

**Puremusic Interview with Buddy and Julie Miller
by Frank Goodman 10/2001**

I fell into a coffee shop discussion recently about who had the coolest band in town. This was before the terrorist attacks, when we were still discussing normal things. Music above all, movies, sports, the opposite sex. A couple of genres came up, and a number of bands. But when the votes tallied up across a few tables, Buddy and Julie Miller came out on top, and everyone seemed okay with that.

They have been referred to as the greatest couple in country music since Tammy Wynette and George Jones. They may not be as tempestuous, but their chemistry is very entertaining, and their partnership very productive. Since her days as a Christian recording artist, Julie has released two CDs on Hightone Records, and Buddy three. They're all over each other's albums, and yet each record remains centered around the artist at hand. That speaks to many things: the strong musical identity that each of them possesses, the total support each gives the other, the inextricability of their gifts. Their latest and eponymous album is their first formal collaboration, and it's reminiscent of their moving and powerful live show.

In person, as on stage, they are unusual and charming, disarmingly so. Buddy is steady, reserved, wry. He's the man of the house, protective and capable on many levels, industrious. Julie is mercurial at least, her mood meter can jump from wounded compassion to enlightened joy and back again in a moment or two. She's like a wide open person, one that laughs and cries a lot, precious and deep. Two different kinds of intense artists who go together in a way that is archetypal, ancient.

We had a really fun conversation for a couple of hours. I stayed longer than I meant to, I was having such a good time. We hit some places that were so confessional and private I felt blessed, and others that were more like an Abbot and Costello routine, or Lucy and Ricky.

I have to go to FarmAid in the morning, and am heartsick that I will have to miss their show here in Nashville tomorrow night. The last time I saw them at a nightclub called 12th & Porter, it was so packed I went in through the kitchen, and ended up side stage, and moved in for a good view of the whole band. When the show began, it took my breath away in its power and presence. When they started singing, I knew I was seeing something holy.

We're lucky to have Buddy and Julie Miller around. I'm glad they're starting to get covered by big artists like the Dixie Chicks and Lee Ann Womack, and that their own records are selling in bigger numbers all the time. The growing resurgence of bluegrass and all kinds of country and roots music owes a lot to a recent funny movie, but has everything to do with the fact that there are a lot of great artists in this genre and a world that's looking for where real country music went. It's right here.

[While we waited for Julie to appear, Buddy and I were shooting the breeze technically, about a recording software called ProTools. At one point I just started the recorder for the heck of it.]

Buddy Miller: I have a friend in NY who says that they get the rhythm section to play all day, and then use four bars of it -- loop it, dupe it, and quantize it. I don't use it like that. You can just use it as a real nice tape recorder. That's what I do. And the plug-ins are great, it's great technology. I've got a real big system, I beta tested for them for seven years. I had a two inch machine here, too. But it was really big, and every time I pressed the stop button on the remote, the button would fly across the room. It would rattle like a washing machine on rewind, and the hiss was louder than I liked to talk over. And, for what we do, I don't need it. I switched to digital, and was amazed. There are things about tape that I miss, the actual smell of tape is the thing I miss the most. And you can get the sound a little silkier, you know, things like that. In the end product, nobody can really hear the difference.

Puremusic: Right, since you're going to end up in the digital domain anyhow [a CD], and largely listened to in someone's car.

BM: It is all cumulative, digital makes you work a little bit harder.

PM: Do you master to an analog machine?

BM: Generally what I do is, I'll mix to an ATR Ampex half inch machine, it's the finest half inch mastering machine. Then I'll dump that back into ProTools and do the mastering. I didn't do the mastering on this last record, we didn't have time. I've been out on tour most of this last whole year, and it wasn't easy getting this record done.

PM: I never realized until I read some bios that you spent some time in Jersey and PA. What part of your life was spent there?

BM: High school, in the Princeton area. You say you're from Bucks County [PA], then you know there's a lot of good bluegrass going on around there.

