co-produced but co-wrote the record this time, right?

GS: Well, not all the songs. I'll tell you the ones that he did co-write. We co-wrote four of them. "Understood," "Changeable," "Stay Home Tonight," and "Fireworks" were all co-writes with Neilson.

PM: Well, there's not a bad song in the bunch. But those are four really good ones.

GS: Thanks. Well, and then "The Girl Who Killed September" is actually Neilson's song.

PM: Oh, really? Oh, that's interesting.

GS: And I've always loved that song so much, and I wanted to cover that. And again "Gold Rush Heart" is Jason's song. So there are two covers on the record, which I'm so excited about.

PM: Now the last one was whose song?

GS: Jason Wilkins. Do you know him?

PM: Sure, though not personally. Wow, great song.

GS: "Gold Rush Heart" is his song. Neilson brought that to me and had said, "Dude, would you be open to like listening to a song to possibly cover it, because I just think you would sound great singing it?"

PM: Wow.

GS: Yeah, I just really decided for this project to be open. I wanted Neilson to produce it, and I really wanted us to go in together and make music, and I wanted to hear what he had to say, and really kind of take some direction from a producer for a change.

PM: And did you cut it at his place?

GS: Yep, the whole thing.

PM: Wow. And so who played? You and Neilson played, obviously.

GS: Yep. Kirk Yoquelet played drums. All three of us played drums, actually. Kirk and Andy Hunt. I can't remember if Neilson played drums on "Little Lonely Girl" or not.

PM: I love that song.

GS: I think we all four did. I wrote that one. The rest of them--the last four that I didn't mention are all mine.

PM: Right. Who played electric?

GS: Well, I played a lot of the electric guitar.

PM: Wow.

GS: Actually, Neilson did, too, and so did Andy Hunt, who engineered. He's a person--like Neilson uses Andy a lot. Well, Neilson is doing a lot more engineering now. But Neilson uses Andy on a lot of his records because he just gets great sounds. Andy was sort of a protégé of Jacquire King.

PM: Right.

GS: Well, Andy worked with Dennis Herring for a long time, but he worked with Jacquire King for longer. He kind of came up under Jacquire, and he learned a lot of skills from him.

PM: I see. Yeah, I got to meet Andy Hunt, because there are a lot of good electric sounds on this record.

GS: Most of that is Andy's work. I mean, Neilson did some engineering, but Andy engineered and mixed the record. I mean, Neilson mixed "Stay Home Tonight," and he mixed "Spectacle." But Andy mixed the rest of the record.

PM: So what was the preproduction process all about? Was there much of that?

GS: Uh-uh, not really.

PM: You just went in and cut it.

GS: Yeah, because see, Neilson and Kirk and I had been on the road together for over a year, so we went in and--I mean, I guess the preproduction--I guess Kirk and Neilson and I did little bit of preproduction, in that we talked about--because we built a lot of loops--organic loops, though, we made the sounds, with our voices, our breath, claps. Like "40 Days" starts out with those claps.

PM: Right.

GS: There's a lot of just organic loops that we built that started the songs, and that we would play to. Instead of a click track, we would play the loops.

PM: That's interesting. Why did you do that? That's such a cool idea.

GS: It was Neilson's idea, honestly.

PM: Organic loops.

GS: He just really wanted to do some kind of tribal percussive thing, he was into that, and he thought it would be a really cool way to do something different. And it was awesome, it was really fun to play to that stuff.

PM: Yeah, because I know I have a question coming up about those percussive vocal techniques.

GS: Oh, and I wanted to tell you, too. I forgot about "Brightest Star," that's a three-way-- it was me and Neilson and Kristen Hall. I didn't want to leave her out.

PM: Ah. What's she like?

GS: She's awesome. She's hilarious, and she's a total character.

PM: Yeah, people say that she's just a super talented person.

GS: She is. She's totally a talented person. I mean, Kristen is truly a larger than life character.

PM: Wow. Now, she is the person that used to be in Sugarland, too, right?

GS: Oh, she started Sugarland. She wrote all the good songs.

[Then we, umm, discussed Sugarland for a little bit.]

GS: I'll tell you a funny story. Kristen, when she was first sort of percolating that idea, she told me about it. She said, "Dude, I'm going to start a country band, and I'm going to make a million dollars."

