

**A Conversation with Cindy Cashdollar**  
**by Frank Goodman (6/2006, Puremusic.com)**

At SXSW this spring, there was a show in a church that I went to see one night. I was there to see Kenny Vaughn play with the fantastic band Marty Stuart has now, The Fabulous Superlatives. In the course of the evening, there was a good set by Olabelle. I liked them pretty much, but the part I liked best was the dobro player on stage left. (Okay, she was hot and she was playing her ass off.) Her presence onstage was so solid, so take-charge, without trying to steal any thunder from the singers or the song.

I was looking through the program in the dark, trying to see who that was. When someone got around to introducing the players, and said she was Cindy Cashdollar, I thought "Right, mighta known that...", because one hears her name so often, either on Prairie Home Companion or any of the many records on which the artist appears, including Bob Dylan's Grammy winner, *Time Out Of Mind*.

With all that she has accomplished and embellished, *Slide Show* from 2004 was her solo debut. As she mentions, it's a record that keeps resurfacing, and is still and steadily finding its way into the scene and the marketplace. She's too busy playing gigs with everybody under the sun to be spending her time just promoting her own record.

But it's a super disc for lovers of lap steel, pedal steel, dobro, or any and all of the luminaries who appear within: Sonny Landreth, Herb Remington, Mike Auldridge, Marcia Ball, Johnny Nichols, Jorma Kaukonen, Steve James, Lucky Oceans, and Redd Volkaert. That is a star-studded debut in anyone's book.

And what a really nice person Cindy was to talk to, a real peach. When a monster player has a sweet personality, it just makes the music that much more fun to listen to for me. We highly recommend *Slide Show*, and we know that this conversation with Cindy Cashdollar will make you want to find out more about this fascinating artist.

**Cindy Cashdollar:** Hello.

**Puremusic:** Hi, Cindy, Frank from Puremusic.com.

**CC:** Oh, hey, Frank. How you doing?

**PM:** I'm doing good. How's your morning proceeding?

**CC:** Pretty good so far.

**PM:** Yeah?

**CC:** So far, yeah.

**PM:** It's just started stormin' like Norman here in Nashville, out in the country.

**CC:** Oh, no.

**PM:** What do you got down there for weather?

**CC:** Oh, it's beautiful. It's like a spring day so far. But it's probably gearing up to be pretty warm. It's already started in getting pretty hot. But we had a bunch of storms, too, about a week ago, and now that's over with.

**PM:** Yeah, we've had beautiful days lately. The good days, this time of year, are just so incredible, when it gets nice for a little while. Nashville doesn't get like Austin, but it gets pretty hot.

**CC:** I know. I know it gets very similar. But so far it looks like a nice day here.

**PM:** Somebody just sent me the most amazing video. Have you seen this video of this brown-skinned guy on a kind of cactus-y hillside, and he's playing a guitar, and he's chording, and he's finger picking, but he's got a spoon in his mouth, and he's playing a melody on the top string with it.

**CC:** Yes, I saw that!

[laughter]

**PM:** Mr. Spoon. [You can see it here.]

**CC:** It's incredible. Nobody knows where it's from.

**PM:** So nobody knows who it is or what country--

**CC:** Yes. It's very bizarre. It's going to be one of those cult things. So yeah, I think it's amazing.

**PM:** I mean, with all the slide guitar players I've known, I've never seen anybody chord through something and still play a slide melody. That never even occurred to me.

**CC:** I know. It's incredible, that whole concept. And when I see something like that, I always wonder, like, how did they figure that out? Were they having a day where they had absolutely nothing do?

[laughter]

**PM:** It's like Zen mind, simple mind.

**CC:** It is. It's unbelievable. Have you seen that little--oh, it's just like a little thirty-second thing, it's called "Cookie Blues"?

**PM:** No.

**CC:** Oh, it's wonderful.

**PM:** Will you send that to me?

**CC:** I'll see if I can. Although I play steel guitar, I don't play pedal steel, and there's a reason. I'm technically impaired. So for me to try to send anybody anything other than email is really frighteningly hard.

**PM:** Email is challenging enough, right. Oh, so many of my friends in Nashville are finally getting computers--and I mean, guys like Jim Lauderdale and Kenny Vaughan, it's just like "No, I'm not doing it." [laughs]

**CC:** Well, those guys are too busy to deal with a computer, anyway. And they've probably got people who take care of most of that stuff, and they're on their way all the time.

**PM:** Like hell, they do. Kenny is chasing his kids around, and Lauderdale is probably chasing girls around, but still...

[laughter]

**CC:** It's true. But on the road it's so hard, I find, even--sometimes I'll take my laptop so I can keep up with email, but then there's never any time to use it. And by the time you get back to the hotel and figure out how to plug into their system, you're just too tired.

**PM:** Yeah. You might wonder why, some time after your solo debut, that somebody calls you for an interview--or is it just normal?

