

**A Conversation with Happy Traum**  
**by Frank Goodman (11/2006, Puremusic.com)**

For almost 40 years, Homespun Tapes (they've been around so long, they're outgrowing their name!) has been recording and manufacturing instructional videos for learning every musical instrument under the sun. We counted over 250 artists alone that are represented by the ever-expanding Homespun catalog, and many of them have a number of titles. (Nashville fingerstyle wonder Pete Huttlinger, for instance, has eleven!)

The company was founded by Happy Traum and his wife, Jane, and they still pilot the ship together. Happy had a popular and very good folk rock duo with his brother Artie (Happy and Artie Traum) that were associated with Dylan, The Band, and the Woodstock, NY, community where Homespun is still based. Artie is still a fine solo artist and clinician for Taylor Guitars, we have reviewed him in these pages. After a long recording hiatus, Happy has just released a solo record called *I Walk The Road Again*, which Artie played some tracks on and produced. It also features the talents of John Sebastian, Jay Ungar and Molly Mason, and many bright lights of the Woodstock scene, including Leslie Ritter and Scott Petito. In our usual style, we have included some audio clips from that record on the Listen page for your perusal.

VHS and DVD recordings are such a helpful tool when you're trying to get into an instrument or style that, after we formed a desire to review the new Tony Rice Master Class DVD, we decided to review a Homespun video every issue for a while, and help acquaint or encourage the uninitiated with this great way to plunge into new instrumental or vocal territory. What we found immediately on this first foray is that the tapes often move you into a more inner circle with the artist him or herself. Happy interviews artists to various extents in the course of the lesson, and some are very inclined to be candidly forthcoming about various parts of their careers or their lives. In the Tony Rice Master Class, Tony and Happy get off into some very interesting stories.

In turn, we have interviewed Happy himself, about Homespun and about his new record, and know you will enjoy a rare conversation with the Woodstock maestro.

**Puremusic:** Homespun Tapes seems to have been around about as long as I can recall.

**Happy Traum:** Well, next year we're coming into our 40th year since we first made our very first audiotapes.

**PM:** Unbelievable! I don't know how many products there are, but this morning, I believe I counted 256 artists, alone, that were represented.

**HT:** Yeah, something like that. I don't know the exact number myself, but it's in that realm.

**PM:** Astounding. So with whom, and what, did the catalog begin, and what prompted the initiative to begin with?

**HT:** Well, it started when I was a guitar teacher in New York City in those days.

**PM:** Out of the house, or at one of the--

**HT:** Both. I had done different things. I had students who came to my house and I was teaching at different music facilities.

**PM:** At Matt Umanov's or somebody like that?

**HT:** Well, not Umanov's in those days, but there was a place called Noah Wolf, a guitar shop in midtown Manhattan, I taught there. And there were some music schools I taught at part-time. I was just making a living, running around being a guitar teacher when I wasn't playing music, which I had also been doing for a while before that. And then, around the middle '60s, my brother Artie and I started to get together and go out and do some gigs and go on the road together.

**PM:** Right. Yeah, certainly our family was big fans of that duo.

**HT:** Uh-huh? Oh, okay. First we had a rock 'n' roll band for a couple of years, called The Children of Paradise. Then I moved to Woodstock and the fact of the matter was that I couldn't keep up with my students anymore, so I got the idea of making tapes for them so they'd have something to work on when I wasn't around to teach them. But making individual tapes for individual students got to be too much work. It was just a much bigger job than I had hoped.

**PM:** Right, too custom.

**HT:** Yeah. I had written a book that had come out a year or two previous, called *Fingerpicking Styles for the Guitar*.

**PM:** And was that an Oak Publications book?

**HT:** That's right, Oak Publications. And it did very well. It was the first of its kind. Nobody had ever transcribed traditional guitar solos note for note.

**PM:** Amazing.

**HT:** So that was popular. Then what happened was I decided, well, what if I made a series of tapes. I thought I would base my first tapes on the book, which was primarily what I was teaching anyway. So I put together twelve lessons on tapes--they were reel-to-reel tapes, you have to realize. There weren't even cassettes then.

**PM:** [laughs] Reel-to-reel tapes!

**HT:** Yeah, reel-to-reel, little five-inch reels. And I just made this series of twelve lessons, and started sending them to my students. And then I put ads in places like *Sing Out!* magazine. And *Guitar Player* magazine was just getting started around that time, so I put a few ads there, and began getting a response.

