

## **A Conversation with Ben Taylor      by Frank Goodman (7/2003, Puremusic.com)**

I was minding my own business at the management office, researching something for Puremusic. Probably running down some obscure artist that somebody had told or written me about. A gang email came in from my friend Bob Goldstone, a culture vulture and soulful music aficionado. He is a manager of some kind at Tower Records here in Nashville, and is in charge of the in-store concerts that occur regularly.

I've seen and I've played a lot of those in-store shows, and they usually blow. But I go sometimes just because they do, and you get to see artists under very unusual circumstances, in the light of day next to the bins, with a pretty humble sound system and no lights whatsoever. It's just interesting to see artists up that close in compromising circumstances, see how they handle themselves and the situation. You know?

Anyhow, the email says that The Ben Taylor Band, featuring the son of James and Carly, will be appearing today at 6 PM at the store. I finish at 6, it's up the street. Young Ryan and I buzz up there, he's a 25-year-old songwriter closer to James Taylor territory than Dave Matthews.

There's a good little crowd for a Tower show, for Nashville. As we walk by the stage area, there is obviously a little technical difficulty. The keyboard player (Adam MacDougall) has his Wurlitzer piano somewhat disassembled, and is going at it like he's very conversant with its idiosyncrasies. He's not amused, but he's not unglued.

We pass Ben, who's sitting playing his guitar. He's making this face that looks so much like his dad that I start laughing, and walk over to say hello. "Man, you're doing this face that's so much like your father, it's amazing," and he does a more exaggerated version of it as if to say "Oh, you mean this one?" and I laugh. "Yeah, I know. It's crazy," he says, and we shake hands. He's very personable and nice.

It becomes obvious to the trained eye that the keyboard is not going to work, and also that the keyboardist is a crucial and very gifted instrumentalist, that vibe is in the air. Ben seems slightly chagrined, but handles it extremely well, is cool and gracious about it. The quintet bashes on as four, the acoustic lead player (Rick Musallam) steps up to the plate very impressively, completely unfazed. Seems to enjoy the added pressure of having to carry a suddenly greater load. If the set list changes at all, it is not evident. When Ben asks the acoustic lead guy if he can play such and such without the keyboard, the guy assures him on every occasion, as if to say "I could play all of these by myself if it comes to that, just count it off." All the players are excellent, and the level of interaction is high, it's a good vibe despite the difficulties.

Ben sounds almost exactly like James, it's pretty shocking. His material is of course different, it's more hip hop influenced in the lyric rhythm and in some of the instrumental grooves. The artist is tall and lanky (yo) and busts some cool moves on the little stage, which at 6 PM next to the record bin is pretty cool. His tunes are immediately appealing, really good melodies, the lyrics at first listen seem thoughtful, hipster philosophic kind of thing. Young Ryan seems to enjoy it as much as I do, which in itself is interesting.

After the show, I go back to have a word before Ben starts signing CDs. Ben tells the guy in front of me, "Hang on, my old man's gotta go," and I turn to see his dad standing there, waiting to say goodbye to his son. He's in one of those floppy fishing hats and khakis, the legend that John Mayer rightly dubbed "the blueprint" at the Grammys. There is a tenderness between them that stops me in my tracks, I'm witnessing something very special to me. You can feel the mutual

respect, and the father's pride. They exchange a couple of hushed remarks, and James makes a quick exit, but not before he speaks to a couple of admirers, takes the time.

I drive away, but come back to buy a CD. Ben's just finished signing and is packing up, says yeah, he'll sign one more. I tell him about Puremusic, he says to call him in the afternoon tomorrow, let's do an interview. (That conversation follows.)

I enjoyed the hell outta the CD *Famous Among the Barns*, we think that a listen to the clips provided will make a buying believer out of you. The Ben Taylor Band have put it out on Iris Records, which I believe is owned by Ben, band co-founder and drummer Larry Ciancia, and manager Kipp Stroden. A previous major label deal got typically swallowed up, shelved and otherwise lost in conglomeration, leaving a lingering distaste for that approach, and the story goes that doing it all again at all took some coaxing of Ben by Ciancia and others. But I'm glad The Ben Taylor Band did emerge, we certainly think they will be a creative force and an act with which to reckon. They are touring hard, and coming soon to your town.

