

Conversations with Caitlin Cary & Thad Cockrell
by Frank Goodman (8/2005, Puremusic.com)

Ah, tonight is the outdoor show in Nashville of Country's newest and celebratable duo, Caitlin Cary and Thad Cockrell. When it's done correctly, the classic Country duet format is a bare and luscious enterprise for good singers. Rarely does an audience get to examine and bask in the blend and the tension between a male and female vocalist the way they do in this setting.

And these singers are old friends with strong and tender voices, capable of the great feeling that ballads require. Thad's famous for putting the "hurt" back in Country, and Caitlin first made her mark in Whiskeytown, on violin and opposite Ryan Adams at the mic, and she went on to highly regarded solo records and one with Tres Chicas. Cockrell's records have also seen the highest critical reviews, and rightly so, as they reduce the efforts of almost all of the mainstream singers to corporate fodder of cardboard cutouts.

What attracted me first to this duo CD, *Begonias*, though, is that it was produced by pop maverick Brad Jones. And he certainly satisfies, in his unique fashion, with a few of his stable of genius. Pedal and lap steel luminary Pete Finney and guitar star Pat Buchanan reveled in the opportunity to play real Country in real time, and you can hear that. But two mighty players that the artists brought to the sessions are Roman Candle's multi-instrumentalist Logan Matheny, who plays drums on his way to adding quite a few other things, and Aaron Oliva on bass.

Next day:

Well, the Opry Plaza Show was very impressive. It's one thing to sing well in the studio, but at the show you really get to hear what the hubbub is all about. Some serious crooning and expert harmony entwining filled the courtyard of the Opry where many were gathered. Very mixed crowd of families and all ages, and the group went over in a big way.

The rhythm section absolutely kicked ass. Aaron Oliva is one of those bassists that seem to have it all under his hands, without trying. You couldn't even see him fingering the bass, like Joey Spampinato of NRBQ, he just seemed to be squeezing the notes out, and holding the neck, I don't understand how those guys do that. Drummer Logan Matheny is beautiful, effortless. He was a pleasure to watch. He didn't have anything but a good time, a superb musician. He's going to do great things. And Rich Gilbert, a splendid new addition to the Nashville community, was smoking on pedal steel.

I had my camera with me and shot some video so you can have a taste of the show. There's a clip of the opener, Red Stick Ramblers (which will also give you a sense of the audience and atmosphere), and two clips of Caitlin and Thad and their band.

Don't miss this act when they come to your town. It's Country music like it's supposed to be played, and sung. Check out the audio clips on our Listen page and pick up YepRoc's *Begonias*, and the earlier records of these fine artists, Thad Cockrell and Caitlin Cary. And now, our conversations with each of them, Caitlin first...

Puremusic: Where do I find you this morning, Caitlin?

Caitlin Cary: I'm pulled over in front of the weirdest building I've ever seen in my life. It must have been a restaurant and it's abandoned, and it looks sort of like something out of *Jetsons*, really.

[laughter]

CC: I'm in Wisconsin.

PM: Who are you with?

CC: Well, right now I'm actually riding with my parents—they live in Ohio but they decided to come see a couple shows, so they joined us in Madison and they're coming to our show in Milwaukee tonight.

PM: That's great. We think that *Begonias* is a fabulous record.

CC: Oh, I thank you very much.

PM: I think that Brad Jones was a very interesting choice for a producer, certainly one of our favorites.

CC: Oh, yeah. I think we couldn't have made a better choice as far as that goes. He really got it. He actually put off a project in order to do ours because he was so interested in doing a duets record, per se. So he stopped everything to do this, which was really nice.

PM: He's a very fascinating character, such a very musical person, and so very interested in everybody else.

CC: Yes, absolutely. And he's very high energy, in a good way. You know how sometimes people with a whole lot of energy can be kind of off-putting and scary? He somehow manages to be one of those guys who has way too much energy without [laughs] being intimidating or something.

PM: Yeah, without freaking out everybody in the area. In fact, I've often heard people say that no matter how off-the-wall an idea you put to him—like, “Well, let's put the violin through a fuzz box and then thru your old record player, and let's mic that”—he'll always just look at you and say, “Well, let's try it. It could be good.”