PM: You remember a fantastic band called Bottle Hill from Jersey? What happened to them, they were amazing.

BM: I don't know, man, I don't know what happened to a lot of people... I used to play bluegrass there with the guy that just wrote the biography on Bill Monroe, Richard Smith [*Can't You Hear Me Callin'*, Da Capo Press, www.dacapopress.com]. Then I lived near the northern PA border towards Woodstock after high school, and beat it outta there as soon as I could.

PM: Joined a band and went out West?

BM: Within a year or so, right. We thought we had a deal, with ABC Paramount or A&M, but ended up playing on the streets. Whoever it was, they'd just signed the Ozark Mountain Daredevils, and didn't need two bands in what seemed a similar vein. We had two frailing

banjo players, a fiddle player, and bass and drums. I played electric guitar and pedal steel. We went out there in our school bus with eight guys and their girlfriends, and twice as many dogs. So we had no money. We had to play on the streets in Berkeley and San Francisco. We'd live off discarded food in trash bins of restaurants and crash on friends' floors.

PM: This is what, early 70s?

BM: '72.

PM: I was in Berkeley in '72 as well.

BM: Probably saw me playing on the street. We'd set up right there by campus, whatever that was.

PM: Right, Telegraph Ave. and Bancroft Way.

BM: So, we'd play and try and get some money. Finally somebody heard us who was friends of that fiddle player from Sea Train.

PM: Richard Greene.

BM: Right. Well, this guy appreciated what we were doing. We were pretty acoustic on the street at this point. He owned the Russian River Inn. [In beautiful Sonoma County, about 60-70 miles North of Berkeley.]

PM: Nice joint.

BM: You know it?

PM: Sure, we used to play the Highland Dell in Monte Rio and some other clubs up there.

BM: So, at this time, the Russian River Inn was closed. He said, "Well, I own this place, and I see that half of you are sleeping in this bus. If you guys want to stay here, you can, nobody's renting it or using it as a bar at the moment." So we had our sleeping bags on top of the bar, you know, found a couple of cots. The kitchen was great, set up for business. We lived there for about six months. We'd play all the joints around there, like the Inn of the Beginning in Cotati. We opened our share of good dates for bigger acts.

PM: What was that band called?

BM: St. Elmo's Fire. And as tough as it was, it was still fun. We finally got enough money to drive East, and we stopped here in Nashville along the way. I talked them into going to the Opry. It was Christmas time, and everybody was home, it was a great show. Marty Robbins was playing, and Dolly Parton came out solo and sang a song she'd just written, "Jolene."

PM: Oh my.

BM: It was amazing. We were up in the balcony, eating fried chicken. Anyhow, we continued on, looking for the right situation. We ended up in Massachusetts, in the Stockbridge area.

PM: Where “Alice’s Restaurant” is.

BM: Exactly. There was a studio there called Shaggy Dog Studios, and the guy who owned it took a liking to us, and gave us whatever time we wanted. So we figured, “This is a good opportunity, let’s move here.” So we did, and we had a beautiful house. The previous owner or tenant was Paul Stookey of Peter, Paul and Mary. At this time, things were getting a little depraved, we liked to drink. We were playing a lot, and bought a Greyhound Bus, a great GMC 4103 with the round windows, but one of our banjo players totaled it, too much drinking. After I left the band, he totaled a second bus while reaching for a beer. Instead of making a turn, he slammed into the house of an elderly couple, knocked it right off the foundation.

[At this moment, a gentleman showed up bearing one of those Music City plaques with the gold or platinum records, couldn’t tell which. He introduced himself as John Lomax. He was presenting it to Buddy for working with an Australian artist named Kasey Chambers. He also had a book that he’d written about her family’s epic saga, and was showing it around, the Millers were impressed. He’d also come to pick up their latest record. Julie had appeared at this moment, and offered me something to drink, an Odwalla. Buddy asked for water.]

