

**A Conversation with Diana Jones**  
by Frank Goodman (8/2007, Puremusic.com)

I first met Diana Jones in passing at a friend's Xmas show, and thought she stood out unusually, in an old world way. When, a few months after, I bumped into her at a Folk Alliance, she and I talked a little in the lobby and I was very impressed. She was not running the usual social software, there was something special there.

So when I got a recording of her in the mail, it didn't sit around the way they tend to in this house of records. I put it right on, in a kind of a "let's get to the bottom of this, shall we" mood, positive version. The first song, "Pretty Girl," was arresting in the down home delivery of its message, basically "I don't want to be a pretty girl for you," and I thought, *they're going to play that.*

The tractor beam intensified over the next couple of tunes, until the fourth one, "Pony," a very rare song about a Native American girl. That tune short circuited my mental faculties and hot wired my self into the music of this person that I realized I didn't know the first thing about. Then I started over, and started to listen for real. As many of you know, that's a completely different process that incorporates *presence*, something in modern day culture that has grown, sadly, rare.

And that's exactly what Diana Jones brings to the game, especially in her writing. I love the material on this powerful debut, *My Remembrance Of You*, so now I'm hungry to hear the other several albums she's written alongside and since, to which she refers in our conversation. But this little record took off in such an unpredictable way that it has kept her on the road for a year and half solid, and threatens to do at a whole new level, since she now has been released in the UK (where she is selling out shows in places she has never been), and in the US has been picked up by Ryko distribution, which will put her work at arms length to all who have been hearing about her this last very busy year or so.

When good things happen to good people and great artists, it's like everything is right in the world for a moment.

**Puremusic:** So that's what it takes to catch up with a person like you these days, you have to call them in the UK, right?

[laughter]

**Diana Jones:** I'm sorry. I don't mean to be so elusive.

**PM:** So transatlantic. Where do I find you precisely, and what are you up to over there?

**DJ:** Well, right now I'm spending a little time with my family, and yeah, just kind of hanging out with them. Actually, it's funny, my brother-in-law works for a guitar

company out of the Czech Republic--well, he actually is a rep, so he reps a bunch of different lines, and he reps this one line that I fell in love with, they're handmade guitars out of Prague. He got me an endorsement deal with them.

**PM:** Of course he did.

**DJ:** So I'm going to Wales tomorrow, which is where the main office is, and I'm going to go try out a bunch of guitars and choose the one I want. [laughs]

**PM:** So what is this company called?

**DJ:** The guitars are called Stonebridge Guitars. And they're named after the Charles Bridge, in Prague, which is made out of stone, and built in the 1300s.  
[<http://www.stonebridgeguitars.com>]

**PM:** Wow.

**DJ:** And the guy who makes them--I forget his name offhand because it's Czech and it's hard to remember. But he started making guitars way back in the late '70s. And the Czech Republic was communist, so it was illegal to have your own business. So he had to make them sort of under the cover of night for years, and then was just able, in the last few years to start the company. And he employs 40 people now. And the guitars I've played so far are better than the Martin I've got. They're unbelievable, yeah.

**PM:** Where does his wood come from?

**DJ:** It's all from that area.

**PM:** Wow.

**DJ:** I think it's all within that region. It's the usual suspects, mahogany, rosewood. I'm sure the rosewood is important, and then spruce.

**PM:** He's using spruce tops, of course, not cedar tops.

**DJ:** Both, actually. He's got a couple of different lines. He's got a bluegrass line, and then he's got sort of an acoustic line.

**PM:** And what are you after? Are you after a dreadnaught or an auditorium size, or a little guitar?

**DJ:** I kind of like the smaller ones. Mine is a double O.

**PM:** A double O what?

**DJ:** 0018 Martin. It's an Elizabeth Cotten copy. They did a vintage line, and that was one of them. I think I like the smaller body ones. I'm playing sort of an auditorium size right now that belongs to my brother-in-law, just kind of checking it out. It's smaller bodied. It's not as small as my double 0, but it's pretty small, and it's just so well balanced, and the bass sound is just amazing for the size it is.

**PM:** The auditorium, you mean?

**DJ:** Uh-huh.

**PM:** Yeah, well, that's the thing, if you're an artist like you are that goes back and forth between finger picking and flatpicking--

**DJ:** Exactly, yeah.

**PM:** --it's really about the auditorium, because the really small guitars don't really strum as well as the bigger guitars, somehow--I mean, with rare exceptions.