**CC:** It's funny because that CD just seems to just keep growing legs. It's like somebody else will hear about it or happen upon it. Everybody's desks in this business are just piled with CDs, and they never ever get to them. So, no, it doesn't surprise me at all.

**PM:** Ah. Well, how it happened to me was I was in Austin for South By Southwest, and I happened to go into the church that night because I wanted to see Kenny Vaughn play with Marty Stuart. [If you haven't seen our videos of that performance, bookmark [here](#).]

**CC:** That was a great venue, wasn't it.

**PM:** Oh, yeah--well, it was once they got the sound straightened out. There were some gospel a capella groups at the top, and that was nightmarish. But it got better as the night wore on.

**CC:** Yeah.

**PM:** So when I saw Olabelle, you were playing with them. And that's where I got turned on, really, to Cindy Cashdollar. I mean, I knew your name for years, but I'd only ever heard you play on your many appearances on *A Prairie Home Companion*, or some on *Time Out Of Mind*.

**CC:** Well, I'm glad you called. [laughs]

**PM:** And it's some much different when you see somebody play.

**CC:** Yeah, it is, it's totally different, because people can send you tons of CDs, but I don't think people can actually get what a player or a singer is doing until they actually--you got to see them in person, that's all there is to it.

**PM:** Yeah, because half of it is the presence that they exude.

**CC:** Yeah, and interaction.

**PM:** And your presence is formidable. You stand up there like--even before you played a note I just watched you and said, "That chick can play."

[laughter]

**CC:** That's a big compliment, I appreciate that.

**PM:** On the [Bob Dylan] *Time Out of Mind* sessions, did you run into my friend Bob Britt from Nashville?

**CC:** I sure did, yeah.

**PM:** Isn't he something?

**CC:** Yeah, he's incredible. He's a real pro to work with, and just a great player. I haven't seen him since then, actually.

**PM:** A real tonemeister.

**CC:** Yeah, he is. It's like he always plays appropriate, he always plays tastefully. And I haven't seen him since then. I have no idea who he's playing with, what he's doing.

**PM:** I think he's been out with John Fogerty.

**CC:** Oh, okay. Well, that's a good gig.

**PM:** Yeah, that it is. So as a perennial sideman--first of all, does that word--I take it that word doesn't bother you right, "sideman"?

**CC:** No. I think it's totally appropriate. I think "side woman" sounds ridiculous.

**PM:** It does, yeah. It sounds like a sidecar or something.

**CC:** It does. And "side person" is even more ridiculous.

**PM:** [laughs]

**CC:** Sideman, that's what I call myself.

**PM:** Right. So as a sideman instrumentalist, do you have much truck with the whole singer songwriter thing? Is that interesting to you or--

**CC:** In what way? Can you explain?

**PM:** Like, "Well, I like singer songwriters, I like to play with them," or "Nah, I'll take it if it's a good gig, but I'd just as soon play with a good swing band, if you ask me."

**CC:** Oh, I see what you're saying. No, I love to work with singer songwriters, because I guess you can tell I like doing all different kinds of stuff. And sometimes it's challenging, because singer songwriters, depending on the genre they work in, sometimes, especially if it's a solo performer, there's a lot of chordal changes.

**PM:** Right. Even if sometimes they don't know what those chords are.

**CC:** Right.

[laughter]

**CC:** It makes it interesting. So you have to just use your ear, and just kind of weave in and out. And it becomes really interesting to try to support, musically, what they're playing, as well as vocally, but not get in their way. Because you never, as a sideman, want to get in anybody's way.

**PM:** Yeah, right.

**CC:** And so the singer-songwriter, in a duo situation, is a little more of a challenge, as far as just not cluttering, but supporting.

**PM:** Yeah. And something at which you are an expert.

Let's talk about *Slide Show*. There are so many fantastic grooves on that record. But I really like that title cut duet with Steve James. That's got a great feel.

**CC:** Yeah, it just feels like little train or something.

**PM:** Yeah.

[laughter]

**PM:** Yeah, it really rolls well. Is that Mark Rubin from the Bad Livers on bass?

**CC:** Yeah.

**PM:** Wow. I almost met him during South By Southwest. We were emailing. So that brings the question to mind whether or not you've ever done any gigs with Danny Barnes?

**CC:** No, strangely enough, I have not. And I think he's an incredible player.

**PM:** He's unbelievable, right?

**CC:** Yes, and an amazing person, too. I love him, personally.

**PM:** Yeah, he's an outstanding guy, as a person.

**CC:** Yeah.

**PM:** Very smart and very thoughtful. He really has a unique way of carrying himself.

**CC:** He does. And he actually reminds me of my guitar teacher, who was Billy Faier. I don't know if you've ever heard Billy Faier.