CC: Right. Exactly. I would say so. There wasn't a whole lot of that going on, obviously, on this record. But yeah, I think he would have been game, and I totally understand what you're saying.

PM: But on the other hand, as traditional as the material was, there were still a lot of ideas, arrangement-wise and sonically, that were pretty out-there.

CC: I think so too. And I think that both Brad and also Logan Matheny had a lot to do with that. Logan is this young multi-instrumentalist. He calls himself just a struggling drummer, but it's totally not true. He's very self-effacing. And I've said in the press and I'll say it again here, if he's not producing records in five years, I'm going to kick his ass. He's a really, really talented guy.

PM: Now, my advance copy has limited information. Was he playing bass on the record, too, or was Brad playing bass, or somebody else?

CC: Aaron Oliva plays bass.

PM: Great, thanks.

CC: If you're a Thad fan, he's played on Thad's records as well.

PM: Right, he's great. And Logan did some great tracks. Also on that record I heard Pat Buchanan for sure. And somebody said that Will Kimbrough was also on it.

CC: Will Kimbrough is on it. Am I going to be able to remember which songs he played on? I think on "Two Different Things," and then maybe on one other one as well.

PM: And was Pat on a lot of cuts?

CC: Pat was on just about everything.

PM: Yeah.

CC: He was sort of the tracking guitar player.

PM: Was Pat very familiar to you already as a Nashville guy, or was he just a guy that Brad brought in, and that you'd heard of, perhaps?

CC: I had heard of him. I'm not a liner notes studier. I'm a terrible music fan in that way. I'm starting to be that person, but I'm such a late bloomer in this whole thing that—

[laughter]

CC: —it can always surprise me who's played on what. I'm always in the van with a bunch of guys, we call them muzos, and they sit and talk for hours and hours and hours about who played what on what, and who produced what, and who's doing what now. And I feel pretty lame in those conversations, usually.

PM: Well, there's a charm to that, too, because the people who don't know, they're thinking about something else, and it's probably good that they are.

CC: Maybe so. I mean, my approach to songwriting and all of this—even though I've been all of a sudden doing this for about ten years, I still feel like a beginner, or what would you call it—a folk artist or something, in the sense of being kind of a naive primitive in the music industry.

[laughter]

PM: I think it's charming, actually.

So how was it different, would you say, working with Brad on this record than it was with Chris Stamey for your last two, for *I'm Staying Out* and *While You Weren't Looking*? [Stamey is a popular producer, and one of the original members of the band The dB's, now set for a reunion tour.]

CC: Well, the biggest difference, of course, was pace. This record was quick—we were in and out in three weeks.

PM: Ah.

CC: So it was fast and furious, and a lot of charts, and really a very live record. We overdubbed some of the vocals, but a lot of them were original vocals.

PM: So the pace was very different between Chris and Brad. Were the actual working environments and atmosphere similar, the places you were working?

CC: Well, the way Chris works is typically—at least on my records, we would get a nice studio for basic tracks and spend ten days recording live. And then a lot of the work got done in his home studio, kind of catch as catch can when we could get players in or when we both had time to work. So *While You Weren't Looking* [Caitlin's first solo recording] took about a year and a half.

PM: Oh, wow. That is catch as catch can.

[laughter]

CC: Yeah, it was a real labor of love. And I think that was a good way to make a first record, because we really took time and care, and had a lot of time to think about everything. It's interesting, the last two records I've made, this one, *Begonias*, and then

the Tres Chicas record that I just got done making in London, those were done really quickly, and with an aim to a very organic, live, spontaneous thing. I like both ways a lot—I wouldn't trade in any of the experiences I've had—but there's something about fast and furious that I'm into right now.

PM: And are Jones and Stamey very different in, say, personality, temperament, or are both wired in a similar way?

CC: Oh, I think that anybody who does this job well is kind of wired in a similar way. I think if there's ever a definition of "producer"—you know what a nebulous term it is, but I think it just means "energy ball."

[laughter]

CC: And both of them have that for sure, really quick minds and both just interesting characters. Stamey, we call him the mad scientist.

PM: Oh, so he's got that going on. Yeah, I'm not surprised.

CC: Yeah, yeah.

PM: Every co-writing relationship is so unique. What's the dynamic, you could say, of the friendship and the co-writing aspect in particular, between you and Thad? How does it set up?

