

A Conversation with Lori McKenna
by Frank Goodman (Puremusic.com, 6/2005)

This mother of five has a knack for dramatic entrances. When she made her singer songwriter debut out of nowhere in 1998, Folk Radio powerhouse WUMB named her Best New Artist, The Boston Globe put her in the Top Ten, and she won a Boston Music Award. (Oh, and she sold 10,000 copies.)

Rumor has it that she's making a similarly dramatic entrance in Nashville as a songwriter. I've heard from a number of sources that, subsequent to signing with Melanie Howard Music, the artist got four cuts with *the* Country Crossover artist, a cut with her star husband, and another cut with another huge female artist. The artist is not at liberty to discuss such things, because no one knows until the album is Out whether your song made it on the record or not. (Not most, but some artists will cut 40 songs before they whittle it down to 12—and the other ones will go into various limbos, they're far from a shoe-in for the next record. Then the process starts again, with fresh songs, and fresh songwriters, sometimes.)

So, Nashville is finding out what the Boston area and the national folk scene has known for some years—that Lori McKenna has got the goods. She's already writing all over town with all the coolest writers, and *that* is the best thing a great publisher can do for you. (Aside from landing you six monster cuts, that is.)

We listened to her latest record, last year's *Bittertown*, and found it very impressive indeed. She's got the sound, and she's got the songs. Lori also has a rather unique vision for a songwriter, having married and mothered early, and staying in the neighborhood where she was raised, in the South Shore town of Stoughton, Massachusetts. I don't hear the level of egocentrism in her songs that I believe makes singer songwriters boring to some people, a lot of people. With five kids running around the house (the oldest is 16) and a high school sweetheart husband who loves music but doesn't pay that much attention to the words, I think that probably brings you down to earth pretty well.

And we did find her to be a lovely person on the phone, with no end of praise for the people with whom she has worked or those by whom she has been inspired. And she's more apt to refer to herself as a housewife than a songwriter. It's charming, really. And when you combine those qualities with the beauty and power of her music, it's no wonder that people are falling in love with her, now all over the globe. And it's still just the beginning. There are also rumors of a major label deal for Lori as an artist, and it's easy to predict that she is going to get a Lot bigger in the next five years. Couldn't happen to a nicer gal. We know you'll enjoy the conversation with the angel of Stoughton, Lori McKenna.

Puremusic: Hi, Lori. This is Frank Goodman calling from Puremusic. How are you?

Lori McKenna: Good, Frank. How you doing?

PM: Very fine. Is this an okay time?

LM: I believe it is.

PM: Oh, that's great. Yeah, Melanie told me, "Hey, be prepared for kids to be part of the interview process."

[laughter]

LM: Well, I was going to warn you. I only have one with me at the moment, but he can make a lot of noise.

[laughter]

PM: Oh, yeah.

LM: He's sleeping right now. But my David is laying on top of me. He's going to be a year tomorrow. He's pretty good. My troubles arise when my three-year-old is around, and she's at school right now, so—

PM: Wow. So, since we already have, we might as well start with your family. David is on you right now.

LM: He doesn't like to sleep unless he's attached to somebody.

PM: Right. I know people like that.

[laughter]

LM: I don't blame them, I don't blame them. But he's laying on my arm right now. I'm sitting on the couch. I just fed him a bottle, and he fell asleep, so I figured I better stay here until I'm done with this phone call. [laughs]

PM: So David is one year old tomorrow.

LM: Yes.

PM: And your three-year-old is—

LM: Her name is Meghan. And she is at preschool. She goes to preschool around six hours a week, two mornings for about three hours at a time.

PM: Oh, that's not a lot of relief, but it's something.

LM: Yeah. It helps.

[laughter]

PM: That's a tough age.

LM: And she's the only girl. I mean, she just came out this way, but she sort of wants to run the show, let me tell you. She's the boss.

PM: Well, it's the age where women are going to run the show anyway.

[laughter]

PM: She's right in step.

LM: Yeah, yeah. And then I have Christopher who is eleven. And Mark is twelve, and my son Brian just turned sixteen the other day.

PM: Sixteen?

LM: Yeah.

PM: Wow.

LM: So this is a big week at my house, because our oldest is sixteen and our baby is one.
[laughs]

PM: What is your sixteen-year-old into? Is he listening to rap music, or what's his bag?

