

**A Conversation with Blackie & the Rodeo Kings  
by Frank Goodman (Puremusic.com, 10/2004)**

Blackie and the Rodeo Kings is a Canadian supergroup born of the highest intentions. They came together to immortalize, or at least further popularize, the great songs of Willie P. Bennett, the Jimi Hendrix of the mandolin. (Although Willie has a number of solo albums out, he is better known as the magneto in the Fred Eaglesmith band, a perennially touring outfit of mythic proportion.) The three principals are each artists of great stature and immense talent.

Stephen Fearing has often been called the Richard Thompson of Canada, which is a compliment to both men. He is a gripping solo artist and an acoustic wonder, rare. I was very impressed by how strong an ensemble player he also is, since many solo experts do not excel here. His songs are superlative, and whether penned solo or with his growing number of partners, you always hear his voice in the song.

Colin Linden is one of the most audacious talents of the Canadian scene. His eight solo CDs are only the beginning. He is a sought after producer, session player, and songwriter—on stage, in the studio, and on screen. His cameo as a minstrel clergyman in the Coen Brothers' film *Intolerable Cruelty* was excellent, he sang a beautiful and faithful version of the Simon and Garfunkel classic "April Come She Will." Colin is a blistering slide guitar player, an inspired studio force, and a musician's musician.

I didn't know as much about Tom Wilson when I met the group recently in NYC, before their appearance at Joe's Pub (a beautiful listening room in Soho). What an amazing fellow he is. Tom has had the most success of the three with the group Junkhouse and also on his own, several Top 5 records. He can sing so low that it threatens to pull the nails out of the floorboards. His star power on stage is so absolute, he doesn't even have to show it. And when he turns it on the least little bit, it's like a spotlight came on.

The chemistry of these three is something to behold. The good news is that it comes across completely on the record, and that's unusual, and a real tribute to all of them and to the talent of their producer Colin Linden. They are each incredible singers and players. Their songs are mighty, all the way there. As men I found them even more impressive.

We had a little time to talk together in between sound check and doors, as it's called. The next day I continued on with Colin on the cell phone. They were stopped en route to the next gig, waiting on line at a Cracker Barrel. Dig these Canadian giants of song, listen to their clips, and buy the new fantastic record, *Bark*. It's their first release in the U.S., and long overdue.

**Puremusic:** First of all, what do you guys need to do? Do you got to eat? Do you got to get somewhere? I'm sensitive to the band's needs.

**Colin Linden:** We'll probably eat after. So we're just killing time now.

**Tom Wilson:** We got time.

**PM:** Well, beautiful, then. So when we spoke last, I called you on your cell and you guys were in the limo headed to a big gig. I caught you on your way to a Canadian music awards show.

**CL:** Oh, the CCMAs. [Canadian Country Music Awards]

**PM:** What happened at that show—you guys played, right?

**CL:** Yeah, there was one segment in the middle of the show where all the roots nominees performed. Well, except Kathleen Edwards, she wasn't in this little segment because she wasn't there, but it was the other roots music nominees. Corb Lund, ourselves, Sean Hogan, and The Good Brothers. And it segued into a medley of Good Brothers songs because they were being inducted in the Hall of Fame. So we were all staged together, and we played live. Are you familiar with The Good Brothers?

**PM:** I'm interviewing the younger Good brothers tomorrow—I'm mad about them.

**Stephen Fearing:** Oh, say hi to them for us. They're really good guys.

**TW:** Their dad and uncles are legends in the country—

**CL:** Sort of bedrock Canadian country. So we were all staged together. We played this thing that was the only live music on the show, and it was total chaos and fun and goofy, and then we left.

**PM:** Oh, TV shows are so messed up like that when you're doing them live.

**TW:** Well, I guess with the CCMAs, they have just about enough budget to make it onto TV.

[laughter]

**CL:** They don't have two or three cents to spare. They do a really admirable job of pulling it together.

**PM:** And does the whole nation watch a show like that? I mean, is it a very big deal, the Canadian Country Music Awards?

**TW:** Apparently there were more people watching it than had watched the Junos [the Canadian Grammys], which is interesting to note. I don't know the country world in Canada very well at all. Colin knows way more.