**PM:** Wow.

**HT:** Since I got a response to that, I made a couple of other lessons. And then I thought, I have all these great musician friends in Woodstock who I play with all the time, why don't I just get them to make lessons, too. So I got Bill Keith, the great banjo player who had just moved to Woodstock from the Boston area, and a guy named David Cohen--he had just quit playing with Country Joe and the Fish, and moved to Woodstock. He was their original and only keyboard player, so he made some piano tapes for us. It was all very home done, just a little home tape recorder, nothing fancy, with a mic or two set up just in my living room, and I just brought people in. And Kenny Kosek, the great fiddler--

**PM:** Sure, I remember him.

**HT:** He came up and did some fiddle stuff for us. So it was one of these things that just started snowballing. In the early days, it was just personal friends who were great musicians I was calling on. And then, of course, I was adding all the time, myself, to these tapes. My brother also made some tapes for us.

So then it kind of progressed that way. I started going further afield and finding musicians that I didn't necessarily know personally, but that I admired.

**PM:** Who played different styles, et cetera.

**HT:** Right. I started getting into bluegrass. Well, this is already in the '70s by this time, and I must have met them at festivals. I met Sam Bush--he was just a kid at the time.

**PM:** And was already great.

**HT:** Yeah, already great. So I got him to do some--these are all audio tapes, still. Then I got Tony Rice. People like that just started saying yes to me. I was amazed that they said yes, but they did.

**PM:** And would you bring them all up to Woodstock, or record them on the fly, or--

**HT:** No, I recorded them all different places. Whenever I could, I brought them to Woodstock; that was the easiest for me. But I recorded my lessons with Tony Rice out in California where he was living at the time. For Sam Bush, I went to Kentucky and recorded in a little cabin in Bowling Green, Kentucky, so I went and hung out with him. I went to Louisiana to record Michael Doucet, the great Cajun fiddler from BeauSoleil.

**PM:** You must have felt like Alan Lomax or something.

**HT:** Well, in some ways, yeah, it was a little bit like that, because I was getting to hang out in these kind of exotic places--exotic for me--and hanging out with these great guys, most of whom I became good friends with. That was the nicest thing, that we had a great relationship develop outside of the business part of it.

So I continued doing that, and then in around '83, video started coming into the picture. Video hit so fast. I thought it was a great idea to put lessons on video, and I sent out a questionnaire to our mailing list at the time, saying, "If we had these things in videocassettes would you want them?" And about ninety percent of the people wrote back and said, "No, don't bother. We're not interested."

[laughter]

**HT:** But then I decided, oh, I'm going to go ahead and do it anyway.

**PM:** For the other ten percent.

**HT:** Yeah. But really I knew it was going to be such a different way of learning, being able to see these guys. So I experimented. I found a guy with a camera and brought him to my house. This is, I guess, around '83 or so, '84.

**PM:** So it started with one camera.

**HT:** One camera--in my living room, again. And incidentally, the guy who did that camera work is still the main guy I work with in Woodstock.

**PM:** Get out!

**HT:** He does all the editing, he does all the shooting. He sets up all the shoots of all our videos here, anything we do in Woodstock.

**PM:** What's his name?

**HT:** His name is Cambiz Khosravi. He's of Iranian descent. He's a videographer and a documentary guy. And we just started working together, and it's continued for, what is it? Twenty-five years, thirty years.

**PM:** Unbelievable.

**HT:** Yeah, it's amazing. So we did some shoots in Woodstock in my living room. Kenny Kosek, and a lot of people came up. And then I decided I better get some really great people. So I went down to Nashville. And in one trip to Nashville, I recorded Sam Bush on video, Bela Fleck, and Mark O'Connor.

**PM:** [laughs]

**HT:** It was in three consecutive days.

**PM:** That was a good little trip.

**HT:** I mean, nobody knew how to do it, so it was kind of--everybody who was doing it was learning as we went along.

**PM:** Right, because it's a very peculiar thing to get up there and say what you play, and slow everything you're doing down, and try to get it in reasonable order, and all that.

**HT:** Right. But even from the technical aspect of the camera guys, the mixers, the guys who were--I mean, if you look at those tapes now, they're pretty funky looking, but they still hold up.

**PM:** Sure--they're historical documents at this point.

**HT:** Right, right.

**PM:** Yeah.

**HT:** So then it just picked up from there, and I started calling people and getting most people saying yes. We continued, and it just sort of built up. There's a limit to how many we can do every year, but over forty years, it sort of adds up.

