



9.12

TOM RUSSELL
SELF PORTRAIT

#7

FOR JOHN Y.

Becker

08711-00158

A STAGGERING DISTANCE
December 26, 1991. "I can give you maybe ten minutes or so," reluctantly grumbled a deep voice over the phone. I was writing for a local music 'zine, *Sound*, and had left a message on 1-800-Dark-Ang(el), the only possible way I knew how to connect with Tom Russell for an interview, having stumbled across the toll-free number a year or so before in a tiny *Musician* magazine write-up of *Poor Man's Dream*. It had been a couple of weeks, and I had almost forgotten about it.

I had friends over for the holidays, and wanted to record the conversation, so Tom set up a return call for the next day. That ten minutes he was going to begrudge me turned into over a half hour conversation, discussing his plans for reissuing his early records; the process of booking gigs; blue wing tattoos; his fellow musicians Andrew Hardin, Dave Alvin, and Katy Moffatt; and a "real character" he thought I should get to know (click here), a funeral director in Mt. Olive, Illinois, named Ed Becker—little did I know how much all of this would eventually become part of my life.

Tom mentioned he had never played west



Tom Russell featured in Sound Magazine (click to read):

- February '92
- March '92
- April '92
- November '92
- April '93
- Winter '94

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— *Spin Review*

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— *Rolling Stone*

"Almost as good as the Starline/where"
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— *Rolling Stone*

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— *Bluesman*

"Catch him in concert - it's a sound investment!"
— *Rolling Stone Journal*

"The father of folk-rock!"
— *Bluesman*

"Not content to let the blues take a backseat in the total experience"
— *Open Digest*

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"Always in fashion"
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CHECK OUT THE NEW TOM RUSSELL DISC, *BORDERLAND* ON HIGHTONE RECORDS

of the Mississippi, which led to me, along with *Sound's* publisher, Corky Carrel, landing him a gig at Kansas City's Grand Emporium. Corky had suggested one of his customers at his record store to be the opening act. Even though Corky told me she had a disc coming out on Tom's label, Philo, I was suspicious his motives were simply customer-service driven, so I opted out of her set and instead took Tom and the band for some Kansas City barbecue at Bryant's, home of burnt ends. We stopped at 12th and Vine for a band photo, then made it back for the tail end of the opening act.

I noticed the normally raucous Emporium crowd was listening intently to the opener, whose name happened to be Iris DeMent. Her contract with Philo would quickly

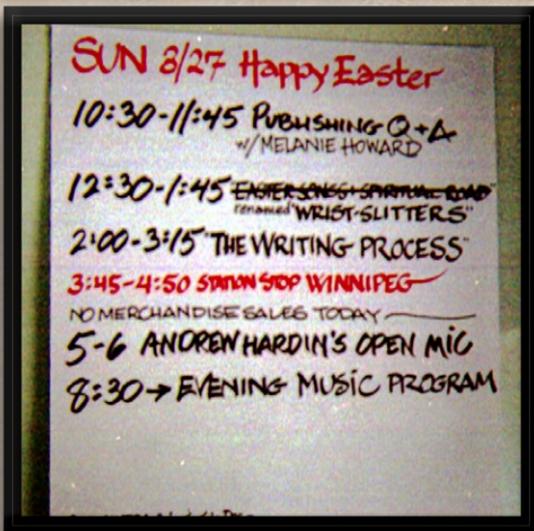
be bought by Warner Brothers and a career was born. After that initial introduction, Tom and Iris would go on to collaborate on Tom's *Long Way Around*, *Tulare Dust*, and *Man From God Knows Where* projects. Corky eventually merged his store with Bill Lavery's until the two of them launched their *villagerecords.com* internet empire. We continued to coordinate Tom's Kansas City shows as he built up his audience here, adding the Shadow, Jimmy's Jigger, Harling's Upstairs, the Hurricane, Mike's Tavern, Davey's Uptown, the Westport Coffee House, and Knucklehead's to his long list of K.C. concert venues.