**PM:** I've read about him, but I don't know his music, really.

**CC:** Yeah, he oddly enough played banjo and guitar. But around Woodstock where I grew up, he was primarily--you would go out and see him at a show, playing banjo. But he also would advertise that he was giving guitar lessons. And so when I expressed interest in wanting to learn guitar early on, my mom just looked through the paper and found his phone number. So that's how we found Billy Faier. But Danny reminds me of Billy's banjo style, in the fact that it's just free and loose, and not like anybody you've ever heard.

**PM:** Right.

**CC:** Billy was not playing bluegrass banjo. I can't even describe how Billy used to play it, but it was really kind of mesmerizing, all these different meters, and just lots of different styles.

**PM:** And did he make a lot of records?

**CC:** Billy?

**PM:** Yeah.

**CC:** I think he did a few. I went online to try to find them. I think he moved somewhere in East Texas. And some of that stuff is hard to get. I think there are a couple of things that you can find, but some of the older things, of course, are out of print. But he was really a big influence as well, because he taught me how to play by ear. And he was another one that would just sit there with records and figure out stuff, just stress the importance of all the good things that you should know when you're just learning.

**PM:** Wow. [Billy Faier has a website now, check it out at [billyfaier.com](http://billyfaier.com).] What kind of a girl were you growing up, and in school?

**CC:** Really shy. Actually, even at home--I started out playing just regular guitar when I was about eleven. And I was just really self-conscious. I mean, I just practiced in my closet, because I didn't want anybody to hear me.

**PM:** Wow.

**CC:** And my mom still bugs my butt about that.

**PM:** Really? [laughs]

**CC:** She'll come to a show and she always says, "I can't believe you were the girl that used to play in the closet."

[laughter]

**PM:** You have so much presence on stage now.

**CC:** I used to get stage fright when I first started playing out, and my knees would shake, or else they would lock up. And it was just really horrible. And it got to the point where I just got so mad that it was happening, because I couldn't enjoy what I was doing.

So I was pretty quiet and shy. In school, though, I had a fun group of friends and raised hell like everybody else. And I used to go out quite a bit to concerts because, growing up where I did, there was always a lot of music, and it was not such a crackdown on the under age thing, you were able to go into a club or a concert situation. So I think that all helped. But I got out to see as much music as I could. I wasn't doing gigs when I was in high school or anything. I just didn't really want anybody to hear me. [laughs]

**PM:** Now, when you were growing up and playing guitar, were you playing acoustic guitar? Were you playing folk music? Country blues?

**CC:** I started out playing acoustic and doing folk music. And then I got interested in country blues. And I used to buy Stefan Grossman's instructional records.

**PM:** Yeah, me too.

**CC:** And they were great. I think he was one of the first people to have that business, or be successful at it. And I think one of the first records I bought was Stefan Grossman and Aurora Block--who, I realized after a time, was Rory Block. She used to go by Aurora Block. And I took a couple of guitar lessons from her. So it went from folk to country blues, and all that fingerpicking kind of style.

**PM:** Mississippi John Hurt, and all that.

**CC:** Yeah. And then I got an electric guitar and took jazz for a while. That was short-lived, but it was an interesting exploration for the few months that it lasted.

**PM:** Now, in contrast, perhaps, to the shy girl in school, how would you describe your personality now? Is it different?

**CC:** I don't feel shy anymore. I think that I'm different in that sense. And everybody just seems like they are different in school--I mean, I wasn't totally quiet and put my head down in my books. But I think I've just gotten over that fear of obviously playing out in public, and talking to people.

[laughter]

**PM:** Yeah. I read that as a young guitarist in Woodstock you were waiting tables when you heard somebody play a dobro, and had what I guess turned out to be an epiphanic moment. But do you recall who was playing the dobro that day?

**CC:** Oh, sure. His name was Ronnie Sutton.

**PM:** And what's become of Ronnie? Is he still playing?

**CC:** I don't know. I think he lives out in California. He had moved to California years and years ago. And I think he's still out there. I don't know if he's playing, but I would bet money he is.

**PM:** I wonder, does he know the impact that he ended up having on your life?

**CC:** I don't know. It's been so long since I've been in touch with him. And even though he was the one I heard, it was his teacher, Charlie Ferrara, who taught me how to play dobro. Because after I heard Ronnie playing--it was at a little bar where I was a cocktail waitress. And so I went to him and said, "Do you give lessons?" And he said, "No, but you can contact my teacher"--who was this wonderful guy that was from up there. And



Charlie played banjo and guitar and pedal steel, and all kinds of instruments. So I took lessons from him for a long time. And he would come over to my house a couple times a week, but never take any money. And my mom would just make him a big pot of coffee.

**PM:** Really?

**CC:** Uh-huh. He's a wonderful guy, really incredible.

**PM:** Is he still around?

**CC:** He's still around, and he definitely knows the impact that he had. I've always just tried to be in touch with him. And he was a guy that worked at a cement plant, and could have definitely played professionally, but he had a family to support. But he really changed my life, really.

