

**A Conversation with Mindy Smith**  
**by Frank Goodman (Puremusic.com, 2/2004)**

I was just arriving at Camp Nashville at the Kerrville Folk Festival, I think it was two years ago. Might be three. I settled in a little and bumped into one of my favorite bards and all around humans, Tom Kimmel. He looked like he had something on his mind. “Got a minute?” he said. “Something I wanna play for ya. Let’s take a ride, go get some water for the camp.”

It was pretty damn hot all right, shade is a precious commodity in the hill country. But we had the windows up and the AC cool but quiet, all the better to hear this something with, apparently. “Friend of mine just turned me on to this chick, wanted me to write with her, maybe...” He knew he had my undivided attention now. “But you tell me, man—is this as good as I think it is?”

We rolled through a couple three tunes in silence, I remember “Come to Jesus” and “Raggedy Ann,” something else. I was probably biting down on my left index finger, the way I am now recalling that day, right hand under the left arm, with my head down. He pulled up to the water place, stopped the car and looked at me. “Holy shit,” I remember saying, “Yeah, I think it is.”

The melodies, and the eerie way they were sung, part wild child and part recluse, hooked me. The lyrics were original and very strong, sounded unmistakably like the new somebody, too good to have never been heard of before. But that’s just how it happens, something incubates in some faraway town, and descends on the scene, someone you’ve never seen starts to play their guitar, they open their mouth and blow your mind. It’s beautiful.

“Mindy Smith,” he said, anticipating my question. “She’s gonna be staying with us here, she arrives today in the early afternoon. Kind of a city chick, think the camping thing has got her a little freaked out. I think somebody told her about the chiggers...” and he flashed that devilish grin of his, raised his eyebrows. “Anyhow, we should try to make her feel at home, you know. She’s gonna play the New Folk competition, stay a couple of days.”

Turned out she was coming down with Gaerd Mueller, a casual friend who was into various musical angles, publishing principally. He was looking after her, buffering and bolstering, opening some doors. Seemed to have some professional-looking photo equipment when they arrived a little later. She had the fish out of water thing going on, so I did my version of the Welcome Wagon.

Wonder of wonders, she was not selected one of the six (!) winners of New Folk that year. But many people with better ears did hear her wondrous gifts, as we did around the campfire those nights.

Back home, Mindy and I stayed friends, and we had her come play at a couple of our Puremusic.com In the Round shows. People still bring up the night that a visiting songwriter decided to play the egg shaker very badly over one of her songs. He somehow failed to see her looks of death that were cracking up the people in the front, and at a certain point she just stopped and put the guitar in its stand. Didn't make a big deal about it, but was not about to have her song compromised. She's got a very strong vision about what she's doing.

In a town where this is very difficult, Mindy built a following of people who loved her songs, and got a buzz going. Eventually that buzz reached the ears of Steve Buckingham, who signed her to a deal with Vanguard Records. She was also chosen to sing "Jolene," the single for the Dolly Parton tribute CD *Just Because I'm a Woman*. That got her all over CMT and GAC, the country music video channels.

The record release is tonight, I think. Hope I can get this issue done and go. Since the moment I heard her, I thought she was going to do something big, and now it's all starting to happen...

**Puremusic:** Although I think it is in every way fitting, it's amazing to see all the great things that are happening for you now.

**Mindy Smith:** Thank you.

**PM:** How are you processing all that?

**MS:** Well, I'm still sort of developing the tools I need in order to process it all.

[laughter]

**MS:** You know what I'm saying? I don't really know what to expect. Everything is different every day. There's always something—it is kind of becoming an interesting situation, more than I've ever anticipated. So as far as dealing with it, I haven't gotten around to that yet. [laughs]

**PM:** Everybody has dreams, but making dreams come true in a world like this, I mean, it just seems so far-fetched.

**MS:** It is far-fetched. I've always had to cope with it not working out. That seems to be easier for me to deal with than the things that are starting to work out. It is great, but it can drain you. So hopefully it'll all start to make sense, because come February things are going to hopefully pick up and I'll be able to actually go out and meet and greet people and start to build an audience. And that might help me understand everything a little bit better. But right now I'm still kind of sitting in my apartment getting calls and getting reviews or interviews or stuff like that.