PM: You’re just back, you say. Has Julie been out on the road with you?

BM: She only came out for the last two Emmy Lou dates, she’s been staying home. We just did a family thing together. I’ve been doing double duty, because I opened about 20 of those dates.

PM: Do you open solo, or with a band?

BM: I have Brady [Blade] play a cocktail drum, and the front of house guy [the person who mixes the show out front], Dean Norman, he plays the bass. So, it’s a different look, and a different sound with the cocktail drum. [a tall drum with heads on the top and bottom. There’s a snare on the top head, played with brushes or sticks, and a traditional foot pedal to get a bass drum sound out of the bottom head.]

PM: Yeah, you got to change the look, and change your shirt between sets.

BM: Yeah, I only do just because I sweat, you know. It doesn’t matter too much what we look like, everybody’s looking at Emmy Lou anyway.

PM: On top of being great, she’s still so striking. Who’s playing in the Emmy Lou band these days?

BM: It's me, Brady Blade, and Tony Hall on bass. It's just been three pieces and her for seven years. Daniel Lanois played guitar the tour after *Wrecking Ball*, and I've been on guitar since then. We changed bass players a year ago, Daryl Johnson had played previously.

PM: So, you get to play your ass off every night.

BM: Oh yeah. There's a lot of freedom.

[Julie reappears with the beverages, Buddy's checking out the gold record.]

PM: Do you have a tune on that record?

BM: No, sang on it, but we have had some cuts, with the Dixie Chicks and Lee Anne Womack...

PM: I've been reading about all the great cuts of late, quite a windfall of them the last couple of years.

BM: It's been mindblowing.

PM: It may not be the end of financial insecurity, but it puts things on a pretty even keel.

BM: Certainly keeps you in cat litter, yeah. And we just like the work. We're going over to sing with Lee Ann Womack in an hour on a song of ours that she did and is redoing. She cut another one of Julie's recently, we don't know if it's gonna make the record, not yet.

PM: Which other Julie song did Lee Ann cut?

BM: "I Need You." It's a rockin thing. We really don't know if it will make the record at all.

PM: Really? That's interesting, might be good for her image. It's kind of, how shall I say, on the dirty side, you know?

Julie Miller: [laughs] Yeah, that's what we thought.

PM: But I mean it in a good way, of course, it's a great song. But all the cut action is really great, one can easily tour all year and not make that kind of money.

BM: It was pretty unexpected.

PM: You know what I'd like to hear? Little Jimmy Scott's cut of "All My Tears."

BM: Oh, you've never heard that? Before you go, I have to play that for you.

PM: He's such an otherworldly singer.

JM: Oh wow. That's for sure.

BM: It was a ways into the song before Julie recognized it.

PM: So, let's see, I did bring some questions. This first one woke me up at 4:30 this morning.

BM: [to Julie] That's a good question for you. [laughter]

JM: Absolutely, if it arrived at 4 AM.

PM: Speaking musically, one of the things that makes your partnership so rich is that Julie is bringing the folk and rock elements to the table, and Buddy the country, soul, and the R&B factor. With that in mind, and speaking personally, what are the elements that each of you bring to the table that make your friendship and your marriage work?

BM: That's a good question. [stands up and walks to a ringing phone]

JM: No, turn it off, Buddy! [laughter]

[After a humorous rapid fire family conference, Buddy agrees to take it off the hook, after the caller's message is complete.]

JM: That's something, Buddy taking it off the hook -- that doesn't happen.

PM: Really? As a recording freak, I woulda thought he'd want it turned off a lot.

JM: [whispering] Oh no, he's a telephone freak.

BM: [from the next room] I'm not a telephone *freak*.

PM: [whispering, to Julie] He likes to talk on the telephone?

BM: [from the next room, louder] No, I hate it!

PM: You just like to know who's *on* the telephone.

JM: He needs to know. [laughing]

BM: I just like to know who's calling.