That first Emporium gig in '92 had left me wanting more, so I turned up the next night in nearby Lawrence, Kansas [coincidentally, the setting for the latter part of



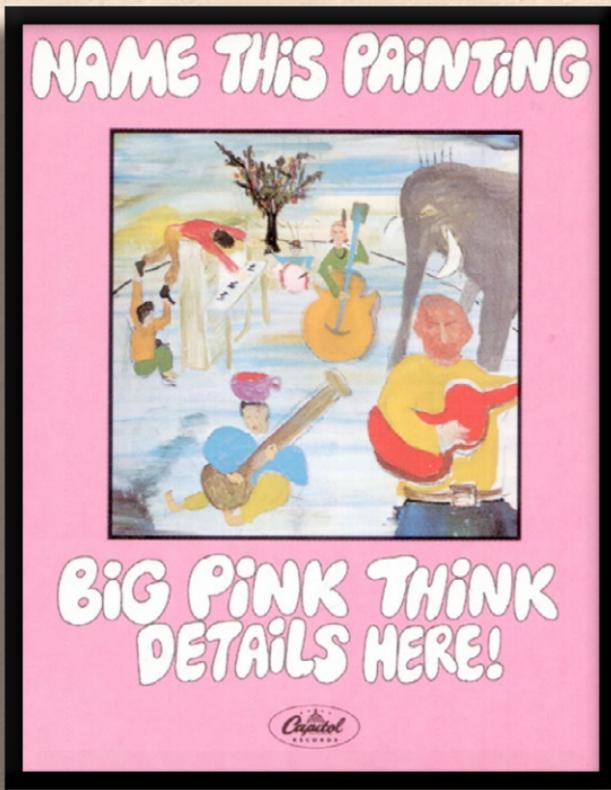
Easter Sunday fell during the trip, so “Easter Songs: Spiritual Road” was the planned theme for that day’s workshop. But once the performers decided they didn’t know enough spiritual songs, the announcement board was hastily changed to “Wrist-Slitters,” with each singer choosing the most depressing numbers from their catalog. Tom asked if I remembered the lyrics to “Blood Oranges,” but I couldn’t come up with them, so I suggested “Open Pit Mine” instead. Not realizing it was from *Museum of Memories*, he worked it up and treated those of us in the boxcar to it. Quite possibly the first (and last) time he’s played anything from the first volume live. But I’m getting ahead of myself.

It was that initial trip to see Tom play the Off Broadway club in St. Louis that resulted in my meeting Ed “Digger” Becker, funeral home director and folk music maven. As chronicled in the first volume of *Museum of Memories*, Ed had already been collecting tapes of Tom for twenty years at that point ([click here](#) for the Vol. 1 liner notes). It would take an additional decade, but our relentless badgering of Tom resulted in that first collection of unreleased tracks and rarities. Yes, it was very intentional that the cover photo we chose showed Tom with a gun to his head, since we knew that was how he felt about it. The marketing was intentionally under the radar, as Tom didn’t want it confused with a disc of new material, so it was targeted at the hardcore fans and only distributed through Village Records, which by that time was no longer a retail outlet, but an internet resource for all things Americana.



Nevertheless, *Museum* sold briskly and even managed a very positive review, to Tom’s chagrin, on allmusic.com. As mentioned in those liner notes, “the second volume is pretty much in the can already, if this one is successful.” But it was not to be. Tom moved on to bigger and better things, and wanted to concentrate on new material. Ed and I knew we had pushed him as far as we could. The years rolled on until February of 2012, when a brief, casual—and cautious—email from Tom turned up in my inbox, asking if I might have some rarities around to send him to check out.

I immediately seized on the opportunity and sent him a proposal disc for *The*



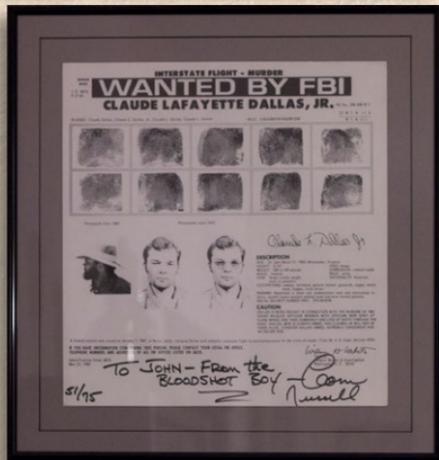
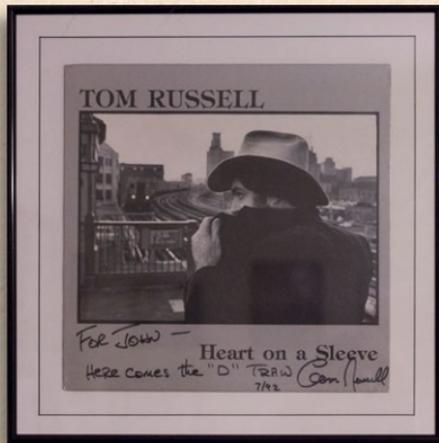
Second Time Around, a working title for the project based on a Hardin & Russell song of that name that was a contender for inclusion. In the years since *Museum*, though, neither Ed nor myself were aware of any more recent unreleased tracks, since Tom had been adding outtakes to ancillary EPs every time a new album came out; I was concerned that there might be a dearth of newer material available for the project.