**PM:** Right. “I’m tired of being the next big thing. Just let me get the hell out and there play, please.”

**MS:** [laughs] And that’s another thing, too, that extra added pressure, knowing that some people are going to expect a lot. But I’m excited that some people who are jaded in this industry are excited about this record, because I think it speaks for other people in Nashville who are capable of making the same kind of record and just haven’t been given the opportunity.

**PM:** It’s a beautiful thing to say, and it’s a good point. When you do go out and tour, who’s it going to be with? Will it be a duo or a combo?

**MS:** Well, as of right now, we’re just going to have Lex out. My mandolin player Lex Price, who is an extraordinary musician in his own right, is going to come out with me on the beginning of this tour, and we’re going to just kind of rough it a little bit and hope that people respond and come see a live show.

**PM:** Yeah, and Lex, on top of being a fine musician, is just such a cool person to have with you on the road. He’s even and deep, great cat.

**MS:** He’s very tolerant.

[laughter]

**MS:** I’m not going to say I’m the easiest person to work with, but I try. We all have our days.

**PM:** Yeah. Well, I think you’re pretty nice.

**MS:** Thanks, Frank.

**PM:** I don’t know the story, even though we’re friends, so maybe for the sake of your present and future fans, let’s talk some about growing up in Long Island and thereabouts, what your early life was like.

**MS:** Oh, I certainly had a struggle—my childhood was a struggle. But I was fortunate that I had a strong family around me to support me when other people wouldn’t. I ran into a lot of problems with teachers and schooling. For lack of a better word, I was a loser.  
[laughs]

**PM:** Really?

**MS:** Oh, yeah. I mean, I was really just—I didn’t have—I was kind of the kid that no one would play with at school. I mean, seriously, that’s the truth—

**PM:** It’s hard for me to imagine that.

**MS:** We all compensate as adults...

**PM:** It's hard to imagine now.

**MS:** No, it's true. It's true. I had friends in my church that I played with, but nobody at school. And it just kind of started to feed into itself, because you know, kids can be cruel. That's just it. I mean, it's no sob story. I'm certainly among good company, I'm sure—people who have had to deal with that sort of thing. But yeah, I had a rough time. My music teachers didn't support me at all. They were, in fact, quite the opposite, very negative and very destructive.

**PM:** Did you show an interest from the get go?

**MS:** Oh, God, yes. I was three years old, I think, wanting—all I ever wanted to do was to sing. And I walked around the house all day long singing, playing with my stuffed animals and singing, that's all I did.

**PM:** Wow.

**MS:** Yeah.

**PM:** And so did you grow up going to regular public school, or some parochial or private school or—

**MS:** I went to public school.

**PM:** And you couldn't get any support on your artistic side from the teachers you ran into in the system?

**MS:** There was no support from them musically. But when you're creative, you're a creative person. You can't get around it. You can't get over it, you can't get under it, you just have to kind of get through it.

**PM:** Right.

**MS:** So I turned to visual arts, and that was a really good outlet for me creatively. It gave me a way to cope. It was actually a wonderful, wonderful part of my life then, because I was so beaten down. I was really fortunate to have support from that side, to have the attention in another way of being creative and refocus that energy—at that time it was so necessary for me.

**PM:** So do you mean you were drawing or painting?

**MS:** Yeah, yeah. I did all that stuff. I'm not saying I'm any good at it. [laughs]

**PM:** Do you still?

**MS:** No, no, I don't. Songwriting takes a lot out of me.

**PM:** Well, you put a lot in.

**MS:** I'd love to paint if I could afford it. Mostly the reason I stopped doing it was because it's so expensive to be in that kind of creative place. It costs a fortune, and I can't afford it. Supplies are expensive, and if you want good ones, if you want to project the right image... Anybody who's in a creative place is going to be spending more money than they're making. [laughs]

**PM:** Yeah. God knows music is an expensive habit.

**MS:** It is an expensive habit, but it seems easier to do. For some reason, for me, to be poor doing music was much easier than to be poor doing art. And you can make an investment in a guitar and just have that one guitar and that's all you need.

**PM:** That's true.

**MS:** You don't have to go out and buy a new guitar every time you finish a song—you don't run out of guitars like you run out of paint.

**PM:** Let's talk about the nuclear family. How many sisters and brothers do you have?

**MS:** I have an older sister, a younger sister, and a younger brother.

**PM:** And what are they up to?

**MS:** Oh, they have their own families and careers. My sister Kim actually owns a law firm in D.C., she runs her own law firm there. My brother, Don, is in the process of relocating in his job, in his career. He's making a career change, he's going to move to Indiana, I guess. And he's in the ministry. And my other sister, Shannon, is a full-time mom. She's the mother of a four-year-old and two-year-old triplets.