**DJ:** Yeah, you kind of need something in the middle.

**PM:** Yeah, the great finger picking guitars.

**DJ:** So I'm sort of in guitar heaven.

**PM:** So will they use you, also, in their advertisement?

**DJ:** Yeah, they will.

**PM:** Beautiful.

**DJ:** They're going to take some pictures tomorrow.

**PM:** I wonder if we can use any of those, because if we can, we want to. We want to get some new pictures of you, and maybe I can sweet-talk your brother-in-law--is that who it is, or did you say your brother?

**DJ:** Yeah, my brother-in-law, my sister's guy.

**PM:** Yeah, maybe he can make it possible for us to use some new photos of the artist. That would be really cool.

**DJ:** And P. [Diana's manager, Pamela Cole] and I do have some new ones as well, just that have been taken in the last few months. And some of those are also from my Epiphone endorsement.

**PM:** So are they on your MySpace page--

**DJ:** Some of them are.

**PM:** Okay, cool.

**DJ:** There are plenty to choose from.

**PM:** So although we were among the army of people that were more than taken--taken back, is more like it--with your debut, *My Remembrance of You*, who knew that it would have legs to travel the world and still be going strong after all this time?

**DJ:** Yeah, it's really been quite a year.

**PM:** It's just unbelievable. First of all, how long has it been out, at this point?

**DJ:** It was a year in April. It was just released in the UK this month. And I'm looking in my book to see how many shows I have in April, but let's see--I had a show in Germany and a show in Holland, and then I had--two, three, four--five shows in the UK. And I did two BBC shows. And every show was sold out.

**PM:** And that was in 2006 or this year?

**DJ:** This year, that was my first time here.

**PM:** And they just released it in the UK, and yet the shows were sold out.

**DJ:** Yeah, the US CD was self-released. But Bob Harrison played it a lot, and has gotten a lot of play on BBC2, too, so that really helps over here. And I think also I just got signed with Paul Fenn. We booked most of the shows, but then Paul booked a couple, and then just with his influence, and him putting the word out, I think--it was interesting, I mean, it just was really an amazing feeling to have that many people excited in a country I'd never been to.

**PM:** Well, I think it's indicative, too, of the fact that the people in the UK, both in folk and country music, get into certain kinds of things, certain things that they perceive to be very authentic and very real.

**DJ:** Yeah.

**PM:** And you're squarely in that category, not because of any cogitation or strategy on your part, but just where you're truly coming from. And they really get that. So I'm not surprised that they come in droves.

**DJ:** Well, and I think also the place that this music comes from, it's really the British Isles originally, and it got filtered through the Appalachians. So there's a language

bringing it back over here, I think there's sort of a memory of it, there's sort of a context for it in the old English music.

**PM:** Yeah, I certainly, as a person with four Irish grandparents, certainly feel that the whole Americana scene, really, came from there, the whole folk scene, the whole bluegrass scene, that's just how it is.

**DJ:** Right.

**PM:** So *My Remembrance of You* certainly gathered amazing airplay and press. Maybe you'd help me with the list of accolades, if your humility permits. I know it was number one for 2006 in the Chicago Tribune, which is quite some feat, and it looked to be number three in the Folk Radio Chart of that year. Is that right?

**DJ:** Yeah.

**PM:** That's pretty amazing.

**DJ:** Yeah, it was. I think I was number three, and I was like the number three artist, or something, too. And "Pretty Girl" was number one for three months almost, Folk DJ Chart, it was the number one song. And we had a bunch of other songs that charted in different places.

**PM:** Number one for three months, wow. And as great a song as "Pretty Girl" is, it still gets eclipsed by the really legendary song, "Pony," which to me is the standout song on the record.

**DJ:** Thanks. Yeah, a lot of people relate to "Pony," I think.

**PM:** Yeah, "Pony"--I've said it before, it's one of the great folk songs of all time.

**DJ:** Well, thank you.

**PM:** I can't imagine how a friend of mine actually came up with that song.

[laughter]

**DJ:** That's sweet.

**PM:** It's kind of an awesome feat. And now the album has been picked up by Ryko Distribution. Now the people who have been meaning to buy it will all have a chance to get it.

**DJ:** Yeah, that will be nice, because it was hard to have a record out there and people saying, "Where can we get it?" And of course you can get it online, and a lot of people do

shop online these days. But to not be able to pick it up in a record store and see it and hold it, I think a lot of people still buy that way.