LM: No, thank God. The only music I really can't tolerate is rap. Raising my kids, I was very careful about what kind of music was around.

PM: Yeah, but you can't—

LM: You can't avoid it, I know. But my kids had Beatles posters on their walls by the time they were in kindergarten. We started them off carefully. We were pretty careful about what they listened to when we still had the chance to give them what we thought was important. My son Brian actually has his own band. He's into rock. He's into—I actually just got him Weezer's new record the other day.

PM: Right. That's a good record.

LM: Yeah, he loves it. I haven't gotten a chance to listen to it. But for his birthday he got a portable DVD player and the Metallica movie, a Weezer CD and—I forget what else he

got. I did pick up Bruce Springsteen, but I told him I had to download it in the iPod before I can give that back to him.

[laughter]

LM: But he's good. I like the stuff that he likes, so...

PM: So he's got a rock 'n' roll mom, obviously. Is his dad also a rock 'n' roll dad?

LM: My husband is a plumber. He's a music listener—he listens to the *music*. He doesn't listen to the words—he's not a word guy, which is great for me, because he doesn't listen to anything I really say.

PM: [laughs]

LM: I mean, I don't have to edit myself because I'm afraid that he's going to get upset, because he doesn't listen.

[laughter]

LM: He just listens to the whole thing. He painted our house last year listening to three records, and the whole time he listened to the same three records. He listened to Mark Erelli's record, *Hillbilly Pilgrim*, which was his favorite record of the year last year, and one of my favorites. And Mark is a good friend of mine, so I didn't mind listening to that a hundred times over. The *O Brother* soundtrack is my husband's favorite thing in the world.

PM: Wow. But he's more about the sound of it than the song.

LM: Yeah. I think it's that thing where certain music just gets in your soul or something, I don't know. So he listened to those two records—and Sara Evans' record that I just popped in there one day. And he doesn't know who she is, he doesn't care. He just likes the sound of the record. [laughs]

PM: What's his name?

LM: His name is Gene. He's funny.

PM: Wow, what a beautiful family you got there. And *Bittertown*, I know it's not brand new, but that's a monster record.

LM: I was just thinking about *Bittertown* this morning, because I was thinking about my son David's birthday tomorrow. *Bittertown* came out May 11th of last year, and David came on May 13th. And basically I was thinking how lucky I am, because I still love that record. I think a lot of people go through this thing where they make a record, and then

it's the second thoughts, like, oh, I should have done this, or I should have put that song on, or all these things that you just second guess about.

PM: Sure.

LM: And that record, I'm just so—I keep telling people that I'm just happy that I got to be on that record [laughs], because I really am proud of it. I still love every song, and I love the way everything happened—I wouldn't change one thing about that experience.

PM: That's really unusual, that you wouldn't change a thing.

LM: It's *so* unusual. But then my next thought was, I'm ruined now. Because it's sort of like the first time—it's like falling in love, like you can't ever go back.

PM: “I'll never be that innocent again.”

LM: I know, I know.

[laughter]

LM: But I really was just put in a great spot with Lorne Entress, who produced the record.

PM: What about him? That guy is magic.

LM: He really is. And I'm so proud of him, and I'm so happy that people recognize really the genius that he is, because he really can do no wrong. And he really can do everything.

PM: What kind of a man is he? What kind of a guy is he in the studio and otherwise?

LM: Well, that's the thing, too, you can almost assume that if somebody is that good with one thing, then there's got to be shortcomings somewhere.

[laughter]

LM: And maybe there are, but I've never noticed any. I mean, I met Lorne just a few months before we went in to make the record. He's a great human being, he really is. He's great to my kids. He's just a great guy. And in the studio, I can get scared pretty easy. But Lorne is a patient and loving producer. And he just takes something that's working and that's good, and he just steps it up, he just brings it up a level. That's what he does for everybody. He would sometimes say to me, “Well, just sing it again, not really sure why, but just sing it again.”

[laughter]

LM: The critiquing was never there. And he'd kid around with Kevin Barry, who played all the bass.

PM: He's a silver-fingered devil, that guy.

LM: He's a great guy, and also a funny character. You put them all together, and it's a real good atmosphere. Because, really, being in the studio for twelve hours listening to myself, it sort of makes me want to jump off a bridge. So it's truly lucky when the people you're working with are super-talented and also very entertaining, it makes it fun.