No cause for alarm, as Tom managed to come up with quite a few recent gems. He had responded to my proposal with a list of possibilities, but conspicuous in its absence was "The Second Time Around." I had to agree with Tom that it wasn't that strong of a performance, but still considered calling the project by that name anyway. At that point the working title became "Unreleased/Unredeemed," until the song "Unredeemed" was also rejected from inclusion. Then Tom decided to reissue *Heart On A Sleeve*, so the rarities project was temporarily shelved. I wondered if it would ever get off the ground.

Pause for an interesting bit of trivia: Tom was the winner of the "Big Pink Think" contest, sponsored by Capitol Records to promote The Band's 1968 *Music from Big Pink* album. His title for the Bob Dylan cover painting, "Crayon Amnesia," won him a pink motorcycle. He declined, and negotiated for a black one instead. You can see Dylan's influence on Tom's painting style as much as you can hear it in his music. Word is that Bob keeps a worn copy of "Gallo del Cielo" near and dear to his heart.

Knowing Tom's hesitation about revisiting the rarities project, I joked about calling it "Self Effacing Portrait" in a nod to the latest Dylan Bootleg Series project that had just been announced. Maybe seeing Dylan releasing stuff from the vaults inspired him to return it to the front burner, and the project was back on. Tom had sent me his first (and of this writing, only) self portrait to be used for a postcard promoting his *120 Songs* book, so I decided to make it the cover of what had now simply become *Museum of Memories Vol. 2*. And in homage to Dylan, no text on the cover. Just a sticker on the shrink wrap.

Whereas Ed Becker was the "star" of the first volume—getting quite a few shout outs from Tom on several songs and even making an appearance on the cover photo—I



decided “The Second Time Around” was going to be my turn for some props, since I was mentioned in a couple of the potential tracks: a live performance of “William Faulkner in Hollywood” where Tom includes the lost extra verse (maybe the only extant recording with it) and dedicates it to me, and “Small Engine Repair,” a *Borderland* outtake he played at my insistence only once, at KOPN in Columbia, MO. During the intro to the song, he name checked me in regards to the lyric book the song appeared in, and again at the end of the performance.

But then it went south. The “Faulkner” tape quality was too poor in comparison to the wealth of other material available for this collection. And the KOPN folks were in the middle of renovating their studio equipment so the recording they were able to get of “Small Engine Repair” had some major distortion on Tom’s voice, so both songs were dropped. I was tempted to manufacture a shout-out from Tom by overdubbing my name into the short-list of possibilities for “Outcast” singers cited during his intro rap, since he used to joke with me that I was at the bottom of that list if he couldn’t find anyone else. But I decided to set personal vanity aside.

As the project was starting to take shape, I pushed Tom to make a new recording specifically for this collection. I suggested “Old Saltillo Road,” a song we had co-writer Greg Trooper performing, but with no known version by Tom. I felt that it was the perfect choice for bridging his older material with a new performance since Elvis could have easily fit in with the fallen stars theme that he was exploring on *Mesabi*.

He obliged by sending me a home recording of the song which I was all set to use, but then he surprised me by giving it another try as part of his sound-check before a gig at Knucklehead’s in Kansas City. But he was struggling with one of the lines. I shouted it out to him, causing him to warn me (jokingly . . . or maybe half-jokingly?) “Don’t try to get on the track!” But the sound man had left the mic on, so Tom’s goofing about the song being on “John’s rarities” was captured and I finally got a shout-out of sorts. And then, when Tom nixed the song “Unredeemed” and I needed a replacement from that time period,



“Small Engine Repair” was restored to the line-up (sans intro, but with the dedication at the end intact). Technically, it’s the only track here that’s been released previously, since fans who bought the *Borderland* photo/lyric book were given an exclusive download, but with advances in technology I’ve been able to reduce the distortion and enhance the sound, making it superior to that original, and rare, .mp3.

I couldn’t pull off getting my mug on the cover like Ed had managed, but Tom scrawled my name on the back of the cover painting, which is a close second. However, the ultimate ego-stroke came my way when Tom sent me “The Coat Hank Williams Wore” and mentioned he had “stolen a line” from me. Almost immediately after the first *Museum of Memories* was released, I had moved to the Westport area of Kansas City to a house around the block from Dave’s Stagecoach Inn, a dive where I tended bar a couple nights a week for fun—voted best jukebox in town, with plenty of Tom Russell loaded on it. There were several late nights there with Tom and Andrew after their gigs that I barely remember. Six years after mentioning to Tom that I now “lived within staggering distance” of the bar, the phrase surfaced in one of his songs. Incredible. Ed may lay claim to having an entire song written around him (“The Most Dangerous Woman in America”), but he can’t claim a co-write with one of the world’s greatest songwriters. Take that, Becker!