JM: He's an information kind of a guy. Anything that's involved with information. The mail, the Fed Ex man, the phone...

BM: I think I'm a normal guy. She's not. I can't get her on the phone when I'm calling from the road! And half the time she probably hears me on the machine, saying, "Julie, it's me, pick up the phone..."

JM: Thing is, I just don't even hear the phone... I don't want to be responsible for knowing.

BM: She doesn't have it turned on sometimes. We had an elaborate system hooked up one time...

JM: You might not want to reveal.

BM: Oh, okay, yeah. [Julie's laughing]

PM: Oh, were we getting into family secrets?

BM: Well, no, I just mean with the...okay, maybe we shouldn't.

JM: Well, he's information guy. I'm Rapunzel, with cats.

PM: Ain't nothin wrong with that.

BM: You ever see nine cats together? [Julie's laughing] You might change your mind. It's like a little herd.

JM: They didn't have a mommy or a daddy, and I couldn't find them one.

PM: One at a time, or a litter?

JM: Well, we did find a couple of litters. We gave away part of two litters, and have the rest. And the mama of the second litter, too. We didn't want to claim her, so we didn't give her a name, she was just mama. Now she thinks that's her name. The other night I thought she was lost, and I was walking the neighborhood at 2 AM calling "Mama..."

BM: Okay, to the question, then.

PM: Okay. What are you each bringing to the table personally that makes the relationship work?

BM: I bring a certain uptightness, [laughter] I think, that's needed at times.

JM: The necessary uptightness, it's essential.

BM: I can't think of anything else I bring. I get the mail, I tell her who called. [laughter]

PM: Let's try it from another angle. Why don't you each answer the question for the other person, say what it is that they bring to the table.

BM: She helps me to keep my...I can't say focus, because I don't really focus on anything...to keep my God awareness present, instead of getting caught up in all this stupid stuff. That's one of the big things. And she's just a real inspiration to be around, all the time.

PM: That angle works a lot better. So, what does Buddy bring, Julie?

JM: I think I just turned into a little pile of dust... If it weren't for Buddy, nothing would happen. There would be no music. He's the most incredible musician you can meet, he's the inspiration. Most great musicians just want to do things the way they want to do it. He's that rare gifted musician that enjoys facilitating someone else's vision, if they ask him to. We ping pong back and forth with stuff. Julie wants to rock a little bit, and don't play quite as good on Julie's songs. Just use one finger. [laughing]

PM: It's beautiful that both people are saying that the other one is their inspiration. It sounds like there's not a control freak in the crowd. Are either of you inclined that way?

JM: I'm the control freak. I start out saying, "Just do whatever you want to do." But once I'm even slightly involved, I sort of get carried away.

PM: That's interesting, when it's you that, how can I say this without being offensive... [Julie's laughing] is the more otherworldly of the two? Not the guy with his feet on the ground and his hands on the controls.

BM: I'm open to whatever way things are going. Sometimes I have an idea...

JM: He always has tons of ideas. But, as talented as he is, he'll always let someone else say "Well, will you play it *this* way for me?" at any time.

BM: I just like to get something done.

JM: I have no goal. I don't want to finish an album. I'd rather play, and work on a song endlessly.

BM: But she wrote almost all of this record. When we first talked about it, we discussed doing a record of country duets. We had a couple of songs. But in the end Julie always wants to rock. [she's laughing]

PM: Yeah, that's the thing that surprises me about her. She has that real folk aspect, but then she wants to play the dirty rockers.

JM: [laughing hard] With the voice of a four year old.

PM: Right, she doesn't just want to rock, she wants to go *there*.

BM: It's all fun, and when we're live, we swing toward the rock side.

PM: This new record is very good, there's some great songs on it. I never knew the incredible story of that Columbine child. Lord... [Rachel Scott, the first student killed in the massacre. Her remarkable story and journal excerpts are revealed in the book that Julie gave me at the end of our conversation, *Rachel's Tears*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville. Julie wrote a very moving song about it, "Rachel."]