**PM:** Yeah, because I think in this day and age there are still plenty of people who have trouble using their credit card online.

**DJ:** Yeah, I'm always a little worried about it.

**PM:** I can't imagine--I mean, I think the day will soon come when there's a whole lot less shopping except online, but it's not here yet. But where this activity has really paid off, in my mind, is how the gigs have flowed in, remarkably. Now you're opening for Richard Thompson in the UK, I mean, wow!

**DJ:** I know. I know. I try not to think about it, because I get kind of nervous.

**PM:** I think he is the best solo artist in the world, hands down, end of story.

**DJ:** Yeah, I know. I'm such a huge fan. And since it came in that I was going to do the tour--I've got one show with him on this tour, in Cardiff next week, and then I come back and do, gosh, a bunch of dates with him in October, so it's going to be a big month. Yeah, I've just been kind of assimilating that information for a while. [laughs]

**PM:** Yeah, I mean--

**DJ:** I can't quite believe it myself. It's kind of like opening for Bob Dylan.

**PM:** Yeah, very much so.

**DJ:** Holy moly!

**PM:** Very much so. Unlike Bob Dylan, I've never considered listening to Richard Thompson's albums my idea of a good time, exactly, but seeing his show--

**DJ:** Right.

**PM:** --now, that's a different thing, because he's awesome live.

**DJ:** See, I've never seen him live, but I really have been just a huge fan of his recordings. I just feel so blessed to get to see the shows; that's going to be amazing.

**PM:** Oh, he is stultifying live. He's one of the few guys you can see that gets up there not only with the Sunrise pickup, but with that huge thing that--I forget what the hell it is, exactly. It looks like a car battery--

[laughter]

**PM:** --that has to do with the ultimate delivery of that sound. When I run this interview I'll correct whatever the technical information is, but it's some kind of like a big preamplifier, is what it amounts to. His sound guy travels with a little suitcase, and it's got that thing in it. [It's the Sunrise Tube Interface, pictured here without the vented top. It costs three grand and sounds like it, too.]

**DJ:** Wow.

**PM:** It's got the thing and two pedals. It has to do with the delivery of the Sunrise pickup in its most ultimate form. And his guitar sound is frickin' scary.

**DJ:** That'll be a cool thing to check out, just the tech stuff.

**PM:** Exactly, because that's as far as the acoustic guitar sound has gone, it's that. [IMHO.]

**DJ:** Yeah.

**PM:** And nobody much will carry this thing around except him, but people do the Sunrise with the Pendulum, or something like that, which also sounds great. And that's a good way to do it, too. So how did the bill with Thompson come together? What was that fortuitous happening?

**DJ:** Well, Paul's [Fenn] son works with the guy who books--or who I guess was managing this tour for Richard Thompson. And so they were looking for someone to open the tour. And since the UK tour happened, they've now added a week and a half of European dates as well, so that's really nice. But he sort of got it through Paul. The interesting thing was, Paul took me on without ever having seen me.

**PM:** Wow.

**DJ:** Just heard the record. And so I had a show in London last time, and Paul came. And I wish I could remember the guy's name, but he's Richard's guy. The two of them came to the show together. And it was funny, because it was an L-shaped room, and there were so many people in it, the only place for him to sit was like right in front of me. No pressure, you know.

[laughter]

**DJ:** I had just gotten a 50 pound parking ticket, which is about \$100. We were not having a good day. I get into London, and we had driven to the BBC, and I don't even know how the rental car didn't get like completely smashed up in London, but it didn't. Anyway, so we finally get to the gig, and there they are in front of me. And it just ended up being a really magical night. I mean, the audience gave us so much energy back that every show was just kind of exhilarating. It was really amazing. So we did the show, and they were both sort of scheming about the next tour as I was playing. I think they were both feeling

pretty good about it. And he was feeling good about me opening up for Richard, although most of it was booked. Then they booked the European leg after they saw me live.

**PM:** So the European leg, will you play Germany?

**DJ:** Actually, the European leg is interesting. I just put a record out with Jonathan Byrd.

**PM:** Right. What's it called?

**DJ:** It's called *Radio Soul*. And we're doing two weeks starting the last week of September. We did two weeks in Switzerland, Austria and Germany.