PM: Oh, my God. You could have been in that band.

GS: No, because I wasn't really what she was looking for. We talked about it. And she was like, "I'm going to go to Nashville. I'm going to make a million dollars and start a country band." And I was like, "Dude, good luck. Man, that sounds awesome." And I said, "I know you're going to do it. Call me when you do it." And she had said, "Hey, listen, what do you think about this girl?" And she played me some stuff with Jennifer Nettles singing. I said, "That voice is the most irritating voice I've ever heard. I hate that."

PM: Yeah. Right, truly irritating.

GS: She goes. "But I'm telling you, it's what's going to make us rich." I was like, "All right..." Next thing I know, like a year later, there they are everywhere. It was crazy. Yeah, it's awesome. I mean, I don't know the numbers but to my knowledge, she's made

enough money to be able to hang out for a little while at least. So that's really great. And I'll tell you, Kristen is a champion for her friends and for other people who she thinks are talented. She's generous in that way.

PM: Yep.

GS: She's not selfish with her talent and stuff. She really tries to get other people involved. I mean, she's brought me in on a couple projects with up and coming country artists who she thought were going to explode.

PM: Amazing.

GS: And I mean, the "Sweet Ride" thing, the song that's now getting licensed for *Brothers and Sisters*, that's a song that I feel really could go somewhere. And you never know, I mean, Kristen is demoing things, and turning songs in all the time. And Kristen has actually just made a record with Neilson, and one of the songs that we wrote is on it. So she spreads it around, which is a wonderful quality.

PM: So what's the record she just did with Neilson like?

GS: It's really pop.

PM: Oh, I got to get up with her, then. I got to cover that.

GS: Yeah, you should touch base with Kristen, because she's got some stuff going on. I don't think she's going to tour behind it, but she's not going to have to, because she'll be able to just--I mean, I would imagine she could sell several thousand copies of that without much promotion at all, just spreading the word around.

PM: Yeah. And she'd just be a good chick to know. She just sounds like a great person, and a real great artist and all that stuff.

GS: She's a gem, and you would love her. And I would totally recommend that you reach out to her.

PM: So this *Girl that Killed September* record, how long did that take to track at Neilson's this time?

GS: Two weeks.

PM: And how did you do it? What did you cut live? Or did you just--

GS: I'm trying to think. First of all, there was a rule on this record that I could not play acoustic guitar. The only way he would let me play acoustic guitar--which was fine with me--but the only way he would let me play acoustic is if I played a lead or some part. He really wanted to get away from the strumming Americana thing.

PM: That's smart.

GS: Well, he was like, "That's the only way that we're going to be able to construct these songs in a different way."

PM: And to get a pop sound out of it, you've got to get away from that Americana strum. Right.

GS: Exactly. So that was really fun. And it also forced me to have to think outside the box. For instance, I played piano on "Little Lonely Girl." So that piano stuff is me.

PM: Great.

GS: And I'm not like great at piano, but if I practice and poke around I can get stuff together.

PM: Yeah, make the right sound.

GS: Yeah. That song is not one take, but it was close because I really worked at it. But it forced me to have to pick up other instruments and do other things. A lot of the record wasn't really cut live.

PM: Right. You just put it together piece by piece.

GS: Yeah. We tried to get--what we would do is build a loop, and then we would sort of get a vibe going. We would record some things as if--if we got keeper stuff, that was great. And actually, I think we might have done "Fireworks"--that vocal was going to be scratch vocal but we kept it because there was an energy to it that we couldn't beat. So that was actually live.

PM: Yeah. And I'm not one of those guys that thinks that, oh, to get the sound you've got to all be in the one room, cut it live. Bullshit. It's a painting. You don't have to do it all in one stroke. Every record's different.

GS: Totally. Well, and I've done that. Like *The Sound of You and Me*, there was a lot more stuff cut live there. And part of the reason for that was that Alex the Great [Brad Jones and Robin Eaton's studio in Nashville] is a bigger studio. Neilson's place is really small, and it's tough to get like one live track because all the tracks bleed together. You really have to commit to that. Most of the time you have to plan that out in advance, because of the bleed factor.

PM: Yeah, and you can't fix anything that went down bleeding, right.

So when we talked briefly yesterday, you mentioned a side project you were getting into with Mack Starks.