**Puremusic:** Hi, Ben, it's Frank.

**Ben Taylor:** Hey, Frank. How ya doing, man?

**PM:** All right, man. How's your day been?

**BT:** Oh, so far really relaxing. I found a cool restaurant right down the way where I had some breakfast, and then I walked around a little bit, and hung out in my room and read a magazine.

**PM:** What did you find for a restaurant, anywhere good?

**BT:** A place called Cafe Coco. Do you know where that is?

**PM:** Oh, yeah, that's a nice hang.

**BT:** It's cool, because I found it the night I got in here at like 4:00 in the morning, and it was the only place open and I hadn't eaten all day. So that's where I got me a veggie burger.

**PM:** Yeah, it's kind of a crazy little AA/NA hang, but there's a lot of denizens of the deep that go there for the late night run.

**BT:** Yeah. It's funny that you should put it like that, because that explains sort of the oddball phenomena.

**PM:** [laughs] Yeah, right. You get the NA crowd, but then you get the vampire crowd.

**BT:** Yeah, you really do. It's pretty interesting. I'm stepping into an elevator. I may lose you, but if I do, I'll call you right back.

**PM:** Okay.

**BT:** I think I've spoken in this elevator before.

**PM:** Oh, really? I didn't know that any elevators would work.

**BT:** Yeah, as a matter of fact, I haven't lost you yet, and I've already traveled five floors.

**PM:** That's amazing. I didn't know that would ever work.

**BT:** Yeah, they must have a Sprint tower in this hotel.

**PM:** You know, I was so glad that my man Goldstone sent me an email about you playing at Tower, because I just dug the living shit out of the show.

**BT:** Right on. That was a pretty odd show that you guys caught.

**PM:** Well, of course, because the Wurlitzer crapped out.

**BT:** Yeah, but the nice thing is that he found one today. Somebody who was there hooked him up with the number of some secondhand shop, and he went and found a great one today. He called earlier from the shop all excited about it.

**PM:** What, he actually bought one?

**BT:** Yeah.

**PM:** Oh, wow. Now, was it a tube one or a transistor one or the one that was the transitional model?

**BT:** It's the same exact one that he had.

**PM:** Because guys like Adam are freaks on the Wurlitzer because those three models are all so different from one another.

**BT:** Yeah, they really are.

**PM:** How old are you, Ben?

**BT:** I'm 26.

**PM:** So are the audiences split between your peers checking you out and older folks checking out James and Carly's musical offspring kind of thing?

**BT:** In the few past months, I haven't played to very many of my own audiences. It's been mostly Dar Williams' audience because we've been touring with her. But when we were headlining our own shows, it was mostly kids my age. But then there were always at least twenty people who are big fans of my parents who were there checking it out who dig it too.

**PM:** Yeah.

**BT:** It's been a pretty mixed batch, yeah, but I'd say mostly kids my age.

**PM:** Cool. You're a really good guitar stylist. Have you been playing since childhood and just got serious about it in your twenties, or have you been serious about it all along?

**BT:** I was actually way more serious about it in my teens. I used to be way better than I am now. The rest of my band gets on me about that more than anything else, really. I got to practice.

**PM:** Really?

**BT:** Yeah.

**PM:** Because I thought you were playing pretty damn good, actually.

**BT:** Thanks, man. It was all right. Had I known my dad was there, I'd have played better. I didn't know he was there until the end of it, because he's ultimately—well, he coined that style. I just sort of play along with it. Guitar-wise, I really—I play a lot like him.

**PM:** Yeah, he wrote the book on that guitar style.

**BT:** Yeah.

**PM:** No doubt about it. So you didn't know he was there until the end either?

**BT:** No, I had no idea.

**PM:** Yeah, because he was really infrognito with that—

**BT:** I know, but that's actually his uniform. If I had seen him, I definitely would have known who it was. I would have recognized him.

**PM:** Oh, really, that's his normal—

**BT:** Yeah, that's how he gets down.

**PM:** [laughs] I was standing waiting to talk to you for a second after the show, and there was a cat in front of me to whom you said, "Hey, hang on a minute. My old man's got to go." I saw him for the first time when you turned. And the rapport between you and your dad was really touching, I thought.