**CL:** It was actually broadcast live to CMT in America. So it was the first time we ever played on CMT USA.

**PM:** Oh, wow!

**CL:** We're just a minute and thirty seconds of it, but it was great.

**PM:** And what song did you play?

**CL:** "Swinging from the Chains of Love."

**PM:** That's a monster song. That should be getting country airplay in the United States. Is anybody going to market that to country?

**CL:** It's getting some Americana action.

**SF:** Yeah, it's more the Americana thing.

**CL:** It's too outside for mainstream country. I mean, real country music is too outside for mainstream country.

**PM:** Yeah, right. You often hear that on Music Row these days, "That's too country for country." It's obscene.

**CL:** I remember when I was still with Warner Chappell, I'd bring a song that I thought would be a really good, a song that I wrote, something straight-ahead country, and they'd kind of look sideways at me and say, "That's a pretty good country song, dot, dot, dot."

**PM:** [laughs]

**CL:** "But what are we going to do with it?"

**PM:** Dave Olney, I remember hearing after he recorded a great song in a demo session one time, he said, "Okay, well, thanks a lot. I'm going to go down to my publisher's office and trade that for a blank stare."

[laughter]

**CL:** That's pretty good.

**PM:** So was "Stoned" your first single in Canada from this record?

**TW:** It was.

**PM:** How did “Stoned” do? Did that get some action up there?

**CL:** It got some.

**SF:** In some pockets.

**TW:** It’s Halifax, Hamilton, Ottawa, Montreal.

**CL:** Yeah. Montreal, a couple places played the hell out of it. But it was controversial, despite the fact that the whole issue of marijuana and whatnot is going through the courts and being very much in the public debate right now, and has been for a while, and it’s much more lenient in Canada overall, the issue is a lot less of a hot issue. But radio is chicken shit, and they took it to be whatever they took it to be. But no, they didn’t play it in the way that we thought they should have and hoped they would have. Instead it was the next single that they went on.

**PM:** Which was?

**CL:** Which was “Had Enough of You Today,” which in rock radio was a top ten.

**TW:** It was a huge record.

**SF:** Yeah, it was a good record for us.

**CL:** Bigger than we’ve ever had.

**PM:** “Had Enough of You Today” was a huge song... That was a good song, but who would have thought that.

**CL:** Tom is known to rock radio already, right? He’s probably had a dozen top ten records in Canada.

**PM:** With Junkhouse?

**CL:** With Junkhouse and on his own. From *Planet Love*, the single, “Dig It,” was probably a top five record in Canada.

**PM:** Was that your biggest song?

**TW:** No, I just had one called “Shine” with Junkhouse that did well.

**SF:** “Out of My Head.”

**TW:** “Out of My Head” did well all around the world except for the U.S. They’re so mean to me.

**PM:** [laughs] Yeah, well they’re so mean to everybody.

**TW:** So that’s done pretty well.

**PM:** So yeah, I’m not up to speed on Junkhouse yet, but I’m about to be.

**TW:** Well, they’re done.

**PM:** I know, but I mean the past records.

**TW:** Yeah. They put out three albums. It was a rock band around the time of the Seattle alternative scene, and it was everything but an alternative band. We looked more like the road crew than we did the band.

**PM:** [laughs]

**TW:** And so we didn’t really fit into the mold. And literally, we’d tour in Europe and we’d show up and they’d say, “Okay, just bring the stuff in.” And I’d say, “Well, we just came in for a beer. We’re not the crew.” And the crew were all like these skinny little guys.

**SF:** Who are now actually all rock stars, right?

**TW:** Yes, that’s true.

**PM:** Are they?

**TW:** Yeah.

**SF:** I’m lying to you, Frank.

**TW:** So Junkhouse didn’t really fit into the mold of the Nirvana, Pearl Jam, Screaming Trees thing. It was kind of its own thing, went down its own path.

**PM:** It’s amazing when something comes in that comes in so hard for a time and then it goes. I knew a guy who was in L.A. at that particular time, and he had a band that sounded like the Red Hot Chili Peppers. And then Nirvana broke, and he quick switched his sound to that, and then they became the Stone Temple Pilots.