CC: Well, I mean, the co-writing was born out of friendship, really, and just a few good conversations about music. And Thad was a fan of my band Whiskeytown. Right around the time I started doing my solo records, he and I started getting together occasionally at my house to write. And compared with some other people I've written with who are very sophisticated songwriters, he's very plain spoken, and he's definitely got country in his soul.

PM: Right. He's a country dude.

CC: He's a country dude, and he allows me to write in a way that I don't necessarily write for myself. When I write with him, I can kind of get out of my own literary head and really say things I wouldn't normally say. They're plain-spoken, and they're bare and emotional more than mentally conceived, you know?

PM: So you're comfortable going to that place with him?

CC: Yes. I feel like I can—there's no real good way to say this, because "dumb it down" isn't right but—

PM: Is it like "simple it up," instead?

CC: Simple it up, or not be afraid to say, “I just love you,” or whatever, whatever the lyric is. But also it’s just fun. I feel like both of us, when we write together—again, it’s kind of fast, whereas when I’m writing with other people sometimes it’s long and laborious. With Thad, it tends to be quick. But it’s just because we get along, and share that aesthetic.

PM: It’s amazing how each partnership is so different. I’ve got certain partners who keep it very simple, and it just goes faster. And others with whom you’ll get more involved in the story, and how it unfolds, et cetera. There’s no comparing the experiences.

CC: Yep. And every song is different, too. I mean, it’s funny, because very seldom we do come in with a blank piece of paper. Usually one or the other of us has an idea, a hook, a verse, a chorus, something. And sometimes it goes super fast, and it’s just that old Brill Building style of trading back and forth lines. Then other times I’ll have a whole thing, and we’ll write a bridge, or Thad will have a whole thing, and we’ll make a little change in the chorus, or a few words here and there. I think that he likes my lyrics, and he’s always wide open to suggestions there. I think I’ve tweaked things that he’s written and—

PM: Is he heavy on the melody side?

CC: Oh, gosh—again, every song is different.

PM: Sure. Every song is different. It always amazes me, too, when in those instances, the thing that somebody has come in with, the verse or the line or the idea, in the end, is not even there anymore. It’s just what got you started.

CC: Yeah, yeah. Well, and a lot of the time you go in with the idea that you’re going to write a song about X. And it turns into a totally different thing—I mean, coming from the background of being a short story writer, where you’re not restrained by anything, melody or form or anything, and you really do strive to say exactly what you mean, or get at whatever theme or point you started out wanting to do. Songs can just get away from you and become whatever they become, and a lot of times you don’t even know what it is, really, until later, until it’s on the record, and somebody tells you what they think it means, or you talk about it for a while. That’s a cool thing about songs, for me.

PM: “Second Option” seems to be the song from the record that’s getting the most airplay at the moment. Was that picked by you or the label as a single, or are the DJs picking it?

CC: I think the DJs are picking it. I think the label is definitely of the opinion, as are others connected to the record, that it’s the “up” song. It’s the one that sounds country and potentially modern as well. I’m hoping to be able to do a video. CMT has intimated that they would play a video if we made one. So we’re trying to do that, and I think we’ll do that song, because the powers that be say, “That’s the one.”

PM: Well, God bless 'em, CMT is coming around just a little bit.

CC: I know, I know. It's good.

PM: They're starting to play some other people's videos besides the usual suspects. But in "Second Option," that's a wild little breakdown section and solo, right?

CC: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I love doing that live. I love when it comes around every night. It's totally exciting. And that's all Aaron, it's that bass line that does it.

PM: It's really cool. Is that one of the songs that was written way before the sessions, or right at that time?

CC: Oh, it was right at that time.

PM: It's got that sound.

CC: Does it? Yeah, it's spontaneous.

PM: Yeah. I personally am very partial to the song "Something Less Than Something More."

CC: Ah, thanks.

PM: What a great song. I just love that kind of folky train groove thing.

CC: Well, that's funny, I kind of stole that from one of Thad's songs. I can't remember which one right now, but I was thinking about the beat, and exactly that movin' on beat. Yeah, well, thanks. I love doing that song every night—although, it depends on the crowd. Sometimes you feel like, "Oh, is this boring people? Is this too pretty?" Because sometimes everyone in the audience is completely transfixed by it, and other times they just start talking.