**BT:** Oh, he's my main man. He's definitely one of my best friends in the world. We have a very good relationship.

**PM:** Have you played much electric guitar in your time, or are you a strictly an acoustic cat?

**BT:** When I pick up electric guitars, I play acoustic guitar parts on them.

**PM:** Yeah.

**BT:** I like them, and sometimes you can make it sound pretty interesting, but that's not my—I haven't had any training like that, no.

**PM:** Yeah. I'm mostly an acoustic guy, too, but I like to play the jazz guitars and play finger style parts on them. They sound good.

**BT:** I like to put flat wounds on a Jazzcaster, or I play a Gibson Chet Atkins, too, that I put big heavy gauge strings on, and I like to get down on those, and put a few pedals just to make the parts that I ordinarily play sound weird.

**PM:** Exactly. Yeah, that's my approach too. So I take it you listen to a lot of rap and hip hop, right?

**BT:** I do. That's pretty much all I listen to.

**PM:** For a guy who listens to that mostly—although there are some trippy rap-type lyrics in your songs—it's amazing that the music part of your songs comes out the way it does.

**BT:** It's all a matter of what your vocabulary is. I mean, my vocal phrasing, I would say, is 90% hip hop. It's just that I don't have that cultural background, so my melodic structures and the attitude and mannerism of the way that I get the lyrics across and the actual words and stories themselves, they aren't rap. But I'm heavily, heavily influenced nonetheless.

**PM:** Now, can you turn me on to a couple of rap and hip hop artists that I might dig, being, say, more in the vein of peace rap, jazz rap, shit like that?

**BT:** Get The Roots. Get anything by The Roots. I mean, my favorite album of theirs is their newest, the one called *Chronology*, but that might just be because I'm a diehard Roots fan. Go get *Things Fall Apart*. It was their album before the new one, and it's just—I mean, they're my favorite band ever.

**PM:** Wow.

**BT:** It's all live, all organic, live drums, live bass, live strings, live rhythm section.

**PM:** Oh, really?

**BT:** Yeah, but I mean, it's so phenomenally, phenomenally good. Black Thought, their lead singer, he's one of the most incredible poets of the century, as far as I'm concerned.

**PM:** I'm on it like today. And it's The Roots, just like it sounds?

**BT:** Yeah. Go get The Roots, *Things Fall Apart*, or *Chronology* is the new album. That's great too, but I think that being somebody who's not already a diehard fan, go ahead and get *Things Fall Apart*. I think it's a little bit more accessible. And then get Mos Def, *Black on Both Sides*. That was his first album. And unfortunately they don't have the lyrics printed, but if you sit and listen to the lyrics for long enough, they'll blow your mind.

**PM:** Oh, beautiful. I really appreciate that, and I'm on it.

**BT:** Yeah. You got to go check it out. Who else is amazing? There's a guy name K-Os, he's pretty phenomenal. He sings—he's got a more melodic component to his style, and a lot of acoustic guitars and weird stuff like that, but also—and all of these people are on an amazing positive tip. They're not on the gangster—you know, not bitches and switches and clothes and hos and that kinda tip. They're on to saving the world shit.

**PM:** Wow.

**BT:** Yeah.

**PM:** So are your folks onto any of this?

**BT:** I try. I try. There's a—it's hard to—I mean, unless you really, really listen to a lot of that music, it's hard to catch what they're saying, and that bugs my folks. But when I break it down and tell them what they said, they always love it. Neither of my parents listen to much music, it's funny.

**PM:** It's not like that.

**BT:** Yeah. It's really not.

**PM:** Huh. Their lives are more about other things, or...?

**BT:** Well, their lives are largely about their own music.

**PM:** Right.

**BT:** I don't know, there must have been times in their lives when they listened to a lot of music, but recently, more lately, I think they really don't.

**PM:** It may be just the news as such, or my own ears, I don't know, I hear more about your dad than your mom, and I don't know where her music has gone or is going or what she's up to.