**PM:** Wow.

**CC:** He has this amazing record collection. He really wanted to teach me Hawaiian style, but I was just way too impatient for that. I just wanted to learn all the fast stuff. But he'd bring over all his old Josh Graves records and Brother Oswald records, and Kitty Wells. And we would just sit there and listen to all these records for a long time. And he would show me what they were doing, and stress the importance of playing with a lot of feeling, and just like really digging in to the instrument.

**PM:** How beautiful to have had such a deep-thinking mentor so early on.

**CC:** Yeah. I'm very thankful for that, that he eventually saw that I was serious. Because in the beginning I know he didn't think I was serious at all. But in time he realized that I really did want to learn, and even though I didn't know anything about the instrument, I obviously loved the sound enough to want to work at it.

**PM:** Yeah.

**CC:** He used to play out a bit, I don't think he does anymore. But he's still there. And he became very close friends with my family, and ended up going on fishing trips with my dad every year, up to Canada. So it was very nice. It turned to be a friendship as well.

**PM:** I think "Locust Grove" is such an amazing cut. I mean, it brought tears to my eyes. Then they just kept rolling, the whole rest of the song. That's amazing when an instrumental can do that.

**CC:** Oh, thank you. I get the same reaction from a lot of people, which really is, I think, the biggest compliment there is: that you can get a physical, emotional reaction out of somebody from a piece of music. But when I wrote it, I was feeling very emotional at the time, so I think it just kind of translated.

**PM:** Yeah, you really stuck it in there, really got it into the composition. It's just truly a testament to your abilities, not just as a player, but as a composer.

**CC:** I wish I wrote more. They come out like once every seven to ten years.

[laughter]

**CC:** I don't know why, it just happens. [laughs]

**PM:** It was an incredible experience that a song without words will do that to you. That's very rare.

**CC:** Thank you so much. I really appreciate that. And my friends back in Woodstock, a couple of them that I grew up with, they say they listen to that piece a lot, because it takes them back. We all used to play in those barns, too. We spent a lot of time in that setting for what that piece was written for, which was my grandparents' dairy farm. So it means a lot to them in different ways. But I guess it's just a sad piece--I felt so sad when I wrote it, and so I think that's why it seems to have the same effect on people when they hear it.

**PM:** Yeah. I've always been so turned on by the playing of Mike Auldridge. And the two pieces on *Slide Show* with him really swung incredibly. When did you and he first meet?

**CC:** I met Mike back when I was doing the bluegrass stuff, the little circuit with the John Herald Band.

**PM:** It was sad to see John's passing. When was it, last year?

**CC:** Oh, that was a huge shock. Very shocking, very sad, because I think nobody knew it was coming. I mean, there were a few that weren't surprised, but nobody could foresee it coming.

**PM:** Yeah.

**CC:** And it was really just a waste of a talent.

**PM:** Yeah, really sad. I was such a Greenbriar Boys fan. They were so great. But he was one of your first bands, right, John Herald?

**CC:** Yeah, like the first real band, I would say. Because I was in a little guitar trio when I moved from Woodstock to Fort Lauderdale, Florida. My first gig was in a little bar called The Button, right on the main drag across from the beach, for happy hour, for tips. And then when I came back to Woodstock, I was in an all-girl band called Whiskey For Breakfast.

**PM:** A pretty bold name for an all-girl band at the time.

**CC:** Wasn't it?

[laughter]

**CC:** And that was fun. And I think at that point, I'd just started playing dobro. And then I was in a couple of bluegrass bands around town, and then came John Herald. So that was first--John Herald was a first for me in a lot of ways. Touring, TV shows, just a lot of things we used to do--with many of the bluegrass festivals that would have us--because we were not a traditional bluegrass band. And that's where I would see Mike Auldridge. Although when I was learning how to play dobro, I would listen to Mike's records all the time.

**PM:** Just unbelievable records he's made.

**CC:** Oh, they're all good. Even his first ones, I think, are still classic recordings.

**PM:** Just wore them out.

**CC:** I think *Blues and Bluegrass* is my favorite. Yeah, they're pretty worn down, too. They're just about playable. I just always thought he was great. And he was really very nice and gracious to me when I would see him at the festivals, and so it was great to have him on the CD. And to sit down and get to play with him was--it didn't seem like it was actually happening.

**PM:** Yeah. And those tunes really jumped.

You've played a lot with one of my favorites, Redd Volkaert.

**CC:** Oh, he's great. We're playing today, actually.

**PM:** He's so explosive and so unpredictable.

**CC:** And I love it! And that's why I love it here. When I'm here I work with him about three nights of the week, four nights of the week. And it's great because you just never know what's going to come out of those hands.

**PM:** Yeah. What kind of a guy is he personally? And what's he like to play with, for you?

**CC:** He's just funny! He just makes a gig fun. I mean, he just makes me laugh all the time, and everybody else that's around him. And it comes out in his playing. He likes to get up there and have a good time.