**PM:** Wow. And were the siblings tight growing up, was it that kind of a family?

**MS:** We were really close. And also because, I would say, we were relatively close in age as well, we fought a lot like close sisters and brothers do, and we played—there were times we got along great. But we have a great open communication, we communicate very well. We're really supportive of each other. And we don't meddle in each other's lives. We can still be supportive and help each other out and not... A lot of families get into meddling.

**PM:** Oh, yeah. Yeah, I come from a very enmeshed group of kids. Not meddling, but yeah, very enmeshed. But you say you found support in your nuclear family.

**MS:** Absolutely. They have been supportive in every aspect of my life. We are the people that we turn to when nobody else will do. We've always come through for each other. So I'm a very, very blessed individual, especially since I've been adopted into that family. I have been fortunate just to know my siblings and to have them be a part of my life. And now it seems like an even bigger deal because a lot of people don't talk to or communicate with their families.

**PM:** Right. Well, it's a beautiful thing. Was it your adopted mom or your blood mom who died of breast cancer?

**MS:** My adopted mother passed away.

**PM:** What was her name?

**MS:** Sharron, that's with two Rs, like the Rose of Sharron.

**PM:** Right. And how old were you when she passed on?

**MS:** I was nineteen when Mom died. She died in '91. I believe I was nineteen. It's still sort of a blur. I've never really gotten past it all, obviously. The record is dedicated to her.

**PM:** Yeah.

**MS:** But, yeah, it was '91 when she died.

**PM:** My mom died in '93. I don't think I ever got over it. I still—

**MS:** Well, I don't think you have to. I don't think it's a requirement, if you lose somebody, to get over it. I think a lot of people who haven't lost somebody don't understand that. They don't understand that it's okay for somebody to grieve as long as they need to grieve, if it's not interfering with their life.

**PM:** Right.

**MS:** Or if it's not completely running your life after, what, ten or fifteen years—but even if it is, you're entitled to that grief, I think.

**PM:** Yeah. I think I like carrying it with me. I think sometime every week I say, "Oh, I got to call Bessie and tell her that." And then, "No, I don't think you can do that..."

[laughter]

**MS:** Yeah, I miss her a lot, especially now, because my mom, if you don't know, I mean, she was a singer, and she would be really on board and excited about everything that's

happening. And it becomes—it does become a void, but a new void because everything is going so well. Many people say, “Well, she’s with you.” It’s not the same. [laughs] I don’t think it’s the same.

**PM:** No, I agree with you.

**MS:** And I think that’s fine. It doesn’t have to be that she’s with you. I mean, I know she’s whispering in God’s ear. I need all the help I can get, but it’s still not the same.

**PM:** Right. But your brothers and sisters must be really excited about what’s happening.

**MS:** Oh, they’re just so excited. I don’t even—none of us really know how to behave right now.

**PM:** So when did your musical pursuit really begin, though, in earnest, songwriting and guitar playing and all that?

**MS:** When I moved to Knoxville, really. I didn’t play the guitar at the time, but I had kind of been in a band in Cincinnati. And it was nice for what it was, but it didn’t last. It was [laughs] a very short adventure, I would say. It was like maybe two, three months worth of work, and it just kind of caved.

**PM:** So how did you end up in Cincinnati, and what kind of a band was that?

**MS:** I went to Cincinnati after my mom died, just to get away from it.

**PM:** Right.

**MS:** Had to. I had to get out of there, out of New York. And I don’t know, but I always wind up where I need to be, so...

**PM:** And you had some friends in Cincinnati or something?

**MS:** Well, a couple of my friends were going to school out there, a school called CBC, Cincinnati Bible College. And so I went. I followed them out there just to get out of New York. But then I knew I had friends who knew me and knew my mom, and could sort of help me if I needed somebody to talk to. It was a unique situation that I had there.

**PM:** So do you come out of some kind of a ministry background?

**MS:** I do. My dad’s a minister. And these friends were at a bible school.

**PM:** And so all the Jesus references in the record—and they’re very deeply and holistically expressed—you come by them honestly. That’s the way you grew up.

**MS:** Oh, sure, absolutely. I've always had to battle with it, my spirituality. I've always sort of gone, well—[laughs] I'm a tough cookie to crack with it all. I've always been very committed to my spirituality, but at the same time I'm torn, like everybody else.