**PM:** Will you play Heidelberg?

**DJ:** I don't see that, no, I don't think so.

**PM:** Too bad. If you get a Heidelberg date added, you got to meet my brother Billy over there. [[www.billygoodman.com](http://www.billygoodman.com)]

**DJ:** I would love to, that would be so much fun.

**PM:** He's a real character and a great player.

**DJ:** Yeah, cool.

**PM:** But those dates are with Jonathan Byrd?

**DJ:** Up until the 7th. And then on the 8th, in Brussels, with Richard Thompson. And then Amsterdam on the 9th, back to Brussels on the 10th, back to Holland on the 11th, and then Paris on the 13th.

**PM:** Holy jeez!

**DJ:** And then we're in Glasgow on the 15th. And then we're back in the UK for two weeks.

**PM:** You just must be trippin', girlfriend, right?

**DJ:** I am trippin'. [laughs]

**PM:** Wow.

**DJ:** I mean, even to just say that to you is like--I'm like, "Who is saying that? It couldn't be me." So it's really strange. I think P. and I were at the airport the other day, my manager, we're sitting there just having a cup of tea before I left. And I forget what it was I said, but it was just something really funny like, "I'll call you once I talk to the London



people"--you know, it was something like that. And I was like, "Can you believe we're saying that to each other?"

[laughter]

**DJ:** It was just really funny.

**PM:** Right. "I'll call you from Prague," exactly.

**DJ:** It was just one of those moments where we were just like, "Wow, we weren't saying this stuff a year ago."

**PM:** Yeah, you were saying, "I'll call you from Lexington."

**DJ:** Exactly, yeah. "When I make it to Johnson City, I'll call you."

**PM:** So are you still touring with Beau Stapleton?

**DJ:** I am.

**PM:** Good. So that's a partnership that has worked out very well.

**DJ:** Yeah, he's really amazing. I can't say enough good things about him. He's got a lot of energy for this. He always gives his best. He just always gives 100 percent. He's a great player. We've been working more and more of his vocal harmonies in. He's a great singer. He reads maps, he's a really good navigator.

**PM:** God bless him.

**DJ:** It's unbelievable, because he studied geology in college so he just has this knowledge of maps that goes beyond what most people do.

**PM:** He reads them topographically.

**DJ:** He knows rock formations. We were in Colorado, and I just learned so much about rock formations from him. It was great.

[laughter]

**PM:** Now, what's he playing with you, what instruments?

**DJ:** He's playing mostly mandolin and tenor guitar. He's got a beautiful 1920s Martin tenor. It was like the first year that Martin made tenors, and it's just gorgeous. And he plays it--he always says that's like the true instrument of his soul--he just plays it like you've never heard anybody else play it. It's really beautiful.

**PM:** How is that strung?

**DJ:** It's like a mandolin, but it's lower. It's the same relative tuning as a mandolin. And then he cross tunes it sometimes like a fiddle. And when we're in the States, when we have a car and we can bring what we want, on a couple of songs he'll also play a National that I have, and sometimes the little guitar.

**PM:** And so along with Beau Stapleton, as we mentioned in passing, another partner along the way was Jonathan Byrd that you did quite a bit of gigging with, and made a quick and great record with.

**DJ:** Thanks, yeah. Yeah, Jonathan has been great. I think that we come from a very similar place in terms of what we love in music and what resonates for us. So when we sat down the first time to just share some songs, it was pretty obvious right from the beginning that there wasn't a lot of effort involved, that it just kind of flowed.

**PM:** And he's the rare songwriter that's a very good flatpicker.

**DJ:** Unbelievable flatpicker.

**PM:** And you yourself are a good flatpicker, but he's even beyond, like a fiddle tune kind of flatpicker.

**DJ:** Yeah, he actually plays fiddle tunes. He's really amazing.

**PM:** So when I saw him with you in November of last year at the Radio, I was very impressed by how well he backed you up, or backed the two of you up.

**DJ:** That was our first gig.

**PM:** It was your first gig!

**DJ:** I think we had one rehearsal.

**PM:** Oh, my lord. Now, although I was pretty early in my days with my little camcorder then, I rooted around and found the tape that I shot that night. So if there's any good footage I'll run a couple of guerrilla clips along with the interview.

**DJ:** Great. Oh, I'd love to see it, because [laughs] we were both kind of flying by the seat of our pants, for sure. And then we rehearsed for two days next time he came back in January, and then had one show at the Down Home in Johnson City, and then the next day went into the studio and made the record, on that one day. Like in seven hours.

**PM:** So you recorded it where, in Johnson City, or back in town?

**DJ:** Back in Nashville, yeah.

**PM:** Where?

**DJ:** It was this little studio owned by somebody that Jonathan knew. And then the guy who engineered was one of the guys that engineers at Kerrville, he does all the recordings for the Kerrville Folk Festival. And then we had it mixed in Nashville, also, by Cliff Goldmacher.