**TW:** I think what separated Junkhouse from the trend is probably the same thing that separates the three members of Blackie and the Rodeo Kings—I go back to the fact that folk music still had a lot to do with what went on in that particular rock band.

**PM:** In Junkhouse?

**TW:** Yeah, for sure. Because one of my first influences was Canadian folk music, and I relied on that as a reference point always. So to me, that era of whatever I was doing was pretty true to my roots, and I wasn't trying to be fitting in with the pack. And I kind of feel that that's the same way Blackie and the Rodeo Kings operates. Although we could be categorized as Americana or roots music because that's where the basics are, I think the fact is that Canadian folk music is kind of a foundation of the band.

**PM:** Right. And is Willie P. still playing with Fred? [see our interview from a couple years back with Fred Eaglesmith]

**SF:** Yes.

**PM:** I've seen him play tiny little clubs with Fred before, and the "Jimi Hendrix of the mandolin" title he's been given is certainly well earned. He's a monster.

[laughter]

**CL:** I heard it was "Keith Richards of the mandolin."

**TW:** That's what I heard too.

**PM:** I'd rather be that.

**SF:** Well, Willie is just playing so great. He's still writing great songs.

**PM:** Do his songs get covered in Fred's band?

**SF:** No.

**PM:** Is he putting out records of his own very often?

**CL:** He did a few years ago, but it's been like four years now.

**PM:** He's working on another one, I've heard. Well, he won a Juno for an album called *Heartstrings*.

**CL:** About 2000, maybe?

**SF:** Yeah. That was his first Juno.

**PM:** I mean, it's so rare that somebody starts a tribute band concerning the songs of a living singer, a living writer.

**CL:** Well, I thought that there were always bands like the Blushing Brides who did the Stones—this is on the Toronto rock circuit—and what are they called, some U2 band, the Hollow Men, it would be just U2 songs. So the idea was like being a stupid ass cover band, but it was sort of our idea.

**SF:** Ultimately it's still sort of a big part of what we do, even though we do our own stuff.

**TW:** It's one of the things, one of the common things that ties us together.

**SF:** It gave us a way to come together and sort of consciously pitch aside all of our own particular agendas. We came together on the music. The idea was to take Willie's songs and put them out as this group that really didn't have an identity. Colin has worked with Willie so many years that he had a really great handle on the music and the vision of where the songs should go. And after we'd made that first record, *High and Hurtin'*, it laid down a template for us. Roles were defined within the scope of our little band around Willie's music. Then we decided to go on from there. It's a really interesting way to put a band together. It happened quite by chance in a cool way like that.

**PM:** It's a fabulous thing, because songwriters are not famous for putting our agendas aside for the songs of another.

**CL:** It was kind of a relief to go up there and not be worried—I mean, when we decided that we would go out and play, we made a couple of rules. And the first rule was that it was the band that never said anything or did anything—be it an interview or a video or a show or anything—unless it was going to be fun. And most of the time we've been able to adhere to that. Sometimes we've taken a few risks and it hasn't panned out that way. But for the most part. So it was kind of a relief. We didn't have to give a damn what it did, because we put all of our energy about caring how we do into our own things instead.

**PM:** Yeah, right, right. "I got plenty of that going on already."

**CL:** It's a great element of relief to know it is the place that you could go to where you didn't give a damn about anything but the music and having a good time.

**SF:** And also, I learned something really important from playing in this band, which is when you say no to a promoter, or no to a festival or no to anything, what happens after that. As a solo artist, I've never felt I had the luxury to do that, because if I say no then they might not hire me again. But with Blackie, it's like it doesn't matter. So you say no, and then they suddenly come up with more money.

**CL:** That was a good thing to learn. We do things because we want to do them, because they're fun. And it's quite incredible what happens when you put that forward and live by that creed. It's been an interesting time—with *Bark* being sort of a successful record in Canada, it's been an interesting challenge to keep ourselves on the right path that way.

**PM:** So when you say it's becoming a successful record in Canada, what kind of numbers is it enjoying? Where's it going?