PM: It's so unusual that a guy goes in and he tracks the bass and the guitars and the lap steel, et cetera, and it sounds really like different guys.

LM: Kevin is amazing like that. And he played some piano, too. Lorne doesn't have kids, but Kevin has kids. And Kevin and I would get in these conversations about our kids. Lorne would just patiently stand there for [laughs] a half an hour while we're going on and on about this, that, and the other thing. And then he'd say, "You guys want to make some music now? What do you think?"

[laughter]

PM: So is Kevin Barry a singer/songwriter, too?

LM: I think Kevin does write some songs. And he didn't sing much for me, but it turns out that—I've heard from other people that he is a great singer. He's kind of shy about his singing.

PM: Because Lorne did some really good singing on the record.

LM: Yeah, Lorne can sing anything. Lorne actually has a pretty impressive range. He can pretty much sing background to anything. And he did a lot of the background singing for the basics, for the tracking, that Chris Trapper and Buddy Miller ended up singing on the record. Well, Buddy Miller, I think they pretty much just sent him the song, and he worked his magic on his own.

PM: Did he just do it here in town? He did it in his own studio?

LM: He did. I don't know the technology, how it works, but I think they basically emailed him the tracks.

PM: Traded files.

LM: Yeah. Because Buddy Miller was going on the road like the next day.

PM: Yeah, Buddy sounded monster on that track.

LM: Oh, man, he's just...I mean, how lucky am I?

PM: I don't recall ever hearing him sing with anybody except Julie and Emmylou before.

LM: And Kasey Chambers.

PM: Oh, right, right. Kasey Chambers.

LM: I'm a Kasey Chambers fan. I got to open for her a couple years ago. And I sat there in the audience and thought, "That's what I want to be when I grow up." [laughs]

PM: Wow.

LM: And Buddy is on her records. But Julie Miller, that voice is just the greatest thing, and to hear them together—and just the fact that he took the time to do that, I was just so—I really am still just so happy. We already knew that that was going to be the first song on the record, and to have that voice on that opening track is just perfect.

PM: And it's the perfect track to start *Bittertown*, because it really opens the piece, like theater.

LM: Yeah.

PM: It's almost like one of the players came out and set the stage for what the show was going to be, like Shakespeare.

LM: Oh, that's great. Yeah, everyone pretty much agreed that that was going to be first. And it has that great—the drum starting. Someone called it the greatest folk drumming ever.

[laughter]

LM: And I thought, does that make sense? But it was. [laughs]

PM: So you met my good friend Thomm Jutz the other night. [He was playing as a duo with Mary Gauthier.]

LM: I did. Well, first I got to say hi to him, and then I got to listen to him play—

PM: Ahh!

LM: —for forty-five minutes, and then I got to chat with him for a minute. And man, he's pretty amazing. I mean, I came to see Mary because I think Mary is—I was just saying this to her the other day, and I think she thinks I'm crazy—but I watch Mary perform, I stand there on the side of the stage, and I feel like somebody would've who was watching like Hank Williams back in the day.

PM: Oh, wow. [Check out our Mary Gauthier interview.]

LM: I was just standing there watching this songwriter that I know is going to be a legend someday.

PM: She's an icon in progress.

LM: She really, really is. I met Mary probably six years ago when I first started doing open mikes. She'd be the open mike feature, you know what I mean? And so I've been able to see this person, this star just rising.

And so I got to watch Thomm and Mary the other night. And I thought he was so great. One thing that's great about the two of them is that a lot of time a sideman, especially when they're good, can sort of distract from a song or distract the audience a bit—they're sort of watching him play, maybe not paying attention to the words anymore. Mary is a poet, it's all about the words. But I thought he blended just perfectly with her. You were watching the whole thing, and you weren't sort of taking one spot or another.

PM: Oh, yeah. Even in conversation, he can make his personality vanish, if he so chooses.

LM: I thought they had a perfect mix. And I thought, wow, this guy—that's what it's all about. Because Mary is still Mary—and I know it's Mary, too, because I've seen her quiet down 100 people standing there with drinks in their hands and not the least bit interested in who's on stage. I've seen Mary silence those people. I know that she can do that. But I thought they played beautifully together. I was really happy to watch it.