**PM:** Oh, Cliff Goldmacher, sure. One of our favorite people.

**DJ:** I love him. Yeah, he's so great to work with. I've always wanted to work with him. And we just got to this point with the record where we knew we needed somebody to mix it, and I went Cliff! Finally!

**PM:** Yeah, he's a superior fellow. And a lot of people don't know that he's an iron man. If he takes off his shirt, it's scary.

**DJ:** Is it?

**PM:** Yeah.

**DJ:** I've never seen that, but yeah.

[laughter]

**PM:** Touring as relentlessly as you have since the record, is it possible at all to write the way you'd like to, or at all?

**DJ:** I'm definitely writing. It's hard to write as much, obviously, because so much of my time is taken up right now. But I try when I get home and I have a little time to just really get stuck into it.

**PM:** How much time would you need or like to have to get the next solo CD written?

**DJ:** Oh, it's written. It's been written for a long time. Yeah, I probably have about three CDs written right now.

**PM:** Oh. Well, there you are.

**DJ:** Yeah, because I wrote so much when I was writing for the first one that I had a lot of overspill.

**PM:** Do you play any of that overspill live, or do you hold it back?

**DJ:** I'm starting to play a few songs, just to get feedback on some of them.

**PM:** And besides, you got to play some new songs or you go crazy.

**DJ:** Exactly. But it's like you said, how that album has had legs for so long, it's been interesting that here I am releasing it again here, and playing the record. But when I was writing, I was really in mind of the fact that I wanted to write songs that I would want to play for that long, hopefully. I mean, every now and then I do need a little time off from them. [laughs]

**PM:** But when you did that record with producer Mark Thayer, did anybody know when it was done what you had and what might happen?

**DJ:** I don't know. I mean, what I knew was that I had made the best record I could. And that was really all I was interested in at that point, because I didn't even know that I was going to move to Nashville. I didn't know what I was going to do with it exactly. I just knew that if I had ever gotten to the point that I decided to do something else other than music, I at least wanted to know what I'd made the best record I could. So that was really where I was with it. And I think Mark and I knew the songs were special when I went and demoed them. We were both kind of excited about that. And he really pushed me after we demoed. We spent a day demoing songs, and I think we got 26 in a day.

**PM:** Wow.

**DJ:** But he just ran tape, and I just kept singing. At the end of the day we both kind of collapsed into a happy lump together. [laughs] We listened to them over the next week or two after that. And I remember him calling me and saying, "You really need to get the money together and make a record."

**PM:** Yeah. So why on earth did Signature Sounds never pick up that album? What's that story, when Mark Thayer--

**DJ:** If you want to call them and ask them, that would be fine. [laughs] I have no idea.

**PM:** I mean, Mark Thayer is their engineer, is he not, or part of the company, or something?

**DJ:** Yeah, he is. He mostly owns the studio. But he can send things Jim Olsen's way, I guess. I love Mark, I've worked with him before. This was the first time we made a record together. I'd done some demo work with him before. And I just love him. We just have a really great friendship and a really great working relationship. So I guess there was some place in the back of my mind where I had the dream that I would be signed by Signature Sounds, and Mark and I could continue to just work together.

**PM:** I mean, Jim Olsen is a very smart guy. He's got very good ears.

**DJ:** Yeah.

**PM:** So I don't get it.

**DJ:** It just hasn't hooked up, I don't know why.

**PM:** I mean, even after the album succeeded he didn't come back and say, "Okay, I missed it. Let me sign this anyway."

**DJ:** Well, maybe also it could have been the timing, because he put out a female artist this last year.

**PM:** Didn't he put out Eileen Jewell?

**DJ:** Yeah. So we are looking for a label for the next record. And I think that--I don't know, there's some kind of thing that happens with the music business, where--for me, anyway, when I just feel like the right things come along when the time is right, and the right people come along when the time is right.

**PM:** So although you and I are friends, we haven't gotten to hang out much together yet.

**DJ:** I know.

**PM:** Do you mind if I ask you about the home and the family you grew up in, and how your search for roots actually led to that record.

**DJ:** Right. Well, yeah, I was adopted, and I grew up in a family where there wasn't much music, but I was always interested in music. So I kind of found my own way to it.