**PM:** Yeah.

**MS:** Nobody wants to be held accountable to anything. And I'm one of those people, I don't like to be held accountable, either, but sometimes I realize that that's just the way it is.

**PM:** Well, you're a rebel in the true sense of the word, that's my perception of you. But on the other hand, you're deep into a beautiful and truly perceived kind of Jesus bag. When I hear you sing about spirit, it just really seems to me to be coming from a non-cliche and a really experienced place.

**MS:** Thank you. It's true, I guess.

**PM:** I like the way you do it. It's like if I hear Julie Miller sing about Jesus, or Buddy sing about Jesus, I get that that's a real experience they're singing about.

**MS:** Well, I don't know any better. [laughs] I wish I could say I set out to do that, but I just don't know any better.

**PM:** So you did that first short-lived band in Cincinnati, and then what happened? What brought you to Knoxville?

**MS:** Oh, my father moved to Knoxville. And I couldn't afford to live in New York anymore by myself, so I followed him on down there.

**PM:** And you were in your early twenties at this point, right?

**MS:** Hang on one second, Frank.

**PM:** Okay.

**MS:** Can I get Provolone on that instead of Swiss? And a cup of coffee. Oh, gosh, the smaller of the two.

Sorry, I'm getting a cup of coffee here.

**PM:** It's amazing how many interviews I've done with people who are ordering lunch while we're on the phone.

[laughter]

**MS:** Oh, well. I drove around for an hour. I can't ever find any food that I like, so I'm always driving around. And I came in here once, this place, Caffeine—I came in here one time and they actually—my favorite coffee shop in town closed down.

**PM:** Which one?

**MS:** Bean Central.

**PM:** Oh, yeah.

**MS:** And now they're making their coffee and then they give it to this place, Caffeine.

**PM:** I haven't been there yet because it's kind of a Vandy hang, isn't it?

**MS:** See, you could have been joining me here, but no.

**PM:** So how was Knoxville for you? That was yet another new experience. What happened there?

**MS:** I think I never knew that you could go out and do songwriters' nights until I moved to Knoxville. I never knew that. And actually, Knoxville, at least when I was there, they had a strong music community and they thrive on supporting each other. They thrive on getting out and sharing their music. It's completely pure. As far as I can tell, it's not anything other than "Hey, we just want to hear good music, something original, or we want to participate in it." And that's the vibe I got when I lived there. It was a really important transition in my life, because I needed to be supported. I'd never really had that with people. I mean, I did with my friends, but not like I did when I finally moved to Knoxville. I really needed somebody to just shake me up and say, "Look, you need to just keep at it." And I had that when I was there, which is pretty outstanding.

**PM:** Yeah, it's really, really important.

**MS:** Uh-huh.

**PM:** So were you starting to come up with good songs early on, or did the—

**MS:** Oh, hell no.

**PM:** No?

**MS:** No! I mean, I had—my first song I wrote, I think it is still a good song, but—

**PM:** Have I ever heard it?

**MS:** I don't know if you have. I'll have to play it for you sometime.

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

**MS:** It's called "Like the River."

**PM:** Yeah, it's not familiar as a title, but...

**MS:** I definitely had a certain melodic sense, but it was all around minor keys. I was still coping with a lot of things, too, at the time. There wasn't a lot of structure to my writing yet, and there was still a lot of work to do. I wanted to learn how to become a better songwriter, and I'm still working on it. Every time I sit down to write a song, I'm trying to be a better writer. Or I'm always trying to top my last song, on my own personal critiquing scale.

**PM:** Yeah. I'll talk about it in the setup to this interview, but Tom Kimmel first played your songs for me in his SUV, I think it was, at that Kerrville Festival a couple three years ago and he said, "I'm going to play you something, man. Let's take a ride around." And since that time—your songs really stood out to me immediately when I heard them, both melodically and lyrically. I mean, that's nearly a miraculous thing, when one hears so many songs and songwriters that may be good, but don't stand out. Can you say anything about your songwriting, the intention or the process that makes them stand out the way they do?

**MS:** Can I say anything about that?

**PM:** Yeah, is there anything about your intention when you sit down to write that makes those songs turn out in a way that stands them out?