PM: I hear it's a great duo show. Tom is also a great songwriter. We write a lot of songs together, and yeah, he's quite a character.

LM: And he's a great singer, too, because he sang with her a bit.

PM: Oh, see, he's so modest he hasn't even said that he sings with her.

LM: She ended the other night with "Wheel Inside a Wheel."

PM: Great song.

LM: And that song just sort of kills me anyway. And then he sings that line with her, "roll on, brother."

PM: Right.

LM: A lot of times people clap for a soloist, and that's pretty much the only time you hear an audience clap in the middle of a song. But they applauded when they got to the chorus of that song.

PM: Really...

LM: I've never seen that. I've seen a guitar solo get applause, but never a *chorus*.
[laughs]

PM: Wow. Yeah, Tom is so modest, I'm glad to hear this from you, because otherwise I'd never know any of this.

LM: Yeah. And I know Mary is having a great time playing with him, and she just thinks he's great. And it sounds to me like he thinks she's great, too, and he really knows that this is somebody that people need to pay attention to. And I'm so happy that her record [*Mercy Now*] is getting all of these amazing reviews.

PM: Well, yeah. Mary's getting fantastic press, well deserved. [see our review] But you, yourself, get unbelievable press, as well. I was hard pressed to find a review that was less than five out of five stars.

LM: [laughs] Yeah, I've been really lucky. Because reviews are tough sometimes—like everyone says, you can get ten good ones, and you're going to remember the one that wasn't exactly positive.

PM: [laughs]

LM: And that's human nature.

PM: Sure.

LM: So I try to stay a little bit away from it, but I'm still interested. Then I think, well, I have so much more to distract me from just worrying about myself. And I think that's always been an important part of how I write and everything else. I have all these other things that are at the top of my list. I have these kids, and I'm home a lot more than most of my friends who are singer/songwriters and do this for a living. I try not to worry about the press so much. And sometimes I miss things. But it's hard not to pay attention.

The thing that's been great for me to see in the reviews is that people get that this record—I mean, I wrote the songs and I sang them, but it really had so much to do with Lorne and Kevin and these players who came in. Lorne never tried to rearrange anything. He just took the songs exactly the way I wrote them and made them into the way they sound on the record. And that's pretty unusual, I think, to have 13 songs where there weren't any changes made. They just came and played the way they did—

PM: Yeah, well, he also knew that the songs were right, God bless him.

LM: Yeah, I guess so.

PM: How did Buddy end up on that session? Is he Lorne's friend or your friend?

LM: Well, it's funny, because I'm a fan of Buddy Miller because of Mark Erelli.

PM: I met him at a coffee shop in Nashville one morning, very nice guy.

LM: Really? Well, he gave me a Buddy Miller tape a long time ago, years ago, and I didn't know who he was at all. Lorne produced all of Mark's records—Lorne and Mark are also very good friends. And somewhere along the way they had opened for Buddy Miller. Then I had the pleasure of opening for Buddy and Julie Miller a couple of years ago at the Iron Horse in Northampton. And it was the day they found out they were nominated for a Grammy, and it was an amazing show, it was the best show I'd seen in two years.

PM: They're incredible.

LM: *So* incredible. And they were really nice to me. And because Mark and Lorne had met them—I think Lorne had Buddy's email or something—he asked me, "If you could have anybody sing on this record, who would you want to have sing?" And I said, "Mark Erelli, Buddy Miller, Chris Trapper."

PM: And he got them all. [laughs]

LM: Mark was easy, because he's a friend. And he said, "I think I might have Buddy Miller's phone number or email or something." And Buddy Miller got right back to him and said, "I remember her. I'd love to do it." It was just so nice. I haven't talked to him about it at all, but we were all floored by what he did. And of course, he didn't think it was that good. [laughs]

PM: He never does.

LM: He said, "You don't have to use it. If you don't like it, I understand."

PM: [laughs]

LM: I mean, come on.

PM: That's really funny. [check out our interview with Buddy, also in this issue]

LM: And then Chris Trapper was in town. I think he lives in Boston or around here. So somebody tracked him down. And it was just perfect.

PM: As a Nashville-based webzine, I was really motivated to call you when I heard the rumblings of all the great things that are happening for you down here. I know that you can't talk about those specifically. But I am led to believe that you've been coming down here to do some writing.