**BT:** My dad stays on the road and hits it pretty hard and continuously, and is continuously more in the public eye. My mom hates touring, and she hates press, so that's why. But she continues to make really phenomenal albums.

**PM:** Man, yeah, she's an amazing artist.

**BT:** She is.

**PM:** So I've come to know just a little bit about you. There's not so much, really, on the net, and I'm happy to be, hopefully, adding to it. But I saw that you've apparently done some pretty high profile modeling.

**BT:** No, actually, I know that a lot of people come to ask that question in interviews, because they get it from somewhere, but it's actually not true.

**PM:** It's not true.

**BT:** No.

**PM:** There's just some pictures of you out there, Calvin Klein pictures or something. And I went, "What's this about?"

**BT:** That was a publicity attempt for an album that thankfully never came out.

**PM:** Oh, that was part of the Sony deal.

**BT:** Yep. That was just an idea from them, trying to create buzz around me.

**PM:** I see.

**BT:** But that was just sort of a one time affair. And then another time I did it for some sort of similar thing, just because a friend of mine was going to do it as well, or something like that. But I've actually never been paid for any of that, so I can't consider that I've ever done it professionally.

**PM:** Got it.

**BT:** And I've never ever done more than a couple days of it, either. I think you have to be miserable

and uncomfortable, too, to qualify as a model.

**PM:** [laughs] Yeah, right. That's my understanding. Yeah, you got to smoke a hell of a lot and not eat a damn thing. Although you're thin enough to do it. I guess that's just the genes. I mean, you've got your dad's torso. But are you also running or working out or—

**BT:** I do a lot of fitness, but usually hotel room fitness.

**PM:** Right. Push-ups and sit-ups, and—

**BT:** More sort of Yoga and martial arts.

**PM:** Ahh, okay, more the eastern way.

**BT:** Yeah.

**PM:** So as far as locale, have you spent your life mostly at Martha's Vineyard, or where else have you spent a lot of time?

**BT:** I mean, aside from traveling around, which has comprised, easily, 30% of my life, I'd say that I split my time pretty equally between Martha's Vineyard and New York.

**PM:** Have you ever seen my buddy Richard Julian play in New York, like at the Living Room or any place like that?

**BT:** No, I haven't, actually. I don't know who that is.

**PM:** Oh, yeah. Watch for him. He's opening for Norah Jones a lot at the moment.

**BT:** Oh, right on. Right on.

**PM:** Yeah, he's really, really funny and really good.

**BT:** Cool.

**PM:** There was a quote of yours, allegedly in *Vanity Fair*, it said something like, "It's a dream come true. I wish I were religious so I could have a god to thank for it." If that's a real quote—

**BT:** What was I talking about?

**PM:** I think you were talking about the good things that had happened to you so far.

**BT:** Well, that's certainly true. My life is good.

**PM:** But the part about not being religious enough to have a god to thank, does that apply?

**BT:** I mean, not a god that I've concentrated on or honed in on enough to give a name to. I don't have an organized religion that I was raised with, no.

**PM:** Or any spiritual trips in your life at all?

**BT:** No. I mean, I'm a spiritual person. But I dedicate that part of myself energetically more to the elements and just the nature of everyday life.

**PM:** Right. And about nature, you seem to be a huge nature person, a wilderness person. Is that not so?

**BT:** Yeah, I really am. If I could right now, rather than being on my fifth month of touring or something like that, I'd definitely be camped out in the woods or in the desert somewhere.

**PM:** So you've traveled extensively all over the world, right?

**BT:** Yeah, especially South America.

**PM:** Oh, y habla Espanol bien?

**BT:** Not exactly.

**PM:** Ah. Where in South America?

**BT:** Mostly in the jungles, just sort of tripping out, and not much in the cities.

**PM:** No shit.

**BT:** Yeah.

**PM:** I was interested that there was a really strong herb song and a strong mushroom song on the record, to say like, "This guy, if he's about this, he just sings right about it." It's beautiful.

**BT:** Thanks very much. I believe pretty strongly in people's right to be able to, A, unwind, and B, relax and inspire themselves in any way that they see fit. And the more organic, the better, as far as I'm concerned.