**MS:** Oh, I'm very driven melodically when I write. A song needs to have a good melody for me to be interested in it enough to write a lyric. [laughs] If I don't have a good melody, I'm not interested in it. That's the bottom line for me. And if I'm able to achieve getting a decent lyric to go with the melody, that's a big deal for me, because I'm not necessarily—I don't write from a lyricist standpoint like some writers do. Like your Shawn Colvins and your John Prines, people who write from a very lyrical perspective, I don't do that.

**PM:** It's melody first, melody above all.

**MS:** It's melody first. And then usually the melody will write the song for me. [laughs] Once I establish where the song is going melodically, nine times out of ten the song writes itself.

**PM:** Now, is it only in quite recent years that you've been getting into writing with other people?

**MS:** Yeah. It's not really a natural progression for me at all.

**PM:** So how did it take place—not until you got to Nashville, or did co-writing start in Knoxville?

**MS:** It started in Nashville.

**PM:** How many years were you in Knoxville?

**MS:** I want to say I was there for...about four years. I was there until '98, so I'm thinking at least four years.

**PM:** So you ran into the music there that helped shape your thinking and your development, right? I mean, we saw a band together the other night that are friends of yours that you knew from Knoxville.

**MS:** Yeah, Blue Mother Tupelo. And I've been a fan of theirs for years, a fan first, and now I get to be friends with them so [laughs] I would go so far as to say that I'm influenced by them musically.

**PM:** Right. Yeah, I thought when I heard Micol [Davis] sing that night, that I heard her voice take a few turns and I went, "Oh, yeah, I can see where Mindy might say that she was moved by Micol's singing, and even influenced to some degree."

**MS:** Yeah, I love her. I can't get enough. She could sing the phone book and I'd be happy. [laughs]

**PM:** Yeah. I'm hoping that I really get where their record is coming from, because if I do, then I'm going to review it in the same issue where we interview you, because that makes sense. [As it turned out, we were too jammed up already with CDs we were overdue with, so we'll be listening to Blue Mother Tupelo for the following issue.]

Is anybody covering your songs yet? I thought I heard a rumor to that effect, concerning Alison Krauss....

**MS:** Well, it's not absolutely certain. I mean, Alison, she may or may not put one of my songs on her record. If it comes out, it comes out. If it comes out and it's on the racks, then I know that I've got a cut. I do know she's excited about some of my songs, and if she does put one on the record, that would be great, I'll be ecstatic, and I'll be happy to brag about it then, but... I still walk with great caution through this industry. [laughs]

**PM:** Yeah, right. It's a small town.

**MS:** Right.

**PM:** And it's not a fast-track town, Nashville. Things take time. You were here for some five years and are now hitting some really bright lights. Could we go through any of the

steps it took to get here, any of the relationships, the pitfalls or the breakthroughs? For instance, how did you hook up with a publisher, and who was that?

**MS:** I got hooked up with Kerry and Gary O'Neil through a guy named Gaerd Mueller.

**PM:** Gaerd Mueller, he's a great fella.

**MS:** Yeah. He hooked me up with them for a couple things, and for some reason it didn't pan out. I was going in and I was doing some vocals for John Scott Sherrill. And when the gig was over, I didn't even know about it. I'd been without a gig for a year, living in poverty, on other people's couches, basically.

**PM:** Here in Nashville?

**MS:** Yeah, yeah. But even though it didn't work out with Gaerd, I'm really fortunate to have gotten a deal. I mean, he set me up with co-writing over there. He was good to me. But nothing really came out of it.

**PM:** And what company was Gaerd with at the time, Blue Water?

**MS:** Uh-huh.

**PM:** Where did the deal finally go down?

**MS:** Big Yellow Dog Music.

**PM:** And are they your publisher today?

**MS:** They are.

**PM:** And who is that?

**MS:** That's Kerry O'Neil and Carla Wallace.

**PM:** Okay. So that was one kind of milestone reached and one hurdle crossed, the publisher. But were there other key people along the way before you met, say, Steve Buckingham?

**MS:** Yeah. [laughs]

**PM:** Who else played a roll in the evolution of—

**MS:** Well, a lot of people brought my stuff to him. But I think after I'd done a co-write with a guy here named Eric Silver, he got my stuff to Steve. Steve listened to it and Steve was really excited about it after that. Eric is the guy who instigated—well, actually got the follow-through with that one, yeah.

**PM:** What a guy. Yeah, I saw him in Provence yesterday. It's amazing, there's always somebody in the story, "They took my stuff to this guy, and this guy took it to that guy." And so Eric Silver is the guy who got the stuff to Buckingham, and your life began to change.