GS: Yeah. We're calling it Starkey. I have to tell you, Mack Starks is one of the most overlooked songwriters that's out there, period--but especially in Nashville.

PM: We think he's fantastic.

GS: What are people thinking? I mean, he's like fantastic. And it's great, because Mack-- I'm enjoying working with him too much because he's just--first of all, he's just a great person.

PM: He's a super guy.

GS: His energy is wonderful, and he's smart. And also, I love his melodic and lyrical sensibilities, they're wonderful. And we work really well together. We write really fast together, too, which is cool. And one thing that I love about Mack is that he's very abstract, and it helps me to feel free to just--it pushes me in a different direction. I mean, a lot of times we'll just sit around and write down phrases of popular culture. But it's kind of awesome to see what kind of comes out. So we wrote two songs last night, which was really fun. And we both have a lot of ideas sitting around, unrealized. Kind of the way it's working is that I'll write on my--I have a '74 Tele custom, it's like the greatest guitar on the planet, my black Tele, it's like a frickin' ridiculous guitar.

PM: Wow.

GS: I plug it into an amp, and I just start coming up with guitar riffs, which is something that I love to do. And that's pretty much what I do if I'm sitting around the house playing guitar, that's what I'm doing is just coming up with guitar riffs, because that's just what I like to do. So I'll come up with a guitar riff, and then we'll sit there and we'll just go back and forth. He'll pick up his acoustic and we just start sitting there, and then I'll come up with a melody or he'll come up with something. It's easy and it's fun. I'll tell you what's really cool, too, is he's got--there's a pretty old--it's a place where there's a lot of artist lofts. You can't live there. But oh, what did he tell me--it's an old factory. It's over there on Clinton. If you take 12th and you go through the Gulch, you know?

PM: Right.

GS: And then you kind of stay on 12th, and like instead of taking that left--

PM: Right, you go straight.

GS: You go straight, and it's 11th. And then if you go over Charlotte, and you pass Joe Johnson, Clinton automatically makes a 90 degree turn to the left. Then there's an old factory. I'll tell you exactly--it's where the Yazoo Brewing Company is. This factory where all these artist lofts are, it's not up to codes, and you can't live there because they don't have a sprinkler system in the building, but it's amazing. So Mack shares a loft with Freedy Johnston.

PM: Really? I heard Freedy moved to town.

GS: He did. And they share a loft together. And it is like the greatest vibe. It's old, it's been there since the '40s. And it's got these really tall ceilings, and there's a loft upstairs where Freedy is going to build a studio. It's amazing. It's such a cool, cool space. So we've been writing over there. We get some beer and just sit around and hang out and write songs.

PM: Wow.

GS: And actually, when we were there last night, we got this call from Sharal. She was like, "Hey, Ralph Lauren is doing a new campaign with JC Penny, and they need songs." They sent us some videos, so we put some music to this video. And it ended up being a song for us, but also something that we submitted to the campaign. So it's a good thing.

I just realized that one thing I have found very good for my soul is just to keep being creative. And this co-writing thing is great because it takes you out of yourself, and it keeps you busy. And if you find someone who inspires you--there's so many people around here who do--if you can just keep that going, it's a good way to make you forget that everything is not going exactly the way you wanted to in your own career.

PM: What a shock.

GS: Exactly.

[laughter]

GS: That's life, right?

PM: Right. So was Freedy in on the tune last night, or were you writing just with Mack?

GS: No, it was just with Mack. Freedy wasn't there. And he doesn't usually stay around when we start working. But I've never really been in a serious side project band. And we don't know what it's going to be--my guess is it will probably just be me and Mack, and then we'll hire people to play with us. We haven't really talked about the ins and outs. But I'm pretty excited. He's fantastic. Like in the last few years, it's intriguing, the idea of being in a band. And actually, I had thought about doing *The Girl That Killed September* as a band project. But Neilson really kind of discouraged me from that, because he was like just, "Look, you don't have do that. You do have a fan base, and you are still good with your fans." He's like, "I think people would enjoy seeing another record from you." I don't know, there's a part of me that thinks, a band seems brand new. Do you know what I'm saying?

PM: Like Strays Don't Sleep.