JM: That book that her parents wrote, and the friends and family that participated in the storytelling, changed my life so much. That's the hardest song I ever had to write. I just cried from beginning to end. At first, I didn't feel like I had the right to even say or do anything about it. But I was talking to a friend of mine, an incredible singer named Kelly Willis, and she said that Rachel's aunt was a close friend of hers, that Rachel's brother had been around the house last year. So I met Rachel's aunt through Kelly, and she said, "Please write this song, it would mean a lot to her family." Then I felt like I had permission, and even the responsibility.

PM: Buddy, I liked what you said in the liner notes about wanting the music to sound like the room it was made in, kinda big and kinda messy, and I think it does. A friend was over listening to the new record, and compared how much easier it was to pick out the lyrics on your records. And I told her that this is how they sound live, but at home. It's a beautiful thing, you just got to let go of that clean idea. [Julie's laughing]

In a day to day sense, what kind of people would you describe yourselves to be?

BM: Well, we've been married a long time [17 years] and have spent very little time apart. So we've developed our own ways of communicating with each other. Aside from that, we're just, you know, checking the mail and going to work.

JM: You're funny. [laughing]

BM: And then, you know, I'm on the phone and stuff. We never got a manager or anything.

PM: You have no personal manager? [Julie's laughing]

BM: I guess we could...

JM: I don't want one. I don't know why...

BM: You don't want one 'cause you're afraid they'll make you do something.

PM: They'd try, at least.

BM: When a new record comes out, I'm on the phone way too much, because I'm doing all that. Coordinating the tours with the booking agent, and all the other stuff I do, there's a lot of working with other people.

PM: You can't like doing all that stuff. I never met a musician in my life that likes to do all that stuff.

BM: No, I don't like it, what's there to like.

JM: He's really good at it, though.

PM: Maybe there's something short of a personal manager that would take a load off, a day to day manager.

BM: I think we're going to bring my sister into that loop. She lives locally, and is real good at that kind of stuff. She works for Gibson, and runs all their big events.

PM: That's beautiful, I love keeping it in the family. Because when you're dead, no one's gonna say, "He was hell on the phone."

BM: "That cat could really book some flights."

PM: What do you like to do when you're not working?

BM: Get the house cleaned up a little, sit down and play some music.

PM: That's nice to hear. So many road musicians sit their guitar in a corner when they finally get home.

BM: I'm slowing down, too. I'm not going to take as many outside things, so we can work more on our songs, our music.

PM: Less touring, or less record production?

BM: Less production, and fewer sessions. I'll never quit doing Emmy Lou tours, unless they fire me.

JM: It's almost comical, what a really nice person she is. She never shows up at the house without food, or flowers, or something. She's very considerate, very thoughtful. When it's time to get on the bus, she gets in the very back. She has no star trip going on whatsoever.

PM: That's a nice thing about the crowd you're running with. You guys don't seem to have an ego between you, and the people you play with are all very nice, mature people. It's rare enough to know musicians in the public eye who don't have a distorted view of themselves.

Could we talk a little about your faith? I know you're both said to be committed Christians, but there are so many kinds. How does Christianity show up in your life, and how does it play out?

JM: For me, I'm not a very religious person, as far as playing it by anybody's book goes. I'm more like this desperate soul that found the ultimate friend. Mother, father, sister, brother, lover.

PM: In Jesus, specifically, right?

JM: In Jesus. I'm from Texas. I felt Jesus touch my heart as a little child, but along the way I got the impression that Christianity was a club for people in the south that enabled them to feel good about themselves. So I split from all that, and for a while, I just ran. I was just as wild as wild can be, a leaf in the wind. It's amazing I'm alive. I was so self-destructive. But then I would spend hours and hours in bookstores, just looking for books with the answers I was after. I'd go to gypsies, self-help programs, psychiatrists. Until one day I'd gotten myself involuntarily locked up in this mental hospital. I was trying to get out. "Thank you very much, I feel better now," kind of thing. But it wasn't that simple, I had to talk with the head guy of the place, Bergen Pines.