**PM:** Because, after all, not only do most musicians need to cultivate any idea of an additional revenue stream, but there is frequently the notion present of giving something back to the community.

**HT:** That's right. And that's the other thing, for me. When you mentioned Alan Lomax--the thing, to me, about doing these tapes, is that in many instances you're documenting a person's accomplishments for posterity.

**PM:** Right.

**HT:** You get somebody like Dr. John on piano, well, there are lots of records of him, lots of concerts, but he never talks about what he thinks about when he plays this stuff. And when he's not around anymore--and that's one of the things that attracted him to the idea, was that it adds to his legacy, adds to the record of his musical accomplishments. And I feel that very strongly. We have Bill Monroe, we have Ralph Stanley--he's still with us, but Bill Monroe is not, or John Hartford is not with us anymore.

**PM:** Right.

**HT:** So there's an aspect of their life and career and musical intelligence you wouldn't have if we hadn't taped them.

**PM:** Because it's played down, but there are many musicians that are very well-spoken, thoughtful people, who are concerned with much more than the gauge of strings they use. And when I watched the Tony Rice video, I was really knocked out by things like his statement about how he feels the folk movement legitimized bluegrass as an art form. I was knocked out by that. What an interesting line of thinking.

**HT:** That's right. That's very interesting, actually. Because people don't realize that in the 1950s and early '60s, guys like Bill Monroe were floundering. They had no place to play, they were not making any money. Rock 'n' roll had come in, and the southern guys who used to like their kind of music sort of turned to Elvis and Jerry Lee Lewis and those guys.

**PM:** Pulled the rug out.

**HT:** Totally. And these guys were just scrapping around for whatever they could get, until along came the Newport Folk Festival, and the college campuses, and the kids who suddenly got this new interest in traditional music. And young people like myself were suddenly listening to them. The same thing with the blues guys, Mississippi John Hurt, or Son House, or Skip James, all those great blues guys who were just sort of passing the time, and suddenly here's this new generation of people that were all excited about their music.

**PM:** Yeah, all of a sudden there's a white guy on their porch with a microphone pointed at them. [laughs]

**HT:** Exactly. And suddenly they had a legitimacy that they didn't have before. And the same thing with the Cajun musicians. I went down to do the Cajun stuff with Michael Doucet, and I became friendly with Dewey Balfa.

**PM:** Wow.

**HT:** And Dewey is another guy who was so grateful that people in New York and California and Chicago and all these places were interested in this music that they grew up loving, but that nobody gave them any credit for outside of Cajun country in southwest Louisiana.

**PM:** Right.

**HT:** And you have no idea, these people were like the dregs of society to the people around them.

**PM:** Wow...

**HT:** And suddenly here's all these people saying, "You guys are great! This is a truly American art form, and it's something that doesn't happen anywhere else. And you're great players." And the whole Balfa family was just truly blown away by the fact that anybody cared, that people really valued what they were doing. I did gigs with them--not playing with them, but on the same show when they were first coming out of Louisiana in the late '70s. And they were totally blown away by the fact that all these outside people thought they were good. So that's part of the driving force behind what I do here, is trying to legitimize--I mean, aside from the young players who are, as you say, looking for a little additional way to make some money.

**PM:** Sure.

**HT:** So it works in a lot of different directions.

**PM:** Would you tell us a little about your wife, Jane, and her role in the business?

**HT:** Yes. Jane was there at the inception. When I first started doing this, she was raising three little kids at the time, and I was on the road a lot. So whenever I was on the road, she was running the tapes off on the kitchen table after the kids went to sleep, and packing them up and sending them out.

**PM:** Wow.

**HT:** At every step of the way of the Homespun development, she was there with ideas. And she's actually kind of the brains behind the operation, and the driving force behind the business end. She also looks after the graphics. She's very involved with every cover design, every catalog that comes out.

**PM:** So, most every aspect of the product.

**HT:** We discuss which artists we're going to do, and all that kind of thing, and she's very tuned into the whole scene. But my role in it is more of getting together with the artists, deciding what to do, directing the video shoot, conceptualizing the whole musical part of it. That's kind of my role: calling the artist, getting them interested in doing it, and then following through with going into the studio with them, helping them conceptualize what they want to teach.