**PM:** Right.

**BT:** I think it's the natural inclination of humans to need to experience altered states of consciousness. And as I say in "Let it Grow," I think it's unfortunate that the only societally condonable means of removing oneself from our ordinary state of consciousness is the most poisonous.

**PM:** You mean alcohol.

**BT:** Yeah.

**PM:** Yeah. That ain't right.

**BT:** It's hard, man. I mean, I myself had to stop smoking pot for the tour because I had to sing so much. But it had always been something that I never, ever drank before this tour, and I've been drinking a little bit, and it's not nearly as good for me. I can feel it.

**PM:** Yeah. Drinking liquor or drinking beer?

**BT:** Mostly beer, but from time to time I'll have a little liquor. Depends on the day and the circumstances.

**PM:** Yeah. You signed your name on my CD, and in an open letter I saw on the Internet, both,



“With respect.” I thought that that said an unusual thing for an artist, especially a young artist.

**BT:** Yeah? Why, do you find that most young artists are disrespectful?

**PM:** Not that. I just don’t see them incorporating it in their signature, thinking enough about it, and—how shall I say—thinking enough of respecting others to say so.

**BT:** I think that it’s so important in human relations that it’s one of those things that should be taken for granted almost—like I wish that we could just take it for granted that everybody respected everybody immediately when we ran into each other. Unfortunately, it just doesn’t happen.

Wow, this is very funny. I’m in a piano bar, and this pianist is hooking up to one of my mom’s songs that’s way obscure.

**PM:** Really?

**BT:** Yeah, I wouldn’t have expected it. [to the pianist] “Let the River Run”?

**Pianist:** Yeah!

**BT:** Wow.

**PM:** [laughs]

**BT:** That’s very, very funny.

**PM:** That’s a beautiful thing.

**BT:** Yeah. That has never happened before. I mean, I’ve definitely been sitting in places where the pianist has been playing one of my parents’ songs, but never that one before.

**PM:** [laughs] So you make a record for Sony, and it gets swept under the corporate rug. Did you seek another major label deal before releasing your next record independently?

**BT:** No way, man. No, it took the twisting—very much twisting of my arm just to get me back in the studio in the first place.

**PM:** Really?

**BT:** And it took twisting of the arm but also the promise that we were not going to go corporate with it no matter what.

**PM:** Because that was so debilitating, so derailing?

**BT:** No, it wasn’t so much that it injured me as a human being or as an artist, it was just that it put a terrible taste in my mouth for corporate America, and it let me understand how and why for centuries art and business have been clashing in the most horrible way.

**PM:** And how rarely they meet in the middle with any substance.

**BT:** Yes. Invariably, artists are always poor because they spend all their time creating art and have minds for art. And businessmen are always rich because they have minds for business, and they have the wherewithal and the patience to succumb to a system where they have to satisfy investors

on a quarterly basis. And basically, that's what it boils down to, from Michelangelo to Britney Spears. It comes down to the fact that art cannot be quantified on that kind of a level.

**PM:** Yeah.

**BT:** It just can't—it really doesn't work.

I can't believe this guy is playing that song. It cracks me up.

**PM:** [laughs] So does Iris Records intend to release or develop other artists? Is that in mind?

**BT:** We've been toying with the idea of it, because actually our business plan is going so well—or the thing that we said we were going to do we've kind of done. So we've been thinking that we might be in a position to be able to help other artists along the line. But right now we need to focus all of our efforts on just developing ourselves.

**PM:** Right. Yeah, you've got to get where you're going.

**BT:** Yeah, a hundred percent.

**PM:** So can we talk a little bit about each of the guys you were playing with yesterday? Such a super talented bunch.

**BT:** I would love to.

**PM:** Yeah, and a really good feeling of fraternity going on.

**BT:** Yeah, there really is. We're all brothers. Okay, so let's break it down one at a time. Adam MacDougall, the guy whose keyboard broke, is really the most phenomenal musician that I've ever had. He's not only the best keyboard player I've ever played with, he's the best one I've ever heard.