PM: What's the story behind that composition?

CC: Well, I have the happy honor of saying that I married my best friend. [Her husband is former Whiskeytown drummer Eric "Skillet" Gilmore.] And I like that model. But the song came from having painfully fallen in love with my best friend in high school. I never know quite what to say in interviews, in case he reads them, because it would probably embarrass him.

PM: Too bad, right?

[laughter]

CC: Yeah, that's right. I don't know, when I get ready to sing it, I always say, "This is a song about accidentally falling in love with your best friend and the ache that happens in your whole body every day when you feel that way, and you don't want to take the risk of messing up the friendship, and you're not sure how they feel, or if they feel the same way, and you feel kind of sure that they might." I think probably everybody has been there at some time or other, right?

PM: It's just so archetypal a situation.

CC: It is. I'm very lucky that it was actually my husband who broke the ice. We were in Whiskeytown together and had this total rule about "you don't date in the band." And since I was the only girl, it kind of applied only to me, really.

[laughter]

PM: Or to anybody who wanted to date you.

CC: Anyone who wanted to date me couldn't have me.

PM: Right.

CC: But Skillet and I we were spending every minute together all the time, and finally, he was the one that said, "You know what? I actually love you." So thank God he did it, because I don't know if I ever would have had the courage to do it.

PM: Right. You didn't want to break the rules. So is Skillet playing with one of you guys now, or both of you guys now?

CC: He plays with me in Tres Chicas, when we can. He has a band called Patty Hurst Shifter that's sort of his first commitment. So he's busy with that right now. We keep trying to work it out to where we're playing and touring together all the time. But right now it seems to be about half the tours I do, he comes along, which is probably good. It's good to have it together and also to have it apart. I feel really lucky to have somebody in my life that understands this life so well. I don't know how musicians marry non-musicians and have it work.

PM: You've sung lots of harmony and lead vocals on a number of records. But wouldn't you say that the blend you have with Thad is pretty uncanny, I mean, one of your best on record?

CC: It is really special. And I think what's coolest about it is that our voices are kind of similar. It's not exactly brother/sister, but we are in a similar range. I mean, I tend to be singing the high part, but he absolutely can sing high harmonies to me, and does. He's got a big range, and I have a pretty big range. But something about the consonance of our voices, I think, is part of what works.

PM: Yeah, there's a timbre there that's very sympathetic.

CC: Yes. I never like to think of myself of somebody who sings with any vibrato at all, because I try really hard to just sing plain. But I think that, really, everybody has some vibrato, and when two of them go together, that makes a fit.

PM: Right. Yeah, I think it's great. Have you guys discussed touring with a backup band that, say, does a batch of your songs and a batch of his, and then songs from *Begonias*? I mean, is that a working paradigm or...?

CC: It's funny that you ask that, because we just were talking about that. We've been trying to work out a tour in Europe, and a whole big thing just fell through, which sucks.

PM: Damn.

CC: But we'll get there and make it work. We were wondering should Tres Chicas go, and then have me and Thad up and front Tres Chicas. And I thought, oh, God, that would be a hell of a lot of singing for me in a night. I don't know if I can handle that.

PM: Right.

CC: But I think that for me right now it's really good to keep my head focused on the project at hand. And so Thad and I are doing songs just from this record, and a couple—we do “She Ain't No You,” which I sang on his record. And we do “Thick Walls Down,” which he helped me write for *When You Weren't Looking*. And since we definitely need some more rock songs for the kind of sets I'm talking about, where people start talking when you sing the beautiful quiet songs—

PM: Right, and for the end of the show.

CC: Yeah, exactly. So we are doing a few from each other's older material. But for the most part we're kind of keeping our heads in this. And we set up the stage in what we call “duet mode,” where we're facing each other a little bit, and singing right at each other, into each other's eyes. It feels good just working *Begonias* right now.

I actually managed to chase away a fan last night who came up to me, and he was this kind of frat boy guy. And he said, “I love Whiskeytown. Are you going to do any Whiskeytown songs?” I think I was polite, but I told him that by no means would he hear any Whiskeytown, and he just left.

[laughter]

CC: Some people don't really know the tactful way to talk to musicians right before we go on.