And he's not afraid to try anything. We never rehearse, so we'll usually work out tunes like five minutes before the show. We just sit there and while we're plugging in, I just say, "Oh, here's a new song." And whatever it is, he'll pick it up immediately.

**PM:** How about Bill Kirchen, is he a buddy of yours?

**CC:** Yeah. I love Bill.

**PM:** He's an old California friend of mine.

**CC:** Wow! You should move here. [laughs]

**PM:** When I was interviewing Eliza Gilkyson recently, we were talking about people in town. She said, "Frank, you should move here." [laughs]

**CC:** Yeah, Austin is definitely a musical hotbed of a community. Every night of the week you can go out and hear all this great music, all different music. And it's amazing that in the same town, the same night, Bill Kirchen is playing in one place and Redd Volkaert is playing in another place.

**PM:** Yeah.

**CC:** Sometimes Bill will come and sit in with us. And I just did a couple of tracks for Bill's new CD. I had never worked with him in the studio before. And that was fun. We just had a great time.

**PM:** Oh, I got to cover that. Yeah, I'm remiss in not having covered that.

Another guy you've played with that I like a lot, and I'm old friends with, is Jorma Kaukonen. My brother, Billy, used to play slide with him, actually.

**CC:** Oh, see, this world is just getting smaller and smaller. Jorma's just an amazing talent. I love to play with him.

**PM:** He's a beautiful guy.

**CC:** He's so nice and there's just so much to him. He's a real multifaceted person.

**PM:** And he's really not pushing it forward. He really holds it in reserve, all the many things that he's about. Unless you go to draw one thing or the other out of him, it would just kind of be there in reserve. He's not really selling himself.

**CC:** No. It's a quiet strength that he has, that you feel when you're around him. But it's there in his playing, too. And his playing is great, because it just goes in these little bursts. But then there's always like all this space around it. And so I think he just naturally encourages whoever is playing with him, you just kind of get on a different level of playing, and you come out with stuff you've never done before. And that's what he brings out in people, I think. And then when you're playing with him and Jack

Cassady--and I love Jack's style, because he plays bass almost like a guitar player, it's melodic.

**PM:** Right.

**CC:** And so between he and Jorma--and then you have Barry Mitterhoff, so it's like a dream gig.

**PM:** I think we have to do a piece on [Jorma and his wife, Vanessa's] Fur Peace Ranch, like go there and see if they'll let me film, and shit like that, because that's a good thing, isn't it?

**CC:** I think it's one of the best teaching facilities that I've ever seen. The location is great, but I like it because the classes are small and intimate, number one. And the setting is so nice. And so it's a very easygoing atmosphere for both the students and the teachers. And they also have that theater up there for Peace Station.

**PM:** Ah.

**CC:** Every Saturday night there's a concert that whoever is teaching gives. And so it can be two or three or the teachers. But it's open to the public, and it's also broadcast on the local NPR station there.

**PM:** That's amazing. He really got that going on, all that stuff.

**CC:** Oh, you wouldn't believe what's up there. And then on Sundays there's a student concert. And so the students get to perform on that stage. Vanessa runs the sound. And the students get to experience performance--most of them have never even been on a stage, or played on a microphone. So it's a really nice experience for them, too. They incorporate just a lot of stuff in a long weekend up there.

**PM:** While we're on the subject of teaching and lessons and stuff, I'd like to hear something about the instructional videos you've done for Happy Traum's Homespun series?

**CC:** Oh, yeah, there are four of them now. There are two dobro videos. One is for beginning bluegrass players--that was the first one I did. And then there's *Dobro Variations*, which is more for intermediate players, that covers different tunings, and there's a very long segment on tackling the minor chords and style. And then the two non-pedal western swing steel videos--or DVDs. Everything has gone to DVD now.

**PM:** Right, right.

**CC:** I like doing it.

**PM:** That company has done so well.

**CC:** I know. And I remember when Happy started it. Happy and Artie both lived in Woodstock forever. And I remember calling him for guitar lessons, and he was always really busy. That's how Homespun started, that he was always too busy to do a regular schedule with students, so he started making cassette tapes to give to the students.

**PM:** Wow.

**CC:** And that's how Homespun started. [laughs]

**PM:** Wow, what an organic beginning to a company that went pretty damn big time.

**CC:** It *is* homespun. [laughs] I look at that name, and it cracks me up. Now it's like international distribution. I think that first dobro video I did was one of the last ones to be done in their facility, which was a very cool little funky studio that Doug James had in Woodstock. So you can really see the difference, quality-wise, between that and the ones as the years progressed. But I really enjoy doing them.

It's kind of strange when you're there doing it, just teaching a camera. But it's an interesting process, at least for me. I take a long time, and I try to think back to all the questions I had and all the stuff I wanted to learn. So I kind of outline all those questions that I think somebody would want to ask if they were with me in person, then I structure the lessons around that. In the past three DVDs, I've used a band on it, so the students can actually hear a guitar and a bass, so they've got some rhythm to play to.