**PM:** Where was that family?

**DJ:** It was on the East Coast, mostly in New York, Rhode Island.

**PM:** New York City, or--

**DJ:** Just outside. I was born in the City, but I grew up in Valley Stream.

**PM:** Valley Stream?

**DJ:** Which is Long Island. And that was like the first eight years of my life.

**PM:** You're a Long Island girl, who knew?

**DJ:** Yeah, first eight years anyway.

**PM:** Yeah, for my first ten years it was Yonkers, just down the road.

**DJ:** Well, I went to Sarah Lawrence.

**PM:** Oh, yeah.

**DJ:** So I actually lived in Yonkers. I know Yonkers very well.

**PM:** A real shithole.

**DJ:** I guess it was just after college that I started to search for my birth family. My main reason in doing it, because I had no way of knowing that my grandfather was musical or where they were from, was that I wanted to just sort of have that question answered, so I could go on with my life and become an adult person.

**PM:** Right, because you had been adopted as a child?

**DJ:** As an infant, yeah. And I left home when I was 15. I was very independent and very headstrong. So nothing's changed.

[laughter]

**DJ:** But I had just gotten to the point where I wanted to have the questions that surrounded my birth and everything sort of answered, as well as I could have them answered, and then move on.

**PM:** Yeah, one would have to know that, from whence do I truly come...

**DJ:** Exactly, yeah. And I think some people need to know it more than others. For me it was a big question. And I found a huge family in the Smoky Mountains in Tennessee. And finding them made me make sense to myself, if that makes sense.

**PM:** Does that mean that when you found that family that you actually found your mother, your father?

**DJ:** Uh-huh.

**PM:** My God! What was that like, if you don't mind my asking such a personal question?

**DJ:** It was really wonderful, and very intense.

**PM:** Did they know you were coming?

**DJ:** No, not exactly. [laughs]

**PM:** No. Wow! Oh, my lord.

**DJ:** I think my mother had some sense of it, because she had wanted to find me. But she had moved to England because she married an Englishman, so she wasn't even in the

country, so searching for me was not as much of an option for her as me searching for her. But she was very welcoming, as was the whole family--which isn't always the case for people, so I was really lucky.

**PM:** Absolutely not, right.

**DJ:** And my grandfather, her father, I had been his first grandchild. And I was the oldest of 14 grandchildren. So I think it was really a big deal for him that I found him. And we became close right away.

**PM:** So the mother that you're visiting now is not the mother that raised you, but your blood mother?

**DJ:** Yeah.

**PM:** Ah. And do you see a lot of yourself in her?

**DJ:** Oh, yeah, yeah. I do. I see myself in a lot of my family. And the women in my family are very dynamic, lots of personality in this family. [laughs]

**PM:** Like yourself, yeah.

**DJ:** Opinionated. So they're really cool.

**PM:** Wow.

**DJ:** And of course, there are my cousins, and I have a sister and two brothers. And my sister just had her second child who is three months, and Alexander is three and a half years, so I'm getting to know them, which has been so amazing--to be able to have my career take hold here a little bit so that I can see them more and watch the kids grow.

**PM:** Wow. On or off the record, is there a good guy in your life at the moment?

**DJ:** No. Because I'm so busy.

**PM:** You're just too busy. Are guys like throwing themselves at you from the road? They must be.

**DJ:** Not at all. No one ever makes a pass at me. [laughs]

**PM:** God, you're such an attractive, interesting person, that's just beyond my comprehension.

**DJ:** Well, I think when you're on the road, it's such a fast-paced life that you don't really get to spend any good amount of time with anyone. Especially the tours over here, it's like sleep, eat, drive, play. So getting to stay anywhere for any length of time to get to

know people, it just really doesn't happen. I felt pretty overwhelmed, too, I would say, the first part of last year, just keeping up with the touring schedule, which is getting a little more ferocious than it was, even.

**PM:** Absolutely.

**DJ:** But I'm getting more used to it, so I actually feel like I have a little more room in my head for something like that if it did happen. [laughs] But I'm pretty busy.

**PM:** And so I'm going to include it, unless you deny me the privilege, this information in the interview, so that guys out there don't assume, as I had, that, well, guys are lined up for a woman like that--

**DJ:** [laughs]

**PM:** So they might e-mail and pledge their interest.

[laughter]

**DJ:** That's funny. Okay, well, I'll think about that.

**PM:** Frank Goodman, Folk Pimp.

[laughter]

**PM:** So on the other side of things, are you what you would call a spiritual person?

**DJ:** Yeah, I think I am. I mean, I think I have been in my life, sort of without trying. I was raised Catholic. I was raised with a lot of dogma, a sort of heavy Catholicism. I went to Catholic school and the whole thing. And I'm really grateful that I did, because I think it gives you a context for the Judeo-Christian world. You learn all the bells and whistles, and then you can kind of choose what you believe.