PM: Right. Breach of protocol.

CC: Yeah.

PM: Let's see. On the record, somebody did a very good job of keeping the instruments out of the same range. For instance, where there's an organ part voiced very high, there's a tremolo guitar going on very low, et cetera. Whose influence did that tend to be?

CC: Well, Brad played most of the keys.

PM: Oh.

CC: Logan did a little bit, but Brad played all the organ parts.

PM: I see.

CC: But I think that what you're talking about mostly came from having really pro people in the studio, people who—I mean, Pete Finney on the pedal steel and—

PM: He's really something...

CC: —and Will Kimbrough and Pat—it's just a matter of having great players who'll listen and fit in and not play when they shouldn't.

PM: Yeah.

CC: We just made this record with some grownup bad asses, really. [laughs] And they were excited to get to do this record. Both Pat and Pete were saying, "Man, it's so rare that we get to play real country music in Nashville, and it's so rare that we get to track live." Especially Pete, I think, because he's frequently called upon at the end of the recording process, when everyone else has gone, and it's him and his cup of coffee.

PM: [laughs] Ah, you never think about that, but that's so true.

CC: That must be kind of lonesome.

PM: Everybody's gone home. Ah.

I know you are a very literate person. Have you read anything lately that turned you on?

CC: Read anything lately—gosh, I have so little time to read anything! I'm about seven-eighths of the way through a novel that I started in London, a Willa Cather novel called *Song of the Lark*. It's the story of a girl who grows up in Moonstone, Colorado, and is a natural prodigy on the piano and voice, and her saga of getting out of her small town to somewhere where she can train. And I think Willa Cather was really fascinated by musicians—by talent, really, and what kind of character makes a great musician. It's been kind of making me feel like a dilettante, because there's a lot of talk of this feeling that

exists in some part of her body, and she's not sure where, and it's this thing, and it wakes her up every morning with burning passion that she doesn't understand. And I'm thinking, "Gee, do I have that? I'm not sure." [laughs]

PM: On the other hand, that's a writer talking about a musician.

[laughter]

CC: Right, right. I keep having to put that in perspective. It was really interesting to be in London reading such an American novel, and to totally have my head in a record and thinking, "Wow, is that what I'm supposed to feel like?"

PM: [laughs]

CC: "Because right now I just need a glass of wine or something."

PM: I'm really looking forward to catching your Opry Plaza show on the 30th. I call from New York today, but I'll be back in town for that, and I'm really looking forward to the show and to meeting you.

CC: I hope it's not too hot. Pray for us all.

PM: I think that may be an unreasonable request, but I'll put it in.

CC: Okay.

[laughter]

CC: All right. Well, thanks. Your questions were great. It felt like a conversation instead of an interview, which is always good.

PM: Thanks, Caitlin. See you soon.

[continue to our interview with Thad]

Puremusic: How's your day going? Where do we find you?

Thad Cockrell: We're about ten miles outside of Milwaukee.

PM: All right. And you guys have a *Begonias* show tonight?

TC: We do.

PM: I think that *Begonias* is a beautiful record.

TC: Thank you so much, Frank.

PM: I'm a fan of both of the artists involved. But I think you know the combination has really been fruitful, and that it's an unbelievable blend you guys have.

TC: Well, thanks. It's been fun. I wish we could have sung in the studio after we'd been out there singing night after night for two months.

PM: Right. Because now you must be really killing it.

TC: It's really amazing. I sit there and I hear it sometimes, and I'm not one to pat myself on the back, but it sounds beautiful.

PM: Yeah. And the voice, you know, it's such a God-given thing. So it's really no more patting yourself on the back than it is just being grateful.

TC: I fully believe that.

PM: Caitlin says that you guys are set up in duet fashion and face each other, and sing into each other's eyes. That whole setup is so great.

TC: We have Christmas lights on the vocal microphone stands. Yeah, we basically look at each other for the whole show. It's really cool. There are definitely people who think that things are going on after the show.

PM: I think my friend Brad Jones was a very interesting choice for producer on this record.

TC: Uh-huh.

PM: He's one of our favorite producers, and I was stoked to hear that you guys picked him. That decision produced a lot of tasty musical moments, I thought.