**CL:** The last one, *Kings of Love*, sold 15,000—which, for a roots record in Canada, was really good.

**SF:** We've done a lot better on this one.

**PM:** Already.

**SF:** Yeah. I mean, we're a long, long way from gold, which is fifty in Canada.

**PM:** Gold in Canada is 50,000?

**CL:** Yeah. But given the fact that artists like Richard Thompson sell 5,000 or 6,000 in Canada—

**PM:** What?

**CL:** Our country is a tenth the size of America.

**SF:** We're the same population as New York.

**PM:** Oh, my God!

**CL:** There's about 27 million people in Canada.

**PM:** Oh, I didn't really have a handle on that. And the country is huge. That's amazing. I had no idea.

**CL:** If you think of bands like Blue Rodeo, who are friends of ours, who are kind of a roots band, I guess they got hits at the time when you could get hits doing roots music. And you think about that group that has sold about three or four million albums in Canada. They're a gigantic band. Think about how hard they had to push it to get to that crowd.

**TW:** They're going to be opening these doors for dinner.

**CL:** Okay. We'll finish up here.

**PM:** Are you guys going to eat here?

**CL:** I think I'm going to, probably—

**SF:** No, I'm going to go for a little walk. I want to get ready for tonight.



**PM:** Okay. Let me see if I got my tape. Well, what about Rounder? Are they doing a good job on the record, is it getting out there in America?

**CL:** True North is our label in Canada, which Bernie Finkelstein runs, and he is our manager—it's very incestuous. But True North is distributing our album down here through Rounder. So Rounder has one hand on it, but not both.

**PM:** Oh. So do they have their radio people on it or True North's radio people?

**SF:** True North hires radio people.

**CL:** So basically sales and distribution are done by Rounder, but marketing and promo are done by True North.

**PM:** Is radio in the States biting on anything from *Bark* yet?

**TW:** Yeah, big time.

**CL:** We're top ten in Triple A, I think.

**SF:** We're number eleven Triple A.

**PM:** Oh, amazing. What song?

**CL:** Mostly "Water or Gasoline."

**SF:** And "Swinging from the Chains of Love."

**CL:** Which was really surprising to us. It's really cool for us to have that kind of acceptance. People don't know us here, so it wasn't like we had a track record to go with at radio, and it wasn't like we had a reputation of slugging it out touring America.

**SF:** We're in the process. There's a certain amount of sluggage going on right now.

**PM:** Yeah, I would imagine so. Well, it's a phenomenal record. The more I listen, the more I'm amazed. Somehow the sleeve got away from me, but is the authorship of the tunes pretty spread out, who wrote what, kind of thing? Everybody got some tunes on the record?

**SF:** Tom, Tom and someone else, Tom and I, me and someone else, me on my own, Colin. The three of us are involved in way or the other with each song.

**CL:** It's pretty evenly split.

**PM:** Two questions that I like to ask in interviews are really out of context here, so I'll ask them anyway. I'd like to know what everybody's reading, if anything, and if you guys are what you call spiritual guys to any extent or in any way.

**SF:** I'm reading two books at the same time. One is *Sweet Soul Music* by Peter Guralnick, which is amazing and wonderful.

**PM:** A fantastic book.

**SF:** And then when I feel like I just need to turn it off, I'm reading an Inspector Rebus novel, which I'm a huge freak and fan of. And yes, I think I'm quite spiritual, but I was raised in Ireland as a Presbyterian, which is very strange to be. So religion and I separated sometime long ago.

**PM:** Yeah, right. Irish as a Presbyterian where?

**SH:** In Dublin.

**PM:** Oh, that's twisted.

**SF:** Yeah. A very, very quiet little tiny group of people in the south. In the north very loud and very bigoted, but in the south, fairly quiet.

**PM:** A lot of our people come from Dundalk, just up the road.

**SF:** I know Dundalk.

**CL:** I just finished reading *We Don't Live Here Anymore*, Andre Dubus. And I also just finished—

**PM:** Oh, that the movie came from?

**CL:** Yeah. I didn't even know the movie was out. But I read the book. And I just finished reading *In the Moon of Red Ponies* by Andre Dubus' cousin, James Lee Burke.