**PM:** Has anybody ever refused, for any reason, to do a tape?

**HT:** Yeah, we've had people over the years refuse.

**PM:** What's the usual reason?

**HT:** Various reasons. Some people are just too busy. Some feel it's not their thing, and it's very hard to get them to think otherwise.

**PM:** Some people think they don't have anything to say.

**HT:** Yes, exactly. Or that they're not the ones--"If you want to know, you should really talk to the real--"

**PM:** "Talk to the guy I learned from."

**HT:** Exactly. And some just don't--I don't know, there's a little bit of an attitude, occasionally, that I run across.

**PM:** Like, "Whatever I got to say is right in the record there."

**HT:** Right, right. But on the other hand, you get people like Donald Fagen of Steely Dan. I mean, I never thought that he would with agree to do this, but--

**PM:** He did one?

**HT:** I happen to have a personal relationship with him, but still, I was amazed that he said yes. He did a tape for us, and it's excellent.

**PM:** And what was the nature of his contribution?

**HT:** Kind of how he takes a blues type song and re-harmonizes it and makes it sound like a Steely Dan song.

**PM:** [laughs] Oh, I've got to get that one.

**HT:** It's pretty good, yeah.

**PM:** That's fantastic. Yeah, I'd like to understand that.

**HT:** It's very interesting. He did a great job. He's a very smart guy.

**PM:** Oh yeah.

So we're going to review the *Tony Rice Master Class* DVD this issue, and continue that practice of reviewing an instructional DVD from your catalog every issue for a while.

**HT:** Oh, that's great.

**PM:** And we really think our readers are going to enjoy and certainly benefit from that.

**HT:** And you're getting good numbers of hits.

**PM:** Yeah, yeah. We get a million hits a month.



**HT:** No kidding, great. And how do they find out about it?

**PM:** We have no idea. It's just really word of mouth. We've been around for six years, and a lot of people link to us. We don't advertise or anything. It's just been a grassroots growth.

**HT:** Wow. Fantastic.

**PM:** Thanks. I really enjoyed the Tony Rice DVD I watched last night and this morning, and now part of the Bryan Sutton DVD.

**HT:** Yeah, that's really good. Are you primarily interested in bluegrass?

**PM:** No, I like it all, it's just that's where I started. But no, I'm a songwriter and a fingerpicker, too, and I like to play the clawhammer banjo. And I'd like to see what Donald Fagen says about taking a blues song and reharmonizing it into a jazz pop song. It's all good.

**HT:** Yeah.

**PM:** Do you always act as host for the DVDs?

**HT:** No, just in the case where the artist is not comfortable or isn't used to teaching. Tony Rice is a guy, for instance, who's not a teacher. So in that case, or like with Bryan Sutton also--although Bryan, actually, about halfway through it--did you see the Bryan Sutton video?

**PM:** Yeah, he just started taking over.

**HT:** Yeah, and that was great. I mean, I started him off, and then all I had to do was watch. With Bill Monroe, John Hartford was the one who did it--he'd had a good relationship with Bill Monroe for years. And with Ralph Stanley, it was Mike Seeger, because he knew him. These were people that I didn't know very well, so I let other people be the emcee. I do it when it's necessary, and I've done it many times. But then you get guys like Chris Smither, or even Sam Bush--although I did start out with Sam, but didn't really need to. Peter Rowan, also. Sometimes guys, despite how well they play, are a little intimidated by the camera, by having to talk to a camera.

**PM:** Right. It's a very peculiar thing, after all.

**HT:** Yes. But then there are guys who are so used to teaching or doing workshops that they don't need me or anyone at all. I just direct the cameras, and I'll make comments in between takes, and tell them if they're going too fast, or you skipped over something, or you made a mistake here, you better go back and correct it. I sort of listen with a critical ear, then. So I don't always show up asking questions, as you'll see with some of our tapes, I'm not in there except as a director.

**PM:** And I think it's hard for a lot of musicians to understand that it's about, "Hey, that's a really good part. Would you slow it down? Okay, now, slower than that, please..."  
[laughs]

**HT:** Right, right.

**PM:** Because it's nothing to the person who's playing, but to the person who's watching, it's really hard.

**HT:** Exactly. And I always have to put myself in the place of the student at home who's trying to learn this stuff.

**PM:** Yeah, because with Tony, I kept saying, boy, as many times as they went over that, I'm still going to put it on slow-mo, and make sure I got every single note of it.

**HT:** Well, that stuff is not for the faint of heart. It's definitely something that you have to work very hard at. And nobody is going to get it all, anyway.