GS: Yeah, exactly. I mean, if you're a singer/songwriter and you're continually putting out records, it's just--I mean, press-wise, it's hard for people to pay attention, there's just so much music out there, and you're not new anymore.

PM: Right.

GS: You're an old singer/songwriter who never made it.

PM: Yeah, you're supposedly a known quantity--

GS: Exactly.

PM: --regardless of how you may be reinventing yourself.

[And we got off on a tangent about a young artist, a new face who's attracting a little psychological bidding war because she's pretty dang good and she's 21. And how what it takes is for someone to really get behind somebody, with conviction, to create any momentum, or even a buzz.]

GS: Take Alanis Morissette, whom I was never a huge fan of. I never thought she could sing, and I don't really love her songs. But somebody saw that it was time for that artist, and somebody took a chance on her. They did it. They went for it. They didn't wait around. And I mean, I know that's not the greatest example to use, but it is an example of how somebody takes a chance on somebody because they believe in it and they go forward. And that's how great artists are made--I mean, that's how *huge* artists are made. And I just think that's interesting, because that's so the way this business is. Everybody is a coward and a follower. There are just not that many people who are going to stand up for something because they believe in it.

PM: It goes back to two things: Goes back to you've got to have somebody that's excited about your music, or you're screwed.

GS: Yeah, exactly. I love it. Can I please use that quote?

PM: [laughs] Yes.

GS: That would be good.

PM: And also that people like to hear people resurface as bands, because it's the unique thing, it's a chemical thing, two people got together and did something, just like you're going to get together with Mack and do a side project, and then it's a different energy, because it's a chemical thing.

GS: Totally, I agree. And again, even not from the industry standpoint, like I said, it's just having this really neat thing, just sort of doing something different. It helps you--and Courtney Jaye and I talked about this at lunch the other day, it kind of helps you to get out of your own bubble for a minute.

PM: Yeah, you got to get out of your bag, for sure.

GS: And it makes you excited about something, and it gets you inspired again, and then there's space for your own career to sort of take shape again, because you get so bogged down in not happening that you're like, "Oh, nobody cares about me, and blah blah blah." And nothing productive comes out of that space. Nothing.

PM: What's the thing that Courtney was doing with Thad Cockrell? Is that happening?

GS: I don't know. We didn't talk about that. She just finished a record that was mixed by Joe Pisapia.

[Joe Pisapia of Guster, and of PM fave Joe, Marc's Brother. And then we went on inevitably about Joe, Marc's Brother, an amazing band that only plays now and then because Joe's now with Guster and Marc and Hags are with Josh Rouse. G was talking about an impromptu show they just did at The Basement.]

GS: And there was this guy down there--have you heard of a guy from Belgium that sings inside the snow globe?

PM: No.

GS: I mean, it's the craziest thing. He wears one of those fuzzy Daniel Boone caps, and like a coat--he must have been burning up. I mean, I think he was about to pass out. But they blow up this giant snow globe, and he zips it up, and then blows it up. And then there's like cut-up paper and stuff that he uses as snow. And he sings Christmas songs.

PM: [laughs]

GS: He sang like six Christmas songs. It was the weirdest beautiful thing I've ever seen.

PM: So I want to get back to the way you use the vocals for percussive tracks. In particular, it was very brainy the way you used the male voice sighing as the percussive track in "Stay Home Tonight." Is that Neilson?

GS: That was Neilson. I mean, all that stuff was his vision. We kind of knew going in that he wanted to do that. And I was all for it. It was great. I love it.

PM: Have you heard that before? I don't recall--maybe a little.

GS: Both he and I are huge fans of Björk, and Björk does that on her stuff a lot. On that *Vespertine* record, she uses a lot of like a guy walking in a box of sand. I saw Björk at the Hollywood Bowl playing that *Vespertine* record when I lived in L.A. And there was a guy on stage in a box of sand, mic'ed.

PM: Wow.

GS: And so Neilson is a huge fan of hers, as I am. I don't know if that's what part of the catalyst was, but he just had this vision going in. He was like, "Here's what we're going to do, and I think this will be a fun way to come up with some loops, but they won't be traditional loops."

PM: Right. So you don't know what program they came from, and all that, right?

GS: Yeah, exactly. That was his brainchild. And it was really fun, I got to say.