**PM:** Wow. And it's a beautiful completion of the circle, that somebody who had kind of fortuitous beginning with a really good mentor should, in turn, give back in that very instructional, pointed way, to people who want to learn. That's fantastic.

**CC:** Yeah. It's hard to find a dobro teacher or a steel guitar teacher in a lot of areas. I was really fortunate. But in talking to so many people over the years, it's really hard to find.

**PM:** Because, as we know, a lot of really the best stringmeisters are just not good teachers. They're totally different talents.

**CC:** I think a lot of people, too, are very far removed at that point from what it was like at the beginning. And it's hard to sit there and play simply enough so it will get across to someone who might be just starting out. Or it's hard to think of the best way to explain things, because if you've been doing it for a long time, your brain is just full of ideas, and you can teach something ten different ways at a certain point after a while. So you have to really get to the basics, but make it interesting enough so people want to keep continuing throughout the lesson. It's real challenge, I think, to do that.

**PM:** Yeah, it is, because it's hard to find your way back to square one.

**CC:** And to relay it to someone else. But I think it's a great company that he has, and I'm sure he'll continue to do it. I mean, every time I turn around they're doing one other incredible thing after the other. You look through that catalog--it's fun to look through the catalog, even if you don't want to play an instrument.

[laughter]

**PM:** Yeah, it's gotten deep.

**CC:** And where else can you learn penny whistle?

[laughter]

**CC:** I mean, there's something for everybody.

**PM:** After so many years in the band, it had to be a radical turning point in your life to leave Asleep at the Wheel, right?

**CC:** It was. It was a horribly scary decision to make, because after almost nine years, I just thought, well, now what? After being in that kind of a cocoon--and I reached up out of that cocoon once in a while to do projects, but it was just a decision that definitely the time had come. It was kind of the urge to do something different, and also to get back to playing what I used to play before the Wheel, more acoustic-based stuff. The steel to me was just a hobby that kind of got out of control.

**PM:** [laughs]

**CC:** It was a little thing that I was doing on the side, and then the opportunity to audition for the Wheel came along. And it was just like it became a monster. It was a fun monster for a long time. That was western swing boot camp, for sure.

**PM:** Right.

**CC:** And Ray Benson, to his credit, when I joined, he said, "Now, you got six months to get up to speed on this instrument." Because it was no secret that I had just kind of started dabbling in it. And so it really was like an education. And musically, what a great experience.

**PM:** Oh, unbelievable.

**CC:** To leave was--I just didn't know what was going to happen. But I left on good terms. I remember walking into Ray's office and saying, "I'm burned out." That's what I said, "I'm burned out." What he said was, "I can't believe it took you this long."

[laughter]

**CC:** That's the first thing he said. Because generally the life span of the musicians who came and went in that band was about six years. I mean, there are still some there that have been there for eighteen, twenty years now. But for the steel players or fiddle players, the lifespan seemed to be like six, seven years.

**PM:** Right.

**CC:** And here I was going on nine. So I left on good terms, and left and thought, "What am I going to do?" And I remember going home and just sitting down with my address book and calling everybody I knew, and just said, "I'm available."

**PM:** Right. Those two beautiful words you want to hear from every woman.

[laughter]

**CC:** I didn't think about that.

[laughter]

**CC:** Yeah, I went to every bathroom stall--

**PM:** "For a good time..."

**CC:** Right.

[laughter]

**CC:** I never thought of it like that. But as it turned out, I toured BeauSoleil that year, because that was their 25th Anniversary Tour. And things started happening, but it just took a while. It definitely took a while. And it took a while to get out of the western swing head, too.

**PM:** No doubt, and back into like simpler music, and acoustic-based music. I mean, that's a real shifting of gears, no doubt.

**CC:** It was a shift. But I'm glad that all that musical stuff from playing western swing-- because it really is jazz on country--

**PM:** Harmonically it's definitely jazz.

**CC:** Harmonically, it's pretty much the same. So it all seemed to work. And I still work with Ray once in a while, and we get together and commiserate. So I'm glad that connection is still there. But it all worked out. And it's scary being in the freelance world, for sure.



**PM:** And how has it been these years, freelance? Some years lean, some fat, or pretty steady all through?

**CC:** It goes up and down. And it will get to certain times where you go, "Oh, my God, what am I going do?" and then the phone will ring. But that's what you accept in any job that you have, where you're self-employed.

**PM:** Right.

**CC:** You just have to have faith that something will come along. And if you are having a down time, you have to utilize it wisely. And that's the time that you use to maybe just work on new stuff, or work on things that you've never tried before. Because when you're freelancing, you're usually in the position of constantly learning other people's tunes, and you're jumping from one gig to another. And you're just always kind of--first of all, you're playing other people's music, and you're always kind of thinking fast on your feet.