**PM:** Right. And I think it's great that the DVDs, the first couple that I got to, have books with everything transcribed in musical notation and tablature.

**HT:** That's right. We try to do that with all of them.

**PM:** That's fantastic. Have many artists who've gone through the process become actually very close friends of yours?

**HT:** Oh, quite a few. I mean, some guys just became friends in the sense that I'll continue to run into them at festivals and so forth. And we lose touch, because a lot of these guys are on the road all the time. But I do go to festivals. Guys like Sam Bush and Jerry Douglas, or Tim O'Brien, whenever we get a chance, we'll get together--when we're in the same place at the same time.

**PM:** Has Darrell Scott done one with you yet?

**HT:** Darrell has not. He'd be very interesting, actually.

**PM:** Yeah, because his guitar style, especially when he plays solo, it's unbelievable.

**HT:** Right.

**PM:** I don't know what he'd call his, but he'd think of something.

**HT:** Yeah. I mean, there are so many great musicians. It's pretty hard to keep up with the number of talented people there are in the world.

**PM:** Your work with Homespun must keep you very close to the cutting edge of the many styles you're interested in.

**HT:** Yeah. That's a point, it's the styles I'm interested in, and we are trying to keep up. There are some fabulous young people. In fact, I'm going to be doing a DVD with Rushad Eggleston. Do you know who he is?

**PM:** I do not.

**HT:** Well, he's actually a cellist. He plays with a band called Crooked Still. They play kind of old-time--

**PM:** I've heard of them, but I don't know them. [Actually, thanks to this interview with Happy, we're getting an interview with them lined up, and a CD is on the way.]

**HT:** They're fabulous. And Rushad is one of these kind of genius kids, amazing. He's a guy that's very exciting to me, because he's young, he's in his twenties, but he's incredibly talented and dynamic. So that's part of the approach, I don't always want to be working with people my age.

**PM:** Yeah, because after all, you want to address that younger generation, of course, and what better way than with their peers.

**HT:** Right.

**PM:** And don't you find that staying on the cutting edge, and getting interested, and staying interested in every new crop of artists coming up, that it goes a long way to keeping one young?

**HT:** Yep, absolutely.

**PM:** It's irreplaceable.

**HT:** Yeah.

**PM:** So I really liked, too, your last record, *I Walk the Road Again*.

**HT:** Oh, thanks.

**PM:** Had it been some time between records?

**HT:** Yes, it had been a really long time between solo records, records that I'd just done on my own. Probably around 20 years.

**PM:** Whoa!

**HT:** Yeah, really a long time. There was a reissue of a couple things I did in the '70s and the late '80s, around '88.

**PM:** So it was a major occasion to get out and do a record.

**HT:** Yeah, it was, just to get out and put some ideas down. I haven't done that in a long time. Get some friends together.

**PM:** I was happy to see your son Adam appears.

**HT:** Yeah. He's a good player, too.

**PM:** And he lives out in Sonoma County?

**HT:** That's right, yeah.

**PM:** My old stompin' ground. I sure like it out there.

**HT:** Oh, yeah.

**PM:** And of course, a number of your talented friends from the Woodstock community and beyond appear as well. One of my oldest friends, Leslie Ritter, is paired with her old partner, Amy Fradon--

**HT:** Yeah, that's right.

**PM:** --and with her current partner, Scott Petito, on several cuts. I grew up with Leslie. She's become quite a great singer. And it's always a pleasure, of course, to hear Jay Ungar and Molly Mason. And Cindy Cashdollar, wow.

**HT:** Absolutely.

**PM:** Who's the drummer, Russ Cashdollar?

**HT:** That's Cindy's brother.

**PM:** Wow. And always, Larry Campbell brings a lot to any record, and he did to yours as well.

**HT:** Always. Yeah, Larry is a very, very close friend.

**PM:** So only on a couple of cuts, though, does your brother and producer Artie show up, and play some of his incredible stuff. We know each other a little bit. How is Artie doing?

**HT:** He's doing well. I just talked to him about fifteen minutes before you called.

**PM:** Yeah, a fantastic guy.

**HT:** Yeah, we're going to Japan together next week.

**PM:** Wow. To do...?

**HT:** We're going to do five gigs over there. A Japanese company just put out a CD of old tapes found from concerts that we did in the '70s and early '80s, so it's live stuff, almost like bootleg sounding kind of stuff. But they packaged it nicely with photographs. They're putting that out, so we're going over there to help support that.