PM: Oh, speaking of programs, do you know how Neilson lined that drum track up on "Understood"? What is that crazy--what was he using, do you know? There's a crazy like snare sound that's going wssh! or something. I don't know what it is.

GS: I'm pretty sure that we did--I mean, I think that "Understood" was the one that we did--that's actually--well the loop is all voices.

PM: Oh, my God! The drum loop is all voices?

GS: Yeah. The snare is me standing around going "Gah! Gah!" So it's, "Boom, gah! Boom gah!" Like that's how it started.

PM: So the snare sound may be somebody going wssh! or something like that.

GS: It might be.

PM: I've got to listen closer to it now that you say it's that.

GS: Yeah, you should ask him, because you're not the first person who's asked me. And I'm pretty sure that's what it was.

PM: Wow. And then it's vocals for percussion again on "Gold Rush Heart," I mean, that's really amazing stuff. Now, are those percussive vocals ever part of the live arrangement, or that's just the record?

GS: Well, I mean, it's just for the record for now. When we played at The Basement last Friday, Neilson played with me, we did the vocal stuff on "Stay Home Tonight," which was fun. But it's hard to replicate that with only a three-piece, and with not having the same band all the time. If we can get this to a level where I'm constantly touring with a band, then that would be the time to work out a lot of that stuff. But it's just not always the same, and without Neilson, the person who was part of the process, it's a little harder to do that. And plus, it takes a certain type of--I mean, like Marco, he's been playing drums with me lately, Marco would probably be up for that.

PM: I've heard about this guy. Jack Irwin told me about this guy Marco. He's great, huh?

GS: Yeah, he's amazing. He's just real interesting. He's very nontraditional, and uses a lot of interesting sounds. He's very percussive. I like him. He's good for the new project, the new songs, because he uses so much percussion in his playing.

PM: Let's talk a little bit about that great song that just kills me, "Little Lonely Girl." Who's on the strings?

GS: Oh, that's Eamon McLoughlin, who is in that Greencards band. Yeah, Neilson and Eamon are friends.

PM: Oh, yeah, I think I met him with Neilson one day at Bongo East, right. He's a funny dude.

GS: Yeah, he's totally a funny guy.

PM: It's a beautiful quatrain that the record ends on, in "Brightest Star": "Whenever you're lonely I'll be the wind blowing by, and whenever you need me I'll be the brightest star in the sky." When and how did that chorus get written?

GS: We were at Kristen's house in Atlanta, probably like four or five years ago now. Neilson and I had gone down there to write with Kristen and stay the weekend. Kristen and I drank, and Neilson sat around with us and we wrote songs.

PM: [laughs]

GS: And I remember it was like I had come up with the "I'll be the brightest star in the sky" part. And Kristen had come up with, "I'll be the great north wind blowing by." And so I was like, well, what if it was just like, "I'll be the wind blowing by"? I didn't really like the great north wind part. I just thought maybe it could be simpler. So we sat around and we were just down there writing.

PM: That's beautiful.

GS: Neilson came up with the verse, I remember, "Maybe today, maybe tomorrow, the sun will come out in the rain and shine on your face." And Kristen and I sort of came up with the chorus lyrics. And then the three of us all harmonized on the "na-na's." It was pretty magical. We were all harmonizing. It was really fun. It was really fun. We want to do it again, it's just we're all--that was a magical time and space. It's just that we've all gotten so busy now it's hard to get together like that.

PM: So what kind of a year do you think 2008 is going to be, and what do you want out of it?

GS: Gosh, man, I feel like 2008 is going to be an exciting year. I do. I feel like 2008 is going to be a year of people taking their power back, especially for me, because I feel like 2007 has been a year of realizing--at least in my own life--of realizing that I have choices, and that I have the power to make the choices to make my life better. So I am looking at 2008 for a lot of new and exciting opportunities that I think will come my way because I'm manifesting them, and I'm excited about them. One of my goals this year is to just make more of a presence as a songwriter, do a lot more co-writing, and get myself out there in more ways than just, "Hey, I'm Garrison Starr, and I make records, and come see me play." I want to continue to be inspired by other people and get my songs in different places. So I'm looking forward to making some money in 2008. That is my goal, to make more money, and keep rolling.

PM: As always, my friend, a pleasure to speak with you.

GS: Same here, Frank. Let's get in touch after the holidays. Thanks a lot.