PM: Bergen Pines, in Jersey?

JM: Right. So the head guy asked me, "If you had three wishes, what would they be?"

PM: "Is this a trick question?"

JM: Right. [laughing] I think he wanted me to say "I want out of here," just so he would know that I really wanted to go. 'Cause people say that they want to leave at those places but don't always mean it. But something came over me. I looked down at myself, where I'd cut myself with a broken beer bottle, and where blood had poured out, and asked myself, "What *am* I doing?" And the spirit of truth was tugging on me to wake up, and I looked at him and said, "I just want to know what the truth is. There's something that just IS, that's beyond something that's just true for you or true for me." And it rolled out of my mouth something just like that. This also coincided with the time that Bob Dylan was having his conversion experience and putting out Gospel records like *Slow Train Coming*, which a friend sent me. Many things of this nature took place in my life in this particular period. It was also the time when Emmy Lou's *Roses in the Snow* came out. Buddy brought it home, and there's this precious voice singing:

Those who have strayed were sought by the Master
He who once gave His life for the sheep
out on the mountain, still He is searching
bringing them in, forever to keep

I just wept, and wept. Something had been pulled away from my spirit, my soul, like a veil was lifted. I was receiving something from God, though I didn't know what it was. I felt crazy, in a new way. God started coming at me from all directions, wherever I looked. Outside this bar in upstate NY one night, spirit spoke to me. "I never wanted your life to be this way," and I saw how sad my life had been, and become. "I always wanted us to be together." That was my moment. The next day, and the next few days, I knew that "I want Jesus, where is He? What am I supposed to do now?" It's a long story, but that's the gist of it. And for me, it's become like a heart rending friendship.

PM: I guess once you've had a real conversion experience, there's no turning back. That's amazing.

JM: I called up Buddy. “Buddy, you won’t believe this, but I just gave my life to Jesus, and I can’t go back.”

PM: What were you two to each other at this time, were you already together?

JM: Yeah, we were living together in Union City.

BM: Yep, we’d come up from Austin.

PM: “I’ve given my life to Jesus,” that had to be pretty shocking.

BM: Yeah, it was shocking. But at the time, we had police out looking for her. We were playing at this club, and she hadn’t shown up. She was kind of on the edge, you know. But the more we talked about it, the more I could tell that a real change had come over her.

PM: That something had happened.

[At this point in the interview, Buddy was speaking so reverently that his voice is barely audible on tape. Although his actual words are not captured, repeated listenings with the equalizer jacked around reveal that he was talking about having a new point of reference in their lives, a new reason to live right, and to gauge what really mattered.]

PM: I very much like the way that your Jesus awareness shows up in the tunes. It’s a really good way. Even people that are not attuned that way can hear what you’re saying. Without proselytizing or preaching, you’re definitely testifying.

JM: Well, it thrills my soul to hear that, it’s my deepest heart’s desire. Give it to those who want it, and don’t push it on anybody that’s not ready. God’s the one who speaks to people. He sure waited until I was ready.

PM: When you run across stories of conversion, you often see that people get good and out there before they’re ready.

JM: Yeah, go try it all out before you’re ready to do it My way.

PM: Do you guys have or make time to read? What are you reading, and what are you listening to?

JM: I see Buddy do a lot of reading when we get on a plane. He opens up those emergency instructions and reads them cover to cover. [Buddy’s laughing]

BM: I collect them.

JM: No you don’t.

BM: I can show you my collection.

JM: He means if only stealing wasn't wrong, he'd collect them.

BM: Oh well, I guess I won't show you my collection. I don't really read much these days.

PM: Manuals.

BM: Yeah, manuals, stuff like that. Or a magazine or book about music, sometimes. I used to read... [wistfully] I want to read again, I just can't seem to get there. I read for a reason now, to fall asleep.