**MS:** Uh-huh.

**PM:** And how did it happen from there? Did Steve get the deal with Vanguard?

**MS:** Well, Steve, he's like the vice president here in town.

**PM:** That's right, I forgot. Ah, well.

**MS:** He's vice president of the Nashville operations. He's also a producer. He also helps run this record label with Kevin Welch and the rest of the team there. So he got really excited about it. And apparently, for Steve to get excited about something is a big deal. [laughs]

**PM:** Right. He's done a lot of things.

**MS:** He's done a lot of things, and he's incredibly particular about what he does and doesn't like, as I've come to know because I brought stuff to him before. He's really particular about music, and he's good at what he does.

**PM:** Right. Well, it's a beautiful sounding record. And he produced it, right?

**MS:** We co-produced it. And then I got really fortunate to actually have worked with Steve on the "Jolene" track, and we co-produced that. We worked really well together. And with his ability—A, his resources; B, his approach to production with a fine tooth comb—it's been a really great experience for me to work with him, with his status and the respect that he has with musicians all over the world.

**PM:** Yeah.

**MS:** We worked really well together on this record, I would say. And it was a treat and a privilege to work with him.

**PM:** I have an advance copy of the record, so I don't know all the credits on it. But it sounds like one of those tracks at least is Sonny Landreth, and I think I hear Kenny Vaughan in there too, right?

**MS:** Right. We've got an amazing collection of artist musicians. Sonny came in and played on "Jolene," which is a bonus track on the record. Sonny played on that track, but I don't think he's on any of the other tracks on the record. We've got Kenny Vaughan and Will Kimbrough mostly on electric.

**PM:** Wow. I thought there was one more amazing slide track. Maybe that's Kimbrough.

**MS:** Might be Kimbrough. We had a whole bunch of people. But Bryan Sutton plays through the whole record.

**PM:** Bryan Sutton plays strictly acoustic? [see our review of Bryan's latest]

**MS:** Yeah, for this record he did.

**PM:** He's pretty astonishing.

**MS:** He's phenomenal. He's just as much an important element as the songs themselves, I think, with this record.

**PM:** Oh, it's like that.

**MS:** Yeah, I think it is.

**PM:** Oh, wow.

**MS:** I think that the musicians on this record put everything they had into it, and really didn't hold back, that's how it feels to me, and they really made a difference.

**PM:** Did Kenny Vaughan play a lot on the record?

**MS:** Yeah. Kenny plays on a lot of the songs. I think it's probably equally distributed between Kenny and Will.

**PM:** Ah, yeah. Two of my favorites. Who played bass and drums?

**MS:** We had a number of different bass players. Dave Jacques came in and played on some of it. Victor Krauss played on some of it, and Glenn Worf.

**PM:** Wow. Just the best. And drums?

**MS:** Well, we had Paul Griffith and Shannon Forrest on drums.

**PM:** You've had a lot of contact with Dolly Parton because of the single and going on TV with her and stuff. She's so amazing. Let's talk a little about her.

**MS:** Okay.

**PM:** What's your experience been like with her?

**MS:** She's been an incredible support to me. She really has reached out. That's really moving, when you know that this person has no reason, nothing at all to gain other than the gratification of seeing somebody else succeed. When someone like Dolly reaches out to you, it is humbling. She just decided she likes what I do. [laughs]

**PM:** Yeah.

**MS:** I mean, it's been a phenomenal situation, and it's one of those situations that you can't really explain to people because what do you have to relate it to?

**PM:** Right.

**MS:** I don't have one. There's a lot of support from a lot of people that I've never expected, or I've always wanted. Just meeting some my heroes has been a remarkable experience. That's one of the main reasons why I got into this, writing songs—

**PM:** [laughs]

**MS:** —to meet some of the people who made a difference in my life with their music. And I've gotten to meet a handful of people so far, so that's the most exciting thing for me.

**PM:** Yeah. I'm sure you're going to bump into a lot of really heavy people in the next six months. And people don't realize, for instance, the power of Dolly Parton. I mean, I've been on the Opry stage or this stage or that stage where I could feel something behind me, and I turn around and it's Dolly just standing a few feet behind me, and it's like [gasps]—it like took my breath away, she was just like shining.