**PM:** Man.

**BT:** He's just—are you coming to the show tonight?

**PM:** Yes, I believe so. [In the end I didn't quite get there.]

**BT:** I can't wait for you to hear what this guy does when he's let loose upon a working keyboard.

**PM:** Right, of course—and keyboards.

**BT:** Yeah, I mean, he's really—there are some people who are plugged into the earth, and it flows through them, this natural earthly energy. And there are some people who I feel are just flying around plugging into heaven. And it comes through the heavens right through their hands or their voices, or whatever it is.

**PM:** Yeah.

**BT:** He's one of these cats who's plugged in at both ends.

**PM:** Where does he come from?

**BT:** He grew up on Roosevelt Island, New York.

**PM:** That guitar player was fabulous. What's his name?

**BT:** His name is Rick Musallam. He's originally from Lebanon. And he's been with us the shortest amount of time, but we auditioned people—we had been playing with two other guitar players, and when we looked to replace them, we replaced both of them with just Rick because he was the only guy who came to audition who could play both of their parts simultaneously. [laughs]

**PM:** Yeah, he was unbelievable. And when Adam's keyboard broke, he stepped up to the plate in a remarkable way.

**BT:** Yeah, he always does. He's really phenomenal.

And then Joe Dunne, the bass player, he's a close friend of the guy I recorded the album with. And the guy I recorded the album with needed to stay at home more and also was just too kind of thoroughbred to do this hard sort of back breaking phase of our project development, and so he recommended a friend of his and taught him all the parts, and Joe stepped up to the plate.

**PM:** And the drummer is one of your closest homies, I take it.

**BT:** Yes. Larry and I started the record company together, and he is my boy from back in the Sony days. He actually recorded the Sony album with me. And he's the guy in the band I've been with the longest. He's also the one who convinced me to come, sort of, out of hiding in Martha's Vineyard to make another record. And he's really great.

**PM:** If you hadn't made another record, what might you have done instead?

**BT:** I don't know. I haven't figured it out. I'm not that qualified. I'm only qualified to do music, or farming. Agriculture or wilderness guiding and traveling, so one of those two other things, I guess. But when it came right down to it, the idea that I was scared to death to get on stage and sing made that the obvious choice.

**PM:** "I can't do that, I better do that."

**BT:** Yeah, yeah. I mean, in life, you only have so many opportunities to face and overcome incredible fears. And then there's pretty much nothing else that gives you a greater sense of empowerment if you stay with it and manage to actually feel good about what you do.

**PM:** And is it any longer a fear? You looked awfully comfortable in your body.

**BT:** No, I'm still scared to death. And hopefully to some degree I will be until I'm ready to be done being on stage, because that fear, I've come to understand, it translates into strength, and it translates into energy on stage. The audience doesn't perceive it as fear, they perceive it as just energy, really.

**PM:** Yeah. Wow, yeah, because that's what I saw, I saw energy.

There are things of course that new and old fans want to know about your life growing up, but the questions are way too jive. So I ask for your help in phrasing the questions in some way that's palatable to you.

**BT:** What, about the folks?

**PM:** About growing up as the son of James and Carly. I mean, did you guys—well, I guess you were pretty young when they separated.

**BT:** I was. I was, and my time for a while was pretty equally divided between the two of them. All I really have to say about it is they're great parents, both of them, which is impressive in and of itself, given the fact that they're both celebrities, because it's hard to be a human being with your feet on the ground, much less a good role model, if you've been cursed with celebrity. You know?

**PM:** Right.

**BT:** I don't mean "cursed" with it, because as my Uncle Livingston says—and I think it's funny but also true—he says that the worst thing that you can possibly be is poor and famous and the best thing that you can possibly be is rich and anonymous.

**PM:** [laughs]

**BT:** I think that's true. And I'm kind of shooting for somewhere in the middle. But my folks ended up with a huge amount of notoriety, both of them, and a huge amount of public recognition. So it's hard, because basically, at best, what singer songwriters do is write and sing songs, and that doesn't make them anything except, if they're good at it, exceptional artists. Unfortunately, the public misconception tends to put them in a position of supposedly knowing more about life than the rest of the people, and they really don't.

**PM:** Right.

**BT:** I mean, it's absurd when I hear my mother or father getting interviewed and they're asked about politics. I think to myself, "Why are these people expected to give some kind of political analysis? They're fuckin' rock stars!"