LM: Yeah. I've been coming down about once a month, for a couple days at a time. And because of Mary Gauthier—Mary called me I guess late last summer or early fall and she said, "I'm writing for this woman—Melanie Howard Music—and she really loves your record *Bittertown*, and she wants to talk to you about a publishing deal." So we met and hit it off. And I ended up signing this deal with Melanie.

PM: She's fantastic. [Besides being a superlative publisher with great ears, Melanie also happens to be the widow of the legendary songwriter Harlan Howard.]

LM: She is great, and she loves the music. I guess I signed a deal with her in December. And since then I've been going down once a month for a couple days. She calls me up and she says, [laughs] "Hey, I got you a writing appointment with Darrell Scott and Mark D. Sanders, just a couple of guys that live down here. No sweat."

PM: Unbelievable...

LM: The first guy I ever wrote with was Mark D. Sanders—

PM: You gotta love that. [In the Al Anderson interview, we mentioned Tia Sillers' Song of the Year "I Hope You Dance"—Mark D. was her co-writer on that song, and many other huge Country hits.]

LM: —and I was petrified. I have to tell you, I had never really done that. I've done co-writes with my friends, like once or twice with Josh Ritter, or my friend Meghan Toohey, and Mark Erelli since then. But I really had never done that before.

PM: Yeah, writing with your friends is one thing.

LM: It's one thing, right. But Mark D. Sanders, I mean, for God sakes?

PM: So many hits.

LM: So many hits. So I was really petrified. But he's such a great guy. We've written four songs together.

PM: Really?

LM: If I was going to make a record, I would want three of them to be on there.

PM: I hear he's a really sweet guy.

LM: I mean, I just love that guy. He's so great to me, and he knows so much about the business. And he's willing to give you advice—some people aren't. Some people, it just doesn't occur to them. [laughs]

PM: Oh, yeah, or if it occurs to them, they make sure they don't.

[laughter]

LM: I just talked to him last night on the phone. And he's been through all this, and he knows. He says, "Your song is on the record when you're holding the record in Wal-Mart, and you read that your song is on the record."

PM: Right. And until then, you don't know nothing.

LM: Yeah. And until then just be happy that you get to do what you love to do for a living. Darrell Scott told me the same thing, and that's what I'm doing. These guys have been through it, and they know. So we're hoping for the best.

PM: Yeah, Darrell is one of my very favorite guys.

LM: That guy, man—his record, that *Live From New York City* record? God, I think that's the best live record I've ever heard.

PM: He's a scary guitar player.

LM: I went over to his house, and he's just got instruments everywhere. You can't spit without hitting a musical instrument in his house.

[laughter]

LM: And he's like—well, I had this song that I just started, and it was kind of in trouble. It was in a lot of trouble, actually.

PM: [laughs]

LM: And I said, "I don't know"—and I was getting laryngitis, so I couldn't even sing. And he was like, "Let me try this." And he picked up a mandolin. And then, "Let me try this," and he sat down at the piano. And I was like, "Oh, my God, this guy"—

PM: Wow.

LM: I sang it to him once with laryngitis, and he just picked it right up.

PM: And fixed it.

LM: And fixed it!

[laughter]

LM: He sure did fix it.

PM: That's so amazing when you give somebody something that's wounded and they fix it.

LM: It was sort of more than wounded—it was in intensive care for a long time.

PM: [laughs]

LM: And not only did he fix it up, but he ended up doing a demo, and it is just brilliant. I mean, I don't want to—I just listen to Darrell Scott's thing, and I don't want to sing the song again myself. Like, well, I got Darrell Scott to sing it!

PM: Right. "That's good enough for me."

LM: Yeah, yeah. So I was just having a blast. I really like Nashville. I don't like to travel much, but when I go down there, Melanie takes such good care of me. She puts me with these people who are fantastic.

I was actually just looking at your webzine, and I see that you did an interview with Beth Nielsen Chapman. And last time I was there I was with her.

PM: Yeah, it's such a drag, because I was playing that same night at a different joint, and I couldn't go see you.

LM: Oh! Well, that was like a big week, right, around town?

PM: Yeah, it was Tin Pan South. You were at the Bluebird, I was across town with some friends at The Basement. But that's Nashville for you. Happens a lot.