JM: I buy books now. [laughs] I'm not reading the kind of intellectual books that people read when they say they read a lot. I read a lot of books that are written by Christians.

PM: What does that mean?

JM: There's this author, Brennan Manning, that I like a lot. [When we were done, Julie gave me a copy of *Abba's Child*, by Manning. NAVPRESS, P.O. Box 35001, Colorado Springs, CO 80935] I don't read much fiction, it sort of bothers me. I mean, you can make up anything. Life is short, I want to read something that's true, that really happened.

PM: Will you write songs that are fictional, or are they all in the "real" domain?

JM: They don't necessarily happen to me, or aren't necessarily happening right now, but they come from a place of experience. Without that, I don't get that sense of fulfillment, somehow.

BM: You don't seem to be going in the "story song" direction.

JM: I want to be able to write story songs...

PM: I hear this more and more from songwriter friends, though, that they don't have time for fiction. It's curious. Many of us are getting all the fiction we need from movies, perhaps.

JM: I think that's right.

PM: Buddy, what are those main axes that one sees you on stage with?

BM: I think the company was called Wandre. They've gotten released under a couple of different names, they're Italian, from the 60s. Wandre Pioli was the fella's name, I think. I believe he was into motorcycles and Picasso.

PM: So, a northern [German] Italian, I guess, if the "w" is pronounced like a "v"?

BM: Yeah, that sounds right. I don't even know that much about the guitars. I've learned a little more in the last 5 years than when I got them. I bought them in '76 for \$50 each.

PM: Where?

BM: In a pawn shop in Boulder. I was in this band with Julie, and we were playing in Boulder. Her boyfriend took me into town, and we walked by this pawn shop that used to be a music store. The one I play all the time, the white one, was in the window for \$85. I thought it would look pretty good on my wall, it had sparkles, so I offered the guy \$50, he said "Sure." When I took it to the gig for a joke and plugged it in, it sounded real good. When I got back to Austin, I ordered the yellow pages for Boulder and went through the pawn shops till I found the place again. They had four more, so I bought them all. They used to import them. It says *Noble* on the top of it, but that's just the name of the accordion importer in Chicago who brought the Wandres into the country. I had to sell one when we were getting married, to Larry Campbell [multi-instrumentalist who plays with Bob Dylan], but he doesn't play it much. They're real good guitars. I've got the most conservative ones. A few of the really weird ones have become expensive, and are valued as works of art.

PM: I remember them having a unique, kind of glassy sound.

BM: They have a real good sound. They have floating pickups, they're not mounted to anything. They're attached to the pickguard, which runs the length of the body. It's very interesting.

PM: And they make your sound unique.

BM: They're all I used for a long time. Since I've had the Emmy Lou gig, I collected a lot of guitars, but they're still my favorite guitars to play. They're mostly all I use on the road. I have to dump some super glue into them after every tour. There's a lot of plastic in them, so it breaks and cracks, you know.

PM: Crazy.

BM: Yeah, crazy glue. Now that I've got a good gig, I bring them to Joe Glaser to work on. When I come in with my plastic guitars, he says, "Oh, more boat work." [Julie brings out a solid body version] Oh, this is a little like the hollow body ones I play. I only used this one live with Steve Earle, because it wouldn't feed back.

PM: Is Steve pretty loud on stage?

BM: I've never played that loud in my life.

PM: Do you have any favorite players, people whose playing moves you?

BM: David Rawlings, Gurf Morlix.

PM: David Rawlings, that guy's getting spookier every day. [Buddy laughs] I just caught the show they did here at the Belcourt Theater, front row center. That new album [Gillian Welch, *Time the Revelator*, Acony Records] is really amazing.

JM: “My First Lover”...

PM: Oh yeah, I love a frailing banjo. She’s become a good banjo player.

BM: We did a version of “All My Tears” for *Songcatcher* [Vanguard Records] and we had Gillian in to play the banjo on it.