Several of the tracks here have parallels to the first disc, and were purposely held back for that reason. “Trucker’s Farewell” shares a similar theme and style to “Strung Out,” the lead-off track from *Volume 1*. “Neighbors (Bill and Joan)” is this disc’s talking-folk track a la “Chinatown in the Rain.” There’s a counterpart to the live rap of “Irish Girls” on “The Outcast,” both tracks providing Tom’s version of *Man From God Knows Where* songs that were performed by other artists on the folk opera. “Fields of Athenry” provided both an Irish tune like “Roddy McCorley” and a relatively unknown cover song like “Open Pit Mine.” Even the eerie clanging of the boat “de Kooning” rides over in sounds like the ship’s bell that closes “Shipwreck Kelly.”



DUG SCHUMACHER

Thanks: Ed Becker, Dave Brogren, Susan Cane, Corky Carrel, Steve Donofrio, Andrew Hardin, Bill Lavery, Katy Moffatt, Chad Meise, Mike Regenstreif, Lesley Schatz, Joe Ray Skrha, Dug Schumacher, Buck Sommerkamp, Eric Temple, and Dave Wallace.

As with its predecessor, I struggled with the sequencing for this second volume. The chronological presentation which ended up working so well on *Volume 1* just wasn't happening. Neither was a random sequence. Finally, I tried a reverse chronology and it felt right: begin in 1972 with the first collection, then come full circle through forty years of material, and end up where it all started.

Over twenty years after that initial phone call when Tom promised me "ten minutes or so," I'm now president of Frontera Records, overseeing releases such as *Aztec Jazz* and reissues of Tom's early catalog, and helping out with publicity, media requests, and fan emails. Still wearing that same Guinness sweater I brought back from that trip to Ireland. And still not feeling worthy.

—John Yuelkenbeck, 10/13





OLD SALTILLO ROAD

Recorded February 28, 2013

Knuckleheads Saloon, Kansas City, Missouri

“Old Saltillo Road” could have been written for *Mesabi*, with that disc’s ruminations on hero worship, sources of inspiration, striking the balance between art and artist, and the ravages of fame. “I was that kid in a room with heroes and legends tacked up over my head” Tom sings in “When The Legends Die.” Some died mostly forgotten, like Bobby Driscoll, Ukulele Ike, or Sterling Hayden; others like James Dean, Elizabeth Taylor, and of course that mercurial singer-songwriter of the title track, Bob Dylan, managed to retain their fame, although not without cost. I suspect Tom has frequently questioned the toll that being a public figure can take on a private life as well.

But this song about Elvis and his longing to return to his roots in Tupelo pre-dates *Mesabi* by over twenty years. Greg Trooper’s version was circa 1989, and Ed and I had it as a placeholder for our proposed second volume back in 2002, assuming Tom had a version of it somewhere. It never surfaced, though, so when I wanted a 2013 track to make this an even forty-year retrospective, Tom agreed this was a good choice for what could have been a *Mesabi* outtake, so I transcribed the lyrics from Trooper’s take and emailed them to him.

He made a home recording of it that he sent me, but then gave it another go with Thad Beckman during a sound check and I was able to snag it from the soundboard. Both takes turned out quite good, so I made a promotional youtube video using the demo version. ([click here to watch it.](#))

I was going to re-shoot Tom’s Dylan painting to get rid of the reflection from my window, but then I decided it was appropriate.



“Brendan Behan”

FIELDS OF ATHENRY

Recorded December, 2012

After the “Saltillo Road” sound check, I went backstage with Tom to check out some of his paintings that he wanted to use for the *Aztec Jazz* disc. Almost as an afterthought, he pulled out a CD-R marked “15 Irish Songs” and handed it to me.

“Here’s a disc of old Irish tunes I recorded to give to my immediate family as a Christmas present last year I thought you might like.” He didn’t really say if it was for the “rarities,” as he had taken to calling it. In fact, I don’t really think it had crossed his mind.

All of the songs had been recorded at his home studio and had a first take, knocking-these-off-quickly feel. But in a style that also conveyed a long-time familiarity that can only come from an accomplished artist who’s been at this long enough for it to be second nature.