**PM:** Oh, wow, that's his cousin.

**CL:** I read a lot. And I am a God lovin' pig eatin' Hebrew.

**PM:** [laughs] Really?

[laughter]

**TW:** He's a Dead Sea pedestrian, as he likes to say.

**PM:** A what?

**SF:** Red Sea pedestrian.

**CL:** Dead Sea—Red Sea, yeah.

**PM:** How about you, Tom?

**TW:** I haven't been able to read anything on the road because I haven't been able to concentrate that long. For the last couple years, I find it hard to concentrate on reading. I've been writing a lot, though, which I'm happy about.

**PM:** That kind of stuff, prose?

**TW:** No, I've been writing for putting songs together. But I find that my concentration level is really down right now. It's really unfortunate, because I used to love reading. Colin's wife is a writer, and she gave me a copy of her book when we were making this record, and I haven't been able to focus enough to give it a fair chance.

As far as religion goes, I just—

**PM:** Or spirituality.

**TW:** Well, I was going to go back to trying to be a Catholic, and then I met this Buddhist girlfriend who said that I had a lot of Buddhist beauty in me. And I think that I'm kind of Buddh-ty.

**PM:** [laughs]

**CL:** You have a Buddhist bootie.

**TW:** That's what she meant, I guess, booty.

**CL:** I've been reading a lot of southern writers, too. Living in the south is just such a fantastic environment.

**PM:** Oh, yeah, so many of the great American authors—

**CL:** Shelby Foote. And I really, really like William Faulkner.

**PM:** Can we hear—what about your wife's book?

**CL:** My wife has written almost five novels and a number of short stories. And she's been working on a novella. She also wrote one of the songs on *Bark* called "House of Sand," the last song.

**PM:** Now, since house music is coming on, would you allow me to supplement this on the phone with you sometime?

**CL:** Sure. You got the number? You know where I shop. [Colin mostly resides in Nashville these days, and he and I have often bumped into each other at Wild Oats.]

[We picked up our conversation the next day.]

**Colin Linden:** Hello.

**Puremusic:** Hey, Colin, it's Frank. How you doing?

**CL:** Good. How are you doing?

**PM:** Very good. You in a proper place and space to finish what we couldn't do last night?

**CL:** Fifty-fifty. We're at Cracker Barrel waiting for some take-out food. I have a few minutes. You want to talk until the food gets here, and then if we still need more after that, we can continue?

**PM:** Absolutely.

**CL:** Okay, great.

**PM:** So, first of all, incredible show last night.

**CL:** Oh, thanks so much for being there, and thanks for the nice word.

**PM:** And what a great crowd.

**CL:** It was nice.

**PM:** Come on, Roseanne Cash shows up, Ethan Coen shows up!

**CL:** And Joel Coen, too.

**PM:** And Joel, too. I didn't meet him. I got to talking with Ethan's wife and didn't know who she was. And I said, "How do you know Colin?" And she said, "Well, Ethan knows him." And then Ethan came over and started talking, and it was only during that conversation that I realized, "Oh, this is Ethan Coen I'm talking to." I went, "*Intolerable Cruelty*, yeah, I saw that."

By the way, a minute on that, if you would. I didn't know when I was watching *Intolerable Cruelty* that you were in it—until up comes this singing preacher and I went, "Hey, that's Colin Linden unless I'm mistaken."

[laughter]

**PM:** How did that happen?

**CL:** Well, I'm in *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* a little bit.

**PM:** Right. That's right.

**CL:** And because *O Brother* was what it was, there were all of these musical events that went along with it. So I actually got to know Joel and Ethan and became friends with them during the making of *O Brother* and *Down from the Mountain* and all that.

Then they just called me out of the blue. They had this role, they thought I'd be cool for it, so they just called me, and said, "How would you like to do some acting?" And it took me about point three milliseconds to say, "Show me where to go, I'll be there, no matter what."