LM: Yeah, I bet it does. I had played at the Bluebird one other time, but for some reason or another, they put us on a stage—they didn't have us in the round like in the middle of the place.

PM: It's much better when they put you on stage, I think, because when you're in the middle of the room—I'm always sitting behind the person I most want to see. It never fails. It's like the only seat left.

[laughter]

LM: That's funny. Well, I think I was sort of up against the pole, to tell you the truth. But Hal David was there the night that we played.

PM: Oh wow...

LM: And I got to tell you, I love songs, right? I love music, I appreciate a songwriter as much as the next person, because I am a songwriter. And Boston is a great environment for songwriters, I think. It's very nurturing here. Well, Hal David gets up and sings "Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head."

PM: Yikes.

LM: Right? And people, like twenty-five-year-old blonde, beautiful girls, women—that you think, well, I'm surprised they even know who he is—were crying, were sobbing. I couldn't even look at the audience because I was afraid I was going to start crying.

PM: [laughs]

LM: And I had to sing a song. You know what I mean? And the room was obviously silent, which it is anyway, but then that guy gets up and sings his song, and people were sobbing. And I said to somebody afterwards, I said, "Wow, I've never seen anything like that before." And they said, "That's Nashville for you, because we appreciate the songwriters here."

PM: Yeah.

LM: Maybe he wasn't the guy singing that on the radio, but he's the guy who wrote that song. And to hear the songwriter sing that song is this thing that you just can't get anywhere else.

PM: And you hear a song like that, and it hits you—"Now that is a frickin' song!" "Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head," thank you.

LM: I know. I know. And they did this whole medley of fifteen of his songs. [laughs] It was brilliant. But then to have him come up and sing, it was really an honor. And I was sitting there right beside him. He was standing there singing, and I thought, "Wow, this is something. I don't know how I ended up here."

[laughter]

PM: So you've written with Mark D. Sanders and Darrell Scott. Who else are you writing with down here?

LM: Well, I got to write with Beth. And let's see, God, I've been down there a few times now. I've written with Liz Rose.

PM: Oh, I've heard she's fun to write with.

LM: She's great.

PM: She writes for the company right next door to our studio.

LM: Oh, really?

PM: Did you go to Jody Williams' office to write with her?

LM: Yes, that's where I went.

PM: Yeah. Well, next time you're there, come to the building before that, we're at the studio on the bottom. Come knock on my door.

LM: Oh, that's so funny.

PM: That's Nashville.

LM: Yeah, I got to say, Nashville is crazy. For someone like me—I live in this town called Stoughton, Massachusetts. Nashville is crazy. I'm sitting in her office, and a tour bus drives by. Then another tour bus drives by.

[laughter]

LM: The windows were open because it was really nice out. And then another tour bus. I'm like, "What's with all the tour buses?" She's like, "Dude, it's Nashville." Like, "What do you mean?"

[laughter]

LM: But yeah, I've really loved every experience I've had so far. It's been incredible. And you know who I got to write with who was a blast was Harley Allen.

PM: Oh, what a character.

LM: [laughs] It was great.

PM: You mean Melanie set you up with Harley Allen. That's fantastic.

LM: Well, and then she said, "Well, I got this co-write with this guy that doesn't really do co-writes." And I thought, oh, boy.

[laughter]

PM: Right. "Which hillbilly are you pairing me with?"

LM: I mean, he doesn't need me. He doesn't need to do co-writes because the guy is so—he's brilliant. And I basically just sat in his office and watched him write a song.

PM: [laughs]

LM: But I was happy to have—

PM: “I was in the room,” as they say in Nashville.

LM: Yeah. He wouldn’t even let me make coffee.

[laughter]

LM: But I got to meet his wife.

PM: He was probably drinking beer, anyway.

LM: Not really, he was smoking a lot of cigarettes. But I thought, well, at least I can light a cigarette for him, or something, while he writes this song. But I got to meet his wife and his kids, and his wife was great. I liked his wife the second I met her. But yeah, Melanie takes good care of me. She really does. And like I said, it’s just a blast for me.

PM: Are there many singers or songwriters working today that you admire a lot, other people whose work you look to for inspiration?