PM: Oh, she had a session on the banjo, I’ll bet she dug that.

JM: She did. She said, “This is my second session on the banjo.” They’re as good as it gets.

PM: Yeah. I thought they were the best duo I’d ever seen, but this new record took a quantum leap, if you ask me. It’s not just about lyrics that would fit on a Ralph Stanley record anymore.

BM: And his guitar playing is so right there.

PM: What’s that crazy parlor guitar he plays?

BM: It’s an Epiphone, I believe, from the 30s or 40s.

PM: I like the way he’ll play himself in and out of corners all night. Comes screaming around the curve, and barely keeps it on the road.

JM: That’s just what it is. Before him, we’d only ever seen Richard Thompson do that.

PM: And now he’ll lean on the bluest, tensest note, first. First of all, let me play the note next to the one you’re singing, and drive that home. And Gillian never bats an eye. The further out he gets, the better she seems to like it.

JM: They’re so cool together. When they sing, they seem like two halves of the same person.

PM: I’m not blowing smoke, but when I consider you two and those two, I won’t listen to any guff about how screwed up Nashville is. “Excuse me, but do you have two couples like this in *your* town? No, I didn’t think so.” [Julie laughs] And it’s significant that both couples, by sticking to their guns, have become successful. “We do this.” It’s good for other musicians to see that, to just be themselves. Don’t try and write like Jim Lauderdale if you want a George Strait cut, that’s stupid. Just write a good song.

Some of your influences are obvious or well known. What are some that people might not be aware of? For instance, in an Australian article on your website, the writer noted that you were influenced by 60s San Francisco rock, which I thought was very humorous.

BM: Oh yeah, I was way into that San Francisco scene.

PM: Jorma Kaukonen, or...?

BM: Jorma, Grateful Dead, Quicksilver.

PM: Oh, you're a Garcia guy.

BM: Oh yeah. And I think the Dead brought a lot of kids to Country music through the back door.

PM: Sure, they were doing Merle Haggard and Buck Owens songs.

BM: An old friend of mine, Steve Gonnier, was a soundman at the Fillmore. He used to let me make soundboard tapes of certain shows.

PM: Buddy Miller a Deadhead, who woulda thunk it.

BM: I thought the Dead were great. Even if you didn't like the sound of their vocals, once you got past that, musically they were really doing something. And Moby Grape, too, I liked them.

PM: Moby Grape! Who was that amazing guitar player, Jerry...

BM: Jerry Miller. They had three great guitar players and Skip Spence.

PM: Any other unpredictable influences?

JM: You might not be able to tell by my, uh, vocal stylings, but I was an Etta James worshipper. How sad is that? [laughs]

PM: So, I didn't know Donald Lindley. Could we have a few words about him?

BM: Donald was a great drummer. I met him in CA, when he was playing drums with Jim Lauderdale. He became a real good friend, and played on all our records.

JM: Played with Lucinda, too.

BM: Right, he played with Lucinda on her first records, through *Car Wheels on a Gravel Road*. He died recently of cancer, and he's truly missed.

JM: Inside my last record, there's a picture of a drummer with wings, that's Donald. He was the sweetest person, and my favorite drummer.

BM: He was so into the music. Weeks after a session went by, he'd be listening to the tapes and call me up to talk about a part that he really liked, or that maybe should be changed, or something that could be added. Most people are just on to the next session, you know.

PM: Your new drummer, Bryan Owings, he's great, and a really nice person. All your band members are good folks. Rick Plant on bass, Phil Madeira on organ, great bunch of guys.

JM: It blows our mind. You couldn't ask for better people to work with.

BM: It's been fun. Now we're going out a bunch, starting next week. Soon we'll start a New York tour with New Year's Eve at The Bottom Line. We're excited about that.

PM: You meet so few musicians who have stayed together and played together as long as you two have, for 17 years. How have you possibly managed that?

[Julie points a finger upward.]