**PM:** [laughs]

**CL:** I asked him if he wanted me to audition for it. "Nah, you know what to do. Don't worry about it."

**PM:** [laughs] And so I hadn't heard "April, Come She Will" in about thirty years.

**CL:** Yeah, lord.

**PM:** Who picked that?

**CL:** They did.

**PM:** Wow, what a beautiful song. And you played it just like the original?

**CL:** Yeah, I played pretty close to it.

**PM:** Yeah.

**CL:** The guys say hello.

**PM:** Oh, thanks, yeah. What an incredible bunch of guys.

**CL:** Yeah. It's a nice group of people to be hanging out with. If you're stuck together with three other sardines in the can, they're three pretty good sardines to be stuck with.

**PM:** Whoa, those are some monstrous sardines.

**CL:** [laughs] Yeah, they're big sardines.

**PM:** It's a really superlative trio.

**CL:** Well, we really—and this includes Charlie, too, who is our soundman—did you get to talk to him?

**PM:** I talked to him out front. He was wonderful.

**CL:** He's a real part of the band. And really, the whole thing is mostly based around our friendship. That's the main thing. The most important part is what happens when we get together and play music for fun. And if we can extend that to the stage, that's great. But the friendship has got to come first. Sometimes when you start doing well, like we touched on yesterday, it's easy for those priorities to shift. Then sometimes you've got to be a little bit of a stick in the mud to say, "Hey, you know what? This isn't fun. Let's not do it." So anyhow, blah, blah, blah.

**PM:** Although really incredible guys, these are very complicated cats, all three, and with Charlie, probably all four.

**CL:** You said it!

**PM:** There's got to be some rough spots on the road. How do you guys deal? What's your modus operandi for when things get difficult in one way or another?

**CL:** Well, just remembering that you're friends, first and foremost, that's the main thing. But also, this is sort of uncharted water for us in a lot of ways. We've never done anything before that really tested it being fun, because we've never done an extensive tour in America before. And when we've done tours in Canada—we did an across Canada tour with Merle Haggard, and the livin' was easy. All you have to do is show up and hear Merle, get on the bus and have a good sleep, and we were rested and happy and all that. It's been a little bit more of a challenge doing this tour, because we're going places where we are not as well known, there are longer drives, we're doing more stuff ourselves. But it's all fine.

**PM:** Who's driving?

**CL:** Charlie and Stephen do the driving. Stephen is driving today. We're driving back to New Rochelle tomorrow night to split up our drive to Boston. We're driving back to New Rochelle after the show tonight, staying there just to get north of Manhattan so we can have a shorter drive tomorrow. Charlie is going to drive tonight, and Stephen is driving today.

**PM:** I thought it was really hilarious how defined the guitar rules are. Tom has the drum set acoustic approach, he acts like the snare lots of times. [laughs] A little bit of high hat, but mostly snare.

**CL:** That's exactly accurate. I've actually given that description to other people. Yeah, snare. And Steven has the bottom end and the big acoustic thing. Charlie really understands how to get that.

**PM:** It's amazing!

**CL:** And I play the coloration stuff.

**PM:** Somehow Charlie gets the drum set acoustic thing going on so there's a big bottom, but also he gets the click going on on the top.

**CL:** Yeah, that's very true. Part of it comes from the fact that he has mixed a lot of rock bands, and really good ones, but also he's a huge fan of Jimmie Rodgers and Hank Williams, and all kinds of old country music. He's been listening to that stuff all his life, so he has a pretty deep knowledge of music. It really helps us out a lot. It's one of the things that makes us, as a three-piece, work as well as it does.

**PM:** It was fun talking with you guys—I know a little bit about you and a little bit about Steven, but it was really a trip to meet Charlie and to get up with Tom Wilson. Tom Wilson is an extraordinary guy.

**CL:** He is. And he's a heavyweight.

**PM:** Yeah.

**CL:** He's a heavyweight songwriter, a heavyweight musician.

**PM:** Big time. His low notes absolutely shook the floor, I mean, literally. You could feel it halfway up your leg, and that was freaky.

**CL:** Yeah. He goes deep.

**PM:** [laughs] I can't remember which of my friends it was, but somebody recently told me, "Frank, the first time I ever met Colin Linden he was like twelve years old playing his ass off at a festival, billed as Howlin' Wolf, Junior."