**PM:** So in down time, do you still practice, at this point in your career?

**CC:** I try to. Just the other day I thought, "God"--I was actually sitting down practicing, which can mean two different things. That means actually working on something that you're having problems with, maybe some style that you want to learn, or it can mean just sitting there playing whatever pops in your head. And that's what I was doing, I was just sitting there kind of noodling around, thinking, "God, when was the last time I did this?" It had been a long time. So it was kind of nice, actually.

**PM:** Well, yeah, in Nashville, I have some friends that when they're home, they're off the road, they don't even pick up their guitar, it sits in the corner. And they say, "Nah, I'm tired of playing that thing, man. I play it all the time."

[laughter]

**CC:** I know. And I've got my times like that, too, for sure. But it's nice to just put on a CD where I'm not sitting there charting it out, or trying to absorb it while I'm sitting. I'm just like, "Oh, here's Stan Getz, great. I'll put this on." That kind of thing.

**PM:** Yeah, right.

**CC:** People always think that when I'm home I must listen to like roots music all the time. But when I'm home I usually listen to a lot of old jazz stuff or--

**PM:** That's an album I'll go back to to the grave.

**CC:** Stan Getz?

**PM:** Oh, yeah. Back all the time to that. "Corcavado" and all those tunes.

**CC:** Oh, God, it's just something about Red and Ira's teasing each other about, "Hey, did you learn 'Desafinado' last week?" I've heard that joke for a year--

**PM:** [laughs]

**CC:** --because I still maintain that guitar and steel doing bossa nova would be a great thing.

**PM:** Oh, yeah. I mean, I love to write bossa nova.

**CC:** Oh, you do?

**PM:** And my friends that I co-write with a lot here, they said, "Frank, forget that bossa nova stuff. We got to get cut." [laughs] And so I've really buckled down this last year and a half, and we're just writing for the market. But whenever I'm sitting by myself, it's like, "I want to write that."

**CC:** Oh, wow. See, I've never talked to anybody who actually wrote bossa nova.

**PM:** Oh, I've got several friends here that write it very well, and just love those voicings. [laughs] But they kind of--they shut up about it because they're trying to be pop writers or country writers, or whatever. But I mean, it's an irresistible style to play and write, and it's so romantic.

**CC:** It is. It's just a beautiful, happy kind of--it always makes you feel like you're at the beach. That's what it reminds me of, the beach. [laughs]

**PM:** Yeah, the first couple of cuts I get, I'm buying a house on some Mexican beach and parking my ace under a palm tree and writing the new bossa nova.

**CC:** I don't blame you. I think it's great music. And boy, you talk about jazz chords--I mean, there are some chords in there.

**PM:** And somebody invented that style in the garage in Cuba in a certain year. It didn't exist before that time. That's the curious thing about bossa nova, it's really traceable down to two or three guys.

**CC:** Oh, I didn't know that.

**PM:** There's even a book on it. [See our book review from a few years back.] And Jobim is one of the guys, and Joao Gilberto--

**CC:** Oh!

**PM:** --they just kind of came up with it. They were trying to come up with something new, and that's the rhythm that happened.

My having to turn this tape over tells me that I've taken too many minutes of this busy woman's time, so I'm going to let you go in a minute.

**CC:** Oh, no. It's fine. My Saturday is open.

**PM:** So you played with so many monster acts now. Are there gigs or co-bills that you'd like to try that just haven't happened yet?

**CC:** Gosh, there's so much music out there.

**PM:** Really.

**CC:** I hear and see so many people and go, "Oh, I'd love to play with them." And then people ask, "Who do you want to play with?" and I blank out.

**PM:** Have you ever played with Ry Cooder or David Lindley?

**CC:** No, and would love to. I mean, they're two of my idols.

**PM:** Of course.

**CC:** I never have, but I mean, if there's Cooder or Lindley, do you really need another person on slide?

[laughter]

**PM:** One might well ask...

**CC:** I don't think so. And it's so funny, because Lindley comes through Austin almost every year.

**PM:** He does? Because I never see him in Nashville--well, a lot of people don't play Nashville. They go, "No, I'm not playing that town. Nobody comes." But he never comes through Nashville.

**CC:** Well, he comes through here, and I swear to God, without exaggeration, *every* time he's here I'm out on the road.

**PM:** Right.

**CC:** It's funny. But, yes, I would love to play with him. Bruce Springsteen is another artist I would love to play with.

**PM:** Oh, I could see that happening for you, for sure. I mean, just look at his current project.

**CC:** Well, I inquired about that too late. I made a phone call, and I was too late. They said, "Well, gee, it might have happened, but you're a month too late." But yeah, that would have been great.