TC: Yeah, it was very interesting. Caitlin didn't know much about Brad, I kind of spirited that whole thing. From his other recordings I could just tell that he really understood music and how to capture something. And also what I really feel is great about his production is that it sounds forward leaning, and not too reverential. You can always tell that everybody that's worked on one of his records understands the history of music, and where things came from.

PM: I think you've put it interestingly there. It doesn't sound over-referential or reverential.

TC: Right.

PM: Because, as traditional as the tunes are, there are a lot of out-there moments on some of the tracks.

TC: Very much so, yeah.

PM: Both in arrangement and sonically speaking. And it really worked, in my opinion.

TC: Caitlin and I both feel that music shouldn't be too reverent, because then it can become kind of schticky, you know? And I just couldn't imagine doing that to something that I love so much, which is music.

PM: Right. Every co-writing relationship is so unique. What's the dynamic of the friendship and the co-writing aspect in particular, between you and Caitlin, if you could voice that?

TC: Well, it's really fantastic. Caitlin really tries to serve the song as best as possible. And hopefully, I try to do the same. And when you do that, songs tend to not fall into a formula as easily.

She's fantastic, and she has such a beautifully literary mind. When she shows up with the idea, it's usually fantastic. And her knack for melody is really stunning. Some of these songs I wrote mostly by myself, and then Caitlin would come in. And then some of these songs, we would literally start from one or two line ideas.

PM: Right.

TC: Bottom line, it's so easy to write with her.

PM: And I think that's, to some degree, what they mean when they talk about chemistry of certain songwriting partners: that you get with certain people and it's just easier, somehow.

TC: Exactly. There's definitely chemistry. And she's the first one that I'd ever co-written with. Since then I've written with others—with some people, it's turned out well. But with some, when you try to write, you just know there's no chemistry. I tried to write with a friend of mine a couple weeks ago. We were coming from different places about it. Within five minutes, I knew nothing of any consequence was going to come of it. So...

PM: Yeah. And it's perplexing, but you just have to cop to it. It clicks with some people, and with others, not. And you just have to find those people and then settle in and work with them. But yeah, it's always traumatic, to some degree, when you get with somebody—especially if they're a buddy of yours—and find that it's not happening.

TC: Yeah.

PM: So how long have you lived in Nashville, Thad?

TC: About a year, I guess.

PM: And how are you liking it?

TC: I love it. It's very cool. Everybody is very supportive. I'm glad I didn't move here a complete nobody. I mean, I'm not famous, but if people in Nashville haven't heard my records, many at least have heard my name.

PM: Right. Yeah, I think a lot of people in Nashville knew who you were. At the last Americana Conference, I think you kicked quite a few hundred asses.

TC: That was the point.

[laughter]

TC: We certainly didn't play anything perfectly. Oh, my gosh, we pulled into town and knew that we hadn't rehearsed enough to make it sound polished. So before we went on stage, I said to just go for it, you know. Do whatever you want to do, and hopefully the spirit of the whole thing will overpower the lack of rehearsal.

PM: Oh, I thought it was amazing. And if you can't blow their minds with polish, you got to blow it with spirit, like you say.

TC: Yeah. So that's kind of what we were going for.

PM: I saw you one night recently, maybe it was at the Bluebird on a Monday night when Mike Henderson was playing. Have you seen much music or songwriters there that turned you on since you arrived?

TC: No, not really. But I've seen some really great rock bands. But I really haven't seen much. I think Gillian Welch is just un-freaking-believable.

PM: Yeah, they're pretty mindblowing, especially up close.

TC: But I have not heard somebody who when they sing they bare their essence in their music—I can't say that I have.

PM: On the other hand, it gives me hope for a country music when people are making records like you and Caitlin have in this duet release.

TC: Hopefully, before it's all said and done, there will be a lot of people who really love this record. Some people have said it could get a Grammy nomination, that would be amazing.

I really don't like to talk about what real country music is, all I can do is make the music I make. And hopefully, through word of mouth, people's appreciation for this music will be borne out in the same way that it has been in similar cases. I think people were so overwhelmed by Gillian Welch that they just made it a point to tell everybody about her.

PM: Yeah. I think that's a good example.

TC: Yeah. If your music is good enough, people will do that, because good music certainly is not as common as some people think.