**CL:** Well, there are a few people who would have said that. I know quite a few people who I knew when I was a kid. Al Bunetta being one of them, that might have been it, or John Prine. I've known those guys—or David Bromberg.

**PM:** I haven't talked to any of them lately. But all of those people would know. So Bromberg is an old crony of yours?

**CL:** Yeah. I haven't seen him in years and years, but I knew him when I was a kid. He was very encouraging to me, very good to me, so yeah, we go back a long way.

**PM:** I certainly saw him a lot in my teens and stuff, too. And he was very important in our lives.

**CL:** And he was one of the first guys to talk about me to the press and stuff like that. Him and John Hammond were really helpful to me when I was a kid.

**PM:** Amazing. I didn't understand until I read some on your site today that—I considered you a Canadian, but actually you bounce back and forth between Toronto and White Plains.

**CL:** All my life I've been crossing that border. I was born in Toronto, but I was one year old when we moved to White Plains. And then my folks split up when I was about seven, and I came back to Canada just before I turned eleven. So all my life I've kind of felt fifty percent Canadian, fifty percent American.

**PM:** So who better than you to describe what's the difference, if it can be described, between the American and the Canadian scene, like being a musician in one place or the other?

**CL:** Well, America is so much bigger, there are just so many more places to play. The audience is so much larger. And there's a whole lot more stuff on the bottom and a whole lot more stuff on the top. In Canada, it's a little bit more in the middle. It's hard to describe. But there's a much smaller scene, and that has pros and cons to it as well.

It means that you have access to—at least you used to be able to have access to major labels, and you could kind of rub shoulders with the business if you weren't as well known. Because the scene was smaller, there were fewer people involved. The thing that's cool about that is that artists who are on the fringe could get some coverage in the major label world, and it was less like, "Oh, how will I ever get my tapes to the important guy?" And so business is a little bit more accessible in Canada. In America, there's just more of everything.

**PM:** Even though there are so many fewer people in Canada, I mean, just the great acts coming out of Toronto alone, to me, is staggering. There are so many good ones.

**CL:** Over the years that's true. I don't know what's going on now so much. I'm a little out of touch lately, but there probably still are some good people. But Toronto has become a much more corporate city over the last ten, fifteen years. So I think it's less conducive to having roots music do as well.

**PM:** I see. I'm still a huge Sexsmith fan, always have been.

**CL:** Oh, man, he's amazing. He's one of the greatest songwriters walking the earth right now, I think.



**PM:** It's incredible that he still hasn't gotten the attention that he deserves, like so many great people.

**CL:** That's true. I think—sorry, there's stuff going on here—Ron is really terrific.

**PM:** So *Bark* has taken off bigger than anything else so far, of the Rodeo Kings albums. I know you've all had successes of different levels solo, but do you think, the way it's going now, that Blackie & the Rodeo Kings is helping your solo careers, or is it going to take them over to some extent, or...?

**CL:** Well, it has taken a little time away from the other stuff, but if there's an interesting avenue to pursue, you take a look at it. I'm not one who thinks exclusive too much, I like to think inclusive.

**PM:** Right.

**CL:** So it seems to me that everything helps everything as long as it's positive. If you're out there playing music for the right reasons and having a good time doing it, and knowing when to say "Okay, time to move on to something else," all of this just helps add to the whole, to the overall vision you have of your music and to your overall development.

**PM:** I agree. So I'm going to talk to the Sadies later today, as you know. And I'll send your regards.

**CL:** Thank you.

**PM:** Oh, you bet. I'm looking forward to that. And I had a note the other day from Cara Luft of the Wailin' Jennys. She said to say hello to all you guys

**CL:** Oh, she's the sweetest. I like them so much. They're such great gals. We've done quite a few festivals with them, and we love them.

**PM:** That was an amazing record, that *Forty Days*. [see our review, and check out our interview with Nicky Mehta of the Wailin' Jennys]

**CM:** Oh, man!

**PM:** You bet. It's fabulous. Well, thanks for your time at Cracker Barrel today, because that helps me flesh out what I had going on.

**CL:** If there's anything you've forgotten, you've got my number, give me a call.

**PM:** Okay. Take care, Colin.

**CL:** You too, Frank. Bye-bye.