**PM:** Who got your spot in that project?

**CC:** I think--I think, Marty Rifkin.

**PM:** Ah. I know the name.

**CC:** A great steel player that lives out in, I think, L.A. somewhere.

**PM:** Right. Oh, yeah, I could see you in Springsteen's band, for sure. Anybody else come to mind that's a dream gig?

**CC:** Tom Petty, I would love to work with him.

**PM:** Oh, yeah.

**CC:** I would love to work with Mark Knopfler.

**PM:** How do you like that new record with him and Emmylou?

**CC:** I absolutely love, love that.

**PM:** Is that great, or what?

**CC:** It's just incredible. And his voice sounds great on it. What a great pairing of people. And yeah, I just think he's a genius. That *Neck and Neck* CD with Chet Atkins, I just love that, too.

**PM:** Yeah, that's really great.

**CC:** So those are the people that come to mind. And I'm sure there are tons of others. I'm just blanking out right now.

**PM:** But, yeah, those are some good ones. And they're like the top of the page, too.

Do you consider yourself to be a spiritual person?

**CC:** In what way?

**PM:** I don't know. In any way.

**CC:** That's a good question. I don't know. I never thought about it. I mean, I think I have a good intuition for things. I guess that could be spiritual in a sense. I don't follow any particular religion. I don't read any books that have to do with spiritualism. So I guess, in an academic sense or following a certain path, then, no. But there are certain times where I think I'm open to situations with other people that might be construed as spiritual, maybe.

**PM:** Yeah, you've probably had quite a few moments on stage that felt pretty spiritual.

**CC:** Yeah. And if you're not a spiritual person, it will make you one.

[laughter]

**CC:** Well, yeah, there's been a lot of nice epiphanies and moments where you just kind of feel like you've been transported somewhere else, so that when it's over, you don't even realize--it's almost like when you're driving and you go into that zone--almost like a meditation. It's done, but you don't remember getting there. Like when you're driving, and you don't remember the trip there--

[laughter]

**CC:** --because you were thinking about something else. It's the same way with music, where you just get so into what you're doing that when it's over you go, "Oh, are we done?"

**PM:** Are you much of a reader or a lover of books? Do you make time for that in your life?

**CC:** I try to. When I'm on the road I tend to read while traveling. And I read all different kinds of things. I love biographies. I love photography--I just got done reading Dorothea Lange's book, a great book. She's one of my favorite photographers. I love the photographers out of the WPA, the Depression Era.

**PM:** Wow. That's interesting.

**CC:** I read a lot of those kind of books--photojournalism, I guess, it is, really.

**PM:** Yeah. Well, it's really nice to meet you. You're a swell person, on top of being a great musician.

**CC:** Well, thanks, Frank. Thanks for interviewing me. I went online and checked out Puremusic, and what a great webzine it is. How long have you been doing that?

**PM:** It's five years now, five and a half years. Yeah, a lot of people come to read it. It's like a million hits a month now.

**CC:** It's a classy online publication, and I like the variety that it covers. That's the good thing about it.

**PM:** Yeah, you've got to be eclectic if you're going to really cover music.

**CC:** Yeah. It's so hard to keep up with it all now. Really, there are just so many different ways it's going. And the whole Americana movement--it almost became underground for a while.

[laughter]

**PM:** Yeah, like prohibition.

**CC:** Yeah. You're discovering things in a cellar. And there's just so much of it out there. You live in a music town, and I live in a music town, and it just seems like every week somebody is saying, "Hey, have you heard"--"Have you checked out this person"--"Have you checked out this band?" And it's really difficult to keep up with. It's a full-time job in itself. So I love Nashville. I was just there when I did the Ryman with Van [Morrison].

**PM:** Oh, you're already doing Van dates.

**CC:** Oh, I've done two tours, and I'm about to do the next one in August.

**PM:** What's that been like?

**CC:** It's great. And playing the Ryman with him was wonderful. And they filmed it. It aired on CMT last weekend, I think.

**PM:** Oh, jeez. I got to get that.

**CC:** It was called "One Night in Nashville." It was filmed in black and white by Danny Clinch, who's a great documentary filmmaker. And I thought it was a wonderful--he really captured the whole evening there. But working with Van, it's another one of those spiritual moments, because he was one of the first people I saw at a live show. When I was twelve, my mom took me to this concert that my guitar teacher, Billy Faier, was playing. John Hammond, Jr., Odetta, and Van Morrison all appeared.

**PM:** Wow.

**CC:** So that was the first and only time I had seen Van live, was when I was twelve.

**PM:** Wow! [laughs]

**CC:** And so years later, here's this phone call, and I'm meeting this person that I saw when I was so young.

**PM:** Yeah. You're wonderful. It was really nice to talk to you.

**CC:** Well, thanks Frank. And I'm very glad meet you by phone. I hope we get to meet in person someday. And good luck with the writing.

**PM:** Well, I hope we cut a tune together sometime. To get you on a couple of tracks would be a real groove. [It so happened that the next week we had the legendary Robbie Turner in to cut some pedal steel tracks for us. When we were shooting the breeze afterward and I brought up Cindy's name, he just went off about what a talented and wonderful person she is.]

**CC:** I hope so, too.

**PM:** Thanks for your time, we'll see you down in Austin before long.