**PM:** [laughs]

**BT:** I think the danger is that you fall into that belief and start thinking that you actually are in a position, because you're a celebrity, to know more than the average joe. But neither of my parents are that way. They both just sort of figure, "We're good at what we do, let that be enough." And that's the way they always approached it. They never made me feel like anything else was different. [then to someone on his end] Hello, my cracker...

**PM:** [laughs]

**BT:** The only really, really bad part of my crew is this guy, Larry Ciancia, who is always just on my ass and he can't play drums at all.

**PM:** Right, he's a real son-of-a-bitch, I could tell. A real ball buster.

**BT:** [laughs] He is, for sure. He just walked in. [to Larry] I'm doing an interview for a webzine. [Larry says something I can't quite hear.] No, I already talked about you and said nice things when you were not here. [Larry makes another comment, Ben laughs] He's paying me off now.

**PM:** "Safe Enough to Wake Up," that's such a beautiful song. Will you tell me something about the person or situation that inspired that song?

**BT:** You know what? I feel like in life there are a lot of people who are sort of blissfully sleeping

their way through the truth, the sometimes unpleasant and painful truth of what we're going through on a day-to-day basis. And "Safe Enough to Wake Up" is about the fact that it's really, really easy to just open our eyes and look around and see what's going on, even though it's a lot more tempting to remain blissfully asleep. But we, as Americans especially, but as human beings in general, are really in a position to do a lot of good if we realize what's going on. So "Safe Enough to Wake Up" is just a reminder that even though it might seem nice to keep sleeping, it is safe enough to wake up and be aware.

**PM:** I like, too, the song "Just Like Everyone Else." It was a really cool song that had a much rootsier vibe musically, a good change of pace from the more pop produced songs. Do you listen to much music that's in that vein?

**BT:** I listen to good music, whatever it is, and I enjoy it, if it's good. But that song, lyrically, it's just sort of an anthem to my own hypocrisy. I don't mind being called hypocritical, I know I am. But with that song, that particular element of production just seemed like the right thing for it.

**PM:** Yeah, I really liked it, and I thought it lent a lot of color.

So are there short-term goals that you guys are aiming at right at the moment?

**BT:** We just want to get our music around to as many people as we can. Spread the word, get the love.

**PM:** Are you enjoying the Dar slot?

**BT:** Yeah, I love Dar. I love her music and I love her band.

**PM:** Is Michael Visceglia on the bass currently?

**BT:** Yeah, he is. Steve Holly on drums—from Wings, for God sakes.

**PM:** Oh, Lord in heaven.

**BT:** We got new mattresses?

**Man's voice:** Yeah, baby.

**BT:** I just got on my bus, which is full of mattresses, wow.

**PM:** [laughs]

**BT:** I really do love the Dar band. They're phenomenal people, they're great to be touring with, and they accept us clowning around and having a lot of fun with them.

**PM:** One last question: What are you reading at the moment?

**BT:** A lot of poetry. A lot of Rainer Maria Rilke. I just got a *Popular Science* magazine, and I've been reading articles about what's going on in the scientific community. And I'm also reading—actually I'm on my third lap through a series of 20 novels about the war between the English and the French in the 1800s. They're my favorite books pretty much.

**PM:** What are they called?

**BT:** They're these books by Patrick O'Brian. And there are 20 of them, so they all have different names. And I'm literally on my third lap through this series of 20. I'm on the third one again, but—

**PM:** [laughs] Unbelievable.

**BT:** Yeah. I'll be reading these for the rest of my life, that's what I decided.

**PM:** Holy shit.

**BT:** It's like movies that you watch again and again and again because you love them so much.

**PM:** Well, it's enlightening to talk to you, and I enjoyed the hell out of your music, Ben. And it's a wonderful band that you have. I hope you'll check out [Puremusic.com](http://Puremusic.com).

**BT:** I definitely will, man.

**PM:** And we'll be spreading the gospel of Ben and the boys.

**BT:** Good for you, man. Anything you can do to get the word out will be a great asset to us.

**PM:** And I hope to see you tonight.

**BT:** I hope so, too. Thank you, brother.

**PM:** Thank you, Ben. Take care.