LM: Yeah. I’ve learned that the thing that gets me the most is the show. It’s really just sitting there and watching a show. It’s hard for me to get out of the house, and when I do, it’s usually because I’m doing a show or I’m going for a couple days to Nashville, or the West Coast to do a couple of gigs. I’m trying to get out—I’m getting out a little bit more and touring, and I’m figuring out how to leave the house for a couple days at a time. We were just in Holland last week and—

PM: Was the Holland tour fun?

LM: Oh, that was great.

PM: And you went with Lorne and Mark, right?

LM: I did. And those guys—playing with those guys is like playing with a full band because they are just incredible. Lorne plays about seven different instruments.

PM: Wow.

LM: And he’ll be playing his mandolin and he’s playing something with his feet.
[laughs] These guys are just incredible. And so we got to play that Blue Highways Festival.

PM: In Utrecht, right?

LM: It was.

PM: Yeah.

LM: I'm sorry. My phone keeps beeping at me. But it was in Utrecht. And the record label that *Bittertown* is on over there is Rounder Europe, and they took such good care of us. That festival—they do a beautiful job of it. It was a blast. We were on the small stage. There was a big stage and a small stage. And basically, on the small stage they have this room that fits I guess 500 people standing up. And the room was filled. And I could see a couple people in front of me that knew the songs. And I thought, how great! I'm a freakin' housewife, for God's sakes! How lucky am I! In two days I'm going to be standing at a bus stop somewhere at 7:00 in the morning with my neighbors, and brushing my kids' hair, and I get to do this!

PM: That's unbelievable.

LM: It really, really is. I'm constantly amazed by the things I get to do. And it was wonderful. The crowd was awesome. They stood in silence and they listened to the songs, and then they cheered. I just looked at Mark and Lorne, and I thought, this is great, to just come over here and have people know the songs. I certainly didn't expect anything like that.

PM: It must be tempting, even with so many kids and a husband at home, to want to tour more.

LM: I'm really optimistic about what I can achieve with these kids, because with the baby, you see, I get a little crazy. We were there for four days, and my husband was with me. And we both said "Four days, tops, like this is perfect." Because if I had been there for six days, I probably would have kidnapped a baby or something...

PM: [laughs]

LM: —because I need to see them. But my two little ones are little, and I tell my husband, like, "I can take them with me." [laughs]

PM: Right.

LM: And I'm pretty optimistic that I can have the best of all worlds, because I've been lucky, and I have a lot of people that back me up and take care of me.

But that tour was great, and being there with Mark and Lorne. And people actually—somebody actually said to me, "Do not come over to Europe ever again without Mark Erelli."

[laughter]

LM: We had a blast. And I think we were the only people on the bill that weren't from Nashville or Austin.

PM: Really?

LM: We had an awesome time. We only got to see a couple other people perform, but we got to meet Jim Lauderdale and—

PM: He's so great.

LM: Oh, my God. I only got to see one of his songs, but when I got home I promptly went on Amazon.com and bought a couple of his records.

PM: He's one of the funniest cats you can meet. He's unbelievable.

LM: He just looks like he'd be a funny guy. I'm going to write with him in a couple weeks when I come down to Nashville. I have an appointment with him. This record that he made with Ralph Stanley—it's like going to church, that record.

PM: And he cut an album of songs that he wrote with Robert Hunter.

LM: Yeah, I read about that, but I didn't get that one. I'll have to go back.

PM: That's great.

LM: Really?

PM: Yeah, I mean—oh, jeez, we could go on forever—

LM: I know.

PM: —but I know you're a busy person, and I'm looking at the tape, going "Frank, you said you weren't going to go more than thirty minutes. Time's up."

LM: I'm sorry. It's not you, it's me! This is what happens when you're the first adult that I have talked to all day long, you get an earful.

[laughter]

PM: You're very sweet. It's really so nice to talk to you.

LM: It's been very nice. Thanks for talking to me, I appreciate it. Well, I'm going to be in Nashville in a couple of weeks so maybe we'll see each other. My little guy actually just woke up, so perfect timing. My little man here. Hang on one second, Frank.

PM: Sure. Fantastic talking to you. What a nice person you are.

LM: And you too, Frank. Thanks for calling me. I appreciate it.

PM: I hope to see you soon.

LM: Okay, maybe in a couple weeks we'll have some coffee. Talk to you then.

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