**PM:** The Japanese are just amazing like that. They're such incredible culture vultures.

**HT:** Yep.

**PM:** It's a rare pleasure, these days, to hear somebody cut a Paul Siebel song.

**HT:** Oh, yeah. That was fun.

**PM:** And you did a great job on "Pinto Pony."

**HT:** Oh, thanks.

**PM:** My Nashville friend, Tom Mitchell, from the Woodstock '60s, tells me Paul Siebel stories sometimes.

**HT:** Oh, does Tom live in Nashville?

**PM:** He does, yeah, for many years. We're very good friends.

**HT:** I haven't seen him in years.

**PM:** But if I may, I'll tell him you said hey.

**HT:** Oh, please do, absolutely.

**PM:** I used to see Paul Siebel at the Main Point, myself, in Bryn Mawr, around 1970. I mean, it's just unthinkable to me that guys like that cannot be seen on the road, not at all.

**HT:** Right. No, he doesn't tour anymore.

**PM:** Just long retired, or--

**HT:** Yeah, he's just plays occasionally. In fact, he came to Woodstock last year. And Eric Anderson was here, we did a little show. I just played a few songs with them. It was actually Eric Anderson's show, but Paul came to visit, so Paul did some songs.

**PM:** Wow.

**HT:** It was really fun, yeah.

[designer aside: I recently happened upon a live Paul Seibel album recorded in 1978. It's listed under "David Bromberg" at iTunes--Bromberg is accompanying Siebel. Here are clips of "If I Could Stay" and "Pinto Pony" live. But if you don't have those legendary first two studio albums of Siebel's, *Woodsmoke & Oranges* and *Jocknife Gypsy*, that's where the real gold is to be found. They've been re-mastered and re-issued as a compilation CD and are still available.]

**PM:** How is Eric Anderson, and how does he sound these days?

**HT:** He sounds like his old self.

**PM:** Somebody told me, oh, yeah, he's the king of Norway, or something.

[laughter]

**HT:** Yeah.

**PM:** And he's got a blossoming career out there, is that true, or--

**HT:** In Europe?

**PM:** Yeah.

**HT:** Yeah, he works in Europe a lot.

**PM:** Does he live in Scandinavia?

**HT:** Well, he did. I think he's spending a lot more time in Holland now. But he shows up--in fact, he just played in this area, at The Town Crier. I didn't get to it.

**PM:** I sure liked what John Sebastian did on your record, a lot of good stuff.

**HT:** Oh, John is great, yeah.

**PM:** On top of his signature harp playing, the idea of him fingerpicking it seemed like electric baritone underneath your acoustic was a great idea.

**HT:** That's right. He does that a lot, yeah.

**PM:** I'm not sure I'd ever heard that idea before. But I'm going to swipe that idea, that's a lot of fun.

**HT:** Great. Yeah, he's really good at it, too.

**PM:** So if I may ask, are there any special books circulating in the Traum household at the moment? What are you guys reading?

**HT:** Oh, you mean, in terms of non-musical stuff?

**PM:** Yeah, just book books.

**HT:** Oh, well, yeah, there are always some books.

**PM:** We just like to know what people are reading.

**HT:** Oh, really? Well, I've gotten hooked on a guy named Charles McCarry, who's kind of like an American version of John Le Carre.

**PM:** Oh, really? Because I'm over the top about Le Carre.

**HT:** McCarry is very literary. They're well-written and well-plotted spy novels.

**PM:** Oh, that's right up my alley.

**HT:** He's extremely good. And a lot of his stuff is not in print, but it's gradually coming out in print. His latest book is called *Old Boys*, and then there's another one coming out. But anyway, I've really gotten into him.

**PM:** And he's writing about the American spy side, right?

**HT:** That's right, exactly. And the same kind of intrigue. And there's another guy, Alan Furst, who also writes great spy books, all of his books take place between the two world wars in Europe. So you get a lot of atmosphere of that whole European intrigue, shadowy--they're also very high-class writers, not writing potboilers at all.

**PM:** Right. Spy literature.

**HT:** Exactly.

**PM:** And what's playing on the CD player? Are you guys always listening to what's next in the catalog, or something else?