**PM:** And God bless the nuns. I mean, we Catholic schoolers have good rudiments, and a lot of our friends do not.

**DJ:** This is so true. It was really great, I actually went to a public school for a year and missed the education I had been getting in the Catholic school so much--because we had moved--that I asked my parents if I could go back to Catholic school. So yeah, I had a really good experience, actually, in terms of learning.

**PM:** So many of my friends can't spell. They can't divide. It's like, what, are you kidding me? You missed that whole thing, or what?

**DJ:** I know, I know. Yeah. So I remember the phonics, we had so much phonics.



**PM:** Well, my brother always says about me, "Yeah, ask Spud, he's hooked on phonics."  
[laughs]

**DJ:** Yeah. I love phonics. And I love that they taught us when we were like in first grade. We were so little, and they were really giving us a lot of information.

Anyway, I did that whole thing, and decided as I got older that it wasn't really for me, in terms of being a Catholic, in my life. But I've always been connected to something spiritual and intuitive that I've tried to live by, I guess.

**PM:** Never went down the Eastern path, or any of that stuff?

**DJ:** Well, I studied comparative religion in college, and always read different things, so yeah, I've studied a lot of different traditions, including Native American traditions. But I've found that there was a sort of resounding truth in all of them for me. There are some things that I identify with, that I've kept--that I've sort of always had, but then identified it more, and then it's just part of how I approach my life. But yeah, it's not any one particular thing.

**PM:** Do you make time to read on the road? Is there time for that at all?

**DJ:** Yeah, I do. I'm reading a really interesting book right now called *Dancing in the Dark*. It's a novel, and it's about this man who was born in the Bahamas and moved to Harlem during the Renaissance, and became a Vaudevillian. It's really cool. All this stuff about race and the entertainment world, and Harlem, and it's really well-documented historically. I used to live in Harlem, so I love it.

**PM:** Wow.

**DJ:** Yeah, I always try to keep a book going, because it gives you some kind of continuity while you're traveling.

**PM:** Yeah, you need kind of some alternate reality to turn to that's fun and just a little bit of an escape from the drudgery that the touring also is.

**DJ:** Right. And also language--I just think it's important to keep feeding yourself words, if you're a writer.

**PM:** Yeah, you can't constantly be on output. You've got to get on input.

**DJ:** Right, right.

**PM:** Who do you turn to when you need support, advice, or a friend? Who are your people?

**DJ:** Well, one of the best things that's come out of this whole music thing for me is the relationships that I've formed within it. And I think one of the most significant ones has been my friendship with my manager, P., who is just great. She's very wise and she's very grounded. Our rule is that we can't both be crazy at the same time. [laughs] Because sometimes there are things that will be challenging for her, and there will be things that are challenging for me. And I think we kind of ground each other. But she's been a real stabilizing force for me through all this touring, and making decisions, and taking things that seem difficult or challenging at the time, and she really is my cheerleader in that way.

I've become friends with a couple of different people. Peggy Seeger, I had a chance to get to know a little bit, and spend a little time. I opened for her at the Old Town School of Folk Music in Chicago. And then I happened to be in Boston, so we had dinner together and talked. And she gave me some good advice about staying grounded on the road, and just the basic stuff. Peggy is in her 70s, and she's still such a force. Her show is so compelling, and I feel like she's just really true to herself as an artist and as a person, and so I think she's kind of a mentor to me in that way.

**PM:** I've never had the pleasure of seeing her. I'd love to see her play.

**DJ:** She's amazing. She's so easy and good with the audience, and just really holds them in the palm of her hand in this way that's so genuine. And she's just like that in person as well. It's just who she is. It's been an amazing opportunity to play with her, and she's so generous on stage. Like she asked me to play with her and sing a couple--she sang a song with me, she sang "Lay Me Down" with me, and just really tried to engage me in her show--not everybody will do that when you open for them. So yeah, she's really something.

**PM:** That's amazing. Along those lines, have any CDs or artists you've run into in your travels lately impressed you deeply, people you've seen live, or records you've run into?