**MS:** Yeah.

**PM:** You could feel her presence. She was awesome.

**MS:** Yeah, she's an awe-inspiring person, and humble, too. [laughs] She's a very sweet, very funny lady.

**PM:** And she's very self-effacing. Like she'll say, "Well, I'm kind of like a cartoon now, I'm this *thing*, I'm *Dolly Parton*." But when you see her and you experience her up close, it's nothing like that.

**MS:** Huh-uh. She's anointed.

**PM:** Yeah. She's like an anointed person.

It looks obvious that Vanguard has got big plans for you. What's it like working with them? Are they good?

**MS:** Oh, God, yeah. Oh, what an incredible group of people. I mean, they've gone so far, they've just done so much to make this record work. And they're so excited about the record that at this point, they won't take no for an answer. And who could ask for more than for your label to be that excited about you? I don't think anybody could. They get up and they're ready to go get this record out there. I couldn't ask for more than that.

**PM:** It's amazing. What are some things you've got coming up? There's a CNN thing coming up, right, or did that happen already?

**MS:** I don't know about the CNN thing—I know that they were going to use me in something about 2004, like who to look out for.

**PM:** People to watch kind of thing.

**MS:** People to watch, yeah. But we got booked for Conan yesterday, for February 3rd. The Conan O'Brien Show.

**PM:** Wow! February 3rd on Conan. Oh, wow! So who will you do that with, the house band and Lex?

**MS:** No, no, no. Kenny Vaughan is going to come, Shannon Forest, and a number of other musicians. I think we booked Victor Krauss.

**PM:** That's amazing. I'm a catch that.

**MS:** And I've actually gotten booked to open four days with John Hiatt, I think in March.

**PM:** Wow. Where will they be? What part of the country?

**MS:** D.C., I think in Alexandria.

**PM:** Oh, beautiful. Yeah, I mean, this is going to be an unbelievable year that's about to happen for you.

**MS:** [laughs]

**PM:** What's the first single?

**MS:** "Come To Jesus." Some people get a little freaked out by that. I don't get it. I mean, that's the least of our worries, right? [laughs]

**PM:** Yeah, right.

**MS:** I mean, there are people like Osama Bin Laden running around out there.

**PM:** Yeah, don't be worried about the word *Jesus*, be worried about the word *bling-bling*.

**MS:** That's right. A guy went so far as to say, "I won't play it because I don't play hymns on my radio station."

[laughter]

**MS:** Whatever.

**PM:** So aside from the big doings that are ahead and that Vanguard is intending, what are your plans? What are your aspirations? What would you like to see happen?

**MS:** I guess I haven't really thought about it. [laughs] I just want to build a following. I want to be able to go out ten years from now and still have an audience, and still be able to write a new song every now and then. I would also like to see a lot of my friends excel through these resources and contacts I have. People that I believe in, maybe I'll be able to help people out, make their life a little bit easier than it was for me.

**PM:** Yeah, it's true, because we have so many talented friends in Nashville.

**MS:** Exactly.

**PM:** There are so many good people here. I know it's really a busy time for you, but are you finding time to listen to other people these days? What are you listening to?

**MS:** I'm really excited about this artist Mack Starks [see our review]. Also Julie Lee, and Kate York.

**PM:** Yeah, we like that Kate York. What is she up to?

**MS:** I think she has a show the 24th. She's going to open for Sarah Siskind coming up. Sarah is very well known around town.

**PM:** Yeah, we like her. [again, see our review]

**MS:** We are all supportive of each other, and we get to visit with each other at each other's shows. When I get to get out, I'll go out and support people like Amelia White or other people that I like to listen to.

**PM:** Well, I'm glad that, with all the hubbub that's going to happen for you this year, we may be the first people on the web or in print to put you on the cover. [Actually we were beaten by a few days by at least one of the free Nashville music papers, The Rage. We like them.]

**MS:** Sounds like it. I think you probably are.

**PM:** Good. I hope we beat the other sons of bitches to it.

**MS:** Me too, because I like you, Frank. [laughs] I'm really fortunate there are good supportive people around me. And thank you. You've always been so supportive. Always. I hope we can continue to have this kind of friendship/other thing, you know what I mean? This is a new part, talking about interviews and stuff, because we've never done that before.

**PM:** Yeah. It's great. I think you're going to get really screaming famous.

**MS:** [laughs]

**PM:** And I think you really, really deserve it. Thanks for spending your lunch hour with me.

**MS:** And let's get together and have a cup of coffee soon.

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