**HT:** Well, I'll tell you what's on my iTunes right now.

**PM:** Cool.

**HT:** I've got Abigail Washburn.

**PM:** Ah, she's a buddy of mine. She's great.

**HT:** I've got Ollabelle.

**PM:** Uh-huh. And Larry [Campbell] produced that, right.

**HT:** Right. I've got the Be Good Tanyas.

**PM:** Oh, yeah, I just videoed them. Sure love them, wow.

**HT:** Got a Bill Frisell record.

**PM:** Which one?

**HT:** *Good Dog, Happy Man*.

**PM:** [laughs] I don't know that one.

**HT:** A great one. I love his new record. I have a lot of Brownie McGhee, because I've been going back--he was my first guitar teacher.

**PM:** So I learned, at your site. What a privilege.

**HT:** Yeah. I'm going to make an instructional lesson, at some point, a DVD on Brownie McGhee's style. So I've been going back and revisiting a lot of his old records, listening to stuff, and then also tapes that I made personally of him back in the early days, which I recently discovered and that I transferred to CDs.

**PM:** Wow. What kind of a guy was he?

**HT:** Oh, he was a complex guy. But he was very urbane, extremely well-spoken, intelligent.

**PM:** Really?

**HT:** Yeah, he was a very bright guy, very sophisticated in his way.

**PM:** And where did he come from?

**HT:** He came from Kingsport, Tennessee, originally, and then went on to spend some time in North Carolina, and then came to New York in the '40s, and got taken in by the sort of left-wing folk music crowd. He got to know Josh White, Leadbelly, all around the



Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie, Almanac Singers, all that stuff. So Brownie got into that. But he also was a little bit in the R&B field, too. So he kind of crossed boundaries. He was a great guy.

**PM:** One hears, even down here in Nashville, that John Hall [of Orleans fame] is running for Congress.

**HT:** That's right, that's right.

**PM:** That would be incredible to see him there. What are his chances considered to be?

**HT:** I think he's got a good chance.

**PM:** Wow.

**HT:** John is very smart.

**PM:** Oh, yeah. He's a hell of a good guy.

**HT:** Yeah. [The votes were cast a couple weeks after this interview, and indeed John Hall *will* be a member of Congress, elected to represent New York's 19th District.]

I've also been listening to the new Chris Smither album.

**PM:** Ah, yeah, we just interviewed him, and we like that record a lot.

**HT:** Yeah. He just made a DVD for us, and several of the songs on his CD are on the DVD that he did for us. That just came out.

**PM:** We've got to take a listen to that, because he just sounds as great as ever.

**HT:** Right. And this band Crooked Still is pretty great. And I told you about the Duhks?

**PM:** Oh, yeah, we love them, too.

**HT:** I've been listening to them.

**PM:** Yeah, you're right on the cutting edge there. It's beautiful.

**HT:** I've got a lot of old stuff, too, like John Prine and Steve Goodman.

Kate Rusby, I like her a lot, from England.

**PM:** Yeah, on Compass.

**HT:** A folk ballad thing. Yeah, she's on Compass, right. I like her a lot. Kelly Joe Phelps, I have a lot of his music.

**PM:** Interesting, that new record, not as complex as some of the other ones.

**HT:** I actually haven't gotten into it yet.

**PM:** Yeah, it's very kind of country blues. It's not lyrically impenetrable and musically just mind-boggling, it's simpler, and still really good.

**HT:** Right. And then one of my old-time favorites, who doesn't get enough respect in this country, is Paul Brady.

**PM:** Ah, I thought you were going to say Paul Geremia.

**HT:** Well, Paul Geremia, too. But Paul Brady, I think he's just incredible.

**PM:** And yeah, I agree. And we're truly remiss in not having covered him yet. And we must get to Paul Brady.

**HT:** Yeah, that was another big thing for me was to get him to do a DVD, which is really a great one.

**PM:** And what was the nature of his?

**HT:** It's taking his songs and the way he plays them on the guitar. I mean, he has a wonderful guitar style, and how he makes his arrangements, with the folk, very acoustic stuff, and also how he handled his more electric stuff, although it's all on acoustic. But I'm a big fan of his, and we became friends.

**PM:** Well, jeez, I know you're a very, very busy person. And I really appreciate you taking the time to speak with us today.

**HT:** Well, thanks. I'm very flattered that you're interested.

**PM:** Yeah, and we think that what you're doing at Homespun continues to be a huge cultural contribution to the country and to the world. And please say hi to Jane and to Artie for me.

**HT:** I will. Thanks a lot, Frank.