PM: And I think following that example down a little, there seems to be a definitely growing audience for old-timey music and Appalachian music, and all that. And I tend to feel, and I'm sure you do, that there could likewise be a very capturable audience of varying ages for a real traditional country sound if it was put out there correctly.

TC: Oh, yeah. It's all about marketing, you know what I mean?

PM: Yeah.

TC: I agree. What kind of hit that home for me is when we go do a show there at Chapel Hill and Raleigh, there are complete families that come out to the show. If it's an all-ages club, they'll bring their kids out. And there will be people in college, and then there will be moms and dads, and then older people too. So I think, yeah, it can reach a wide and significant audience, if it's handled correctly.

PM: Yeah, yeah. I'm not sure that there's a huge audience out there for a lot of what's called alt-country. But I think the authenticity and the sincerity of the traditional Country sound has wider possibilities.

TC: Yeah. Well, I mean, in a perfect world none of the labels would matter. I do understand economics and commerce enough to know that you need to help people understand what it is by saying it's Country—but really, to me, what it is is music. When I hear Bob Dylan's music or Johnny Cash, to me, I just hear fantastic music.

PM: It's just music.

TC: Yeah, yeah. There's soul music that comes out in that, there's old-timey, there's bluegrass, there's country, there's blues, and there's the spirit of rock 'n' roll, and gospel, which is a huge part of it, lyrically and musically, at least for me. To me, that's music.

And really, with the alt-country, I mean, I hardly ever hear anything in it that's really impressive—it's pretty shoddy stuff, all too often. Well, this record, to me, in no way sounds like an alt-country record.

PM: I just think it's fantastic. And I love that you got a lot of my favorite Nashville guys on there, Pete Finney and Pat Buchanan, and Kimbrough got on a couple tunes, and Brad

at the helm. I mean, it's like you picked some of the best things that Nashville has to offer.

TC: Yeah. Well, I became so obsessed with Bob Dylan's *Nashville Skyline*, that made a big impression on me. I think if there's an influence on me that is very easily traced it would be Willie Nelson's *Phases and Stages* and Bob Dylan's *Nashville Skyline*. And to me, at least with Bob Dylan, there was a group of really cool players in Nashville at that time. They got together, and they went in there and they played those songs live, the batch of songs that Bob had around at that time.

PM: Right.

TC: And all these songs were recorded live.

PM: And Caitlin was saying that Pete Finney was so glad to be tracking live, instead of like he usually does, sitting in a booth with his cup of coffee after everybody has gone home.

TC: Yeah, right. Well so was Pat Buchanan, he felt the same way.

PM: Have you read anything that turned you on lately? Are you much of book guy?

TC: Yeah, I love reading. I've been reading this book by Marilynne Robinson called *Gilead*. It's incredibly beautiful.

PM: Well I'm going to check into that, *Gilead*. Okay. Thanks. I think everybody enjoys hearing what people whose music they enjoy are reading. Are you listening to anybody in particular?

TC: Yeah, I am. Who would I say that I'm listening to pretty nonstop? There's this band called Roman Candle, listening a lot to them.

PM: And [drummer] Logan is from that band, right?

TC: Yeah. And I've listened to Bob Dylan and Willie Nelson. And as for newer stuff, there's this guy named Seth Kauffman, he's from Raleigh. His record is called *Ting*, and it's coming out on Hightone. It's really fantastic.

PM: That's very interesting, because *ting* means "listen" in Chinese. I just spent some time in Shanghai.

TC: Oh, wow. Well, it's really crazy and very cool music. I love listening to it.

PM: Well, great. We'll get on it.

TC: Yeah.

PM: Are you what you'd call a spiritual person?

TC: Oh, sure, yeah.

PM: Any particular orientation or—

TC: Well, I would definitely consider myself a Christian.

PM: And you're a preacher's son, right?

TC: Yep. My dad's a preacher, and both of my brothers are. It's a family business, man.

PM: Wow, it's a family business. Well, jeez, you've been very kind with your time today, Thad. It's really nice to talk to you. I'm in New York at the moment, but I'll be back in Nashville for your Opry Plaza show on the 30th, and I'm looking forward to it.

TC: I look forward to seeing you, too. Come by and say hi. I'd like to put a face to the name.

PM: Will do. All right, Thad, take care.