**DJ:** Let me think about that for a second, because it's all such a blur at times, and when I think about it later I'll be like, "Oh, I should have told him about that person." Okay. I have to look at my schedule. Where have been? I saw Chris Chandler--do you know who he is?

**PM:** I do. Absolutely.

**DJ:** I saw Chris Chandler at Kerrville this year.

**PM:** He's quite an amazing fellow.

**DJ:** And my mouth was just hanging open. I mean, he's just so incredible on so many levels. He's the real deal. It was great to get to see Chris--we were on the same night at Threadgill [Kerrville Folk Festival, near Austin]. Jonathan and I did Byrd/Jones there, as

well as our doing our own solo sets. And so getting to just be behind the scenes and sort of get to know Chris a little bit was really great.

And I got to see John Gorka, I was at two different places with him this year.

**PM:** He's another outstanding person.

**DJ:** I just love him. I've opened for him a few times over the years, and now have gotten to sort of share the bill with him a little bit more. I mean, of course he has headlined, and I've played earlier in the night. But that's been nice just to be sort of around him backstage more. And I saw him play at the Wildflower Festival in Dallas--it was actually Fort Worth. And the sound system went out just as he stepped on stage. It just went out. It was just gone. There was nothing. And it was a pretty big room. And he stepped out in front of the monitors and invited everyone to move closer, and just did his show unplugged. It was beautiful. It was one of those moments where I was so glad to be there. We were just sitting on the floor up close listening to John Gorka tell stories and sing songs. It was a beautiful thing.

**PM:** Very special person.

**DJ:** He really is.

**PM:** Where do you think this train is going? And where do you want to take it to?

**DJ:** When I started I had two main concerns. I wanted to make the best product that I could, and then I wanted to be able to have enough work to support myself so I could do this full time, letting me keep writing and keep making records. And I think it surpassed my expectations a bit in terms of that. I don't really know where it's all going. I just try to put one foot in front of the other, and I try to make good decisions, and just keep writing. I feel so lucky that I have work in a business where it's hard to have work. And at this moment I'm just looking forward to getting in the studio and starting to make the new record.

**PM:** Who is going to produce this one?

**DJ:** I'm not sure.

**PM:** I'd like to throw a few names in the hat that have no doubt occurred to you. I wonder what it would be like if David Rawlings produced a record on you, or if Tim O'Brien produced a record on you?

**DJ:** Yeah. Tim is in my brain for sure. I'm a huge fan of Tim O'Brien's and of his records. I think that *Cornbread Nation* is just--I was so taken when I heard that record. That is something I was really impressed with recently. I've heard a lot of his records and I love a lot of his records, and I have played *Real Time* with Darrell Scott, I've played that record until it's worn out. I think it's one of those records I know every moment of it because it's

so great. But when I heard *Cornbread Nation* I felt like there was just a place that he went and I thought, "Oh, I want to go there." He went somewhere deep, really deep on that record.

**PM:** And that would obviously be one of the nice byproducts of Tim producing is that Darrell will be there.

**DJ:** That's true. And possibly Tim might lend a part or two, which would be really beautiful. But I'm a huge Tim O'Brien fan, and Darrell Scott.

**PM:** Now, on or off the record, what about Rawlings?

**DJ:** I love David Rawlings. Yeah, I mean, I think he's really wonderful. I got to meet him at a party, and he was really charming, seems like a very nice guy. I don't know him very well.

**PM:** Do he and Gillian know your music? Have you ever gigged together?

**DJ:** No, we haven't gigged together.

**PM:** That's unbelievable.

**DJ:** Yeah, I mean, I'm obviously a huge fan. I think what they do is really beautiful and you really get taken into their world.

**PM:** Frighteningly good, yeah.

**DJ:** So I'd love to get hang out with them, share songs, whatever. It would be amazing.

**PM:** Well, I hope you get the right producer, because I think it's going to be really essential on this next record. Mark Thayer was a really inspired choice, and now it's time for another one, and I know you'll come up with the right one.

**DJ:** Oh, you just mentioned two people that I would be honored to work with.

**PM:** Well, D, it's really nice to talk to you, always.

**DJ:** Thanks, Frank, you too.

**PM:** It's about time we had this conversation. And I'm glad that the new deal with Ryko Distribution made it kind of a timely opportunity.

**DJ:** Yeah, thanks so much for picking up on that.

**PM:** Okay, my friend. Good luck with Europe, with Jonathan and with Richard. And I look forward to a full report.

**DJ:** Okay. [laughs] I'll let you know how it all goes.