There were old traditionals like “Lakes of Ponchartrain” and “The Water Is Wide,” as well as newer songs like Peter Kavanagh’s “On Ragland Road,” Ewan MacColl’s “Dirty Old Town,” and Phil Coulter’s “The Town I Loved So Well.” One that I wasn’t familiar with, “Fields of Athenry,” was the standout of the bunch to me. I was positive it had to be an old Irish standard, but it turned out to be written in the 1970s by Pete St. John.

To avoid licensing issues, we almost swapped it out for the black humor of the traditional “Isn’t It Grand, Boys,” but I felt too strongly about “Athenry,” which had really gotten under my skin. I was persistent, wore Tom down, and got my way. I’ve learned to pick my battles.



"Irrigation"

IN THE AMERICAN GRAIN

Recorded 2009

I came home one night to a message on my answering machine from Steven Gaydos, a movie producer whose script for a film called *Road to Nowhere* was going to be director Monte Hellman's first feature film in 21 years. The message said that Hellman was a Tom Russell fan and was trying to get in touch with Tom about the possibility of his contributing some music for the soundtrack.

I was kind of bewildered that Gaydos would have been able to track down my home phone number and yet not be able to get in touch with Tom. Nevertheless, my people got in touch with his people, as they say in the biz, and it worked out. Didn't see my name in the credits anywhere, though.

"John: Grabbed a huge box of CDs and such and have been going through," came an email from Tom after I thought we had finalized the track selection. "A few great things emerged including 'The American Grain,' which is the precursor to 'Road To Nowhere.'" Same tune, maybe, but other than the lines about forgiveness being the killer of snakes, hardly the same lyrics.

"Full of these memories and old folk song refrains / I'm carving my initials in the American grain." Some great lines here and definitely worth including.



“The Dance”

BETTER LEFT UNSAID

Recorded 2008

This turned up on a disc marked “Congress House Demos” Tom sent me from recording sessions at Congress House studio in Austin—songs that he had been working on since the release of *Love and Fear* in 2006. Most of the songs on the disc would wind up on the 2009 release *Blood and Candle Smoke*.

“Written for my wife, based on a Lefty Frizzell vibe,” writes Tom.

The song hearkens back to a more old school country sound and songwriting style, which might be why it was left off. Tom and I both thought that Calexico’s cover of “Goin’ To Acapulco” on the *I’m Not There* soundtrack, along with Ramblin’ Jack’s contribution, were the highlights of that project. Tom even told me it was the main inspiration for him recording *Blood and Candle Smoke* in Tucson with Calexico.

I love the subtle wordplay of the line “Ol’ Lefty had it right.” Typical Tom Russell song-crafting.



The Minstrel Boy

THE COAT HANK WILLIAMS WORE

Recorded 2007

Tom writes: “‘The Coat Hank Williams Wore’ was written after a visit into the basement of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. We got to touch one of Hank’s old stage coats.” For his Village Records promotional notes, he added, “I found some lyrics for a lost song in the pocket that will kick your ass.”

I’m probably talking out of school, but Tom once told me about working out a co-writing credit with a fellow songwriter whom I won’t name. They were faxing back and forth about it in the days before email. “You only wrote a couple of lines,” he was told. He shot back, “Yeah, but they were the *best* couple of lines in the song!” I reminded him of this when he confessed to copping the “staggering distance of a bar” line from me and refused my demands for a co-writing credit. “My lawyers are itching to be in touch” was the reply. It’s currently in litigation.

Not sure why this never made it out of the demo stage. It certainly could have fit comfortably alongside the other *Mesabi* characters. Maybe because it’s not too far removed in theme from “The Death of Jimmy Martin,” another outtake that he added to *Wounded Heart of America*. I’m sure when he decides he wants my opinion on what I think the public needs to hear, he’ll let me know. Via his legal department.



Mule with Moon #3

DONKEY SHOW / CANCION MIXTECA

Recorded 2005

“Donkey Show” was sent on CD-R to a lucky few who purchased initial copies of *Hotwalker* through Village Records, but it hasn’t seen an official release until now. It’s a brief outtake that eventually evolved into “Border Lights,” with Tom being approached by the cab driver during the conversation at the end.

During that period, Tom had also been performing “Cancion Mixteca” frequently at his gigs, so it seemed appropriate for me to mix the two together. It certainly wouldn’t have been out of place on the disc. Ironically, the version of “Cancion” I used turned up on a live disc a fan sent in recorded not in Oaxaca, but in, of all places, Sweden. Of course.

Written in the early 1900s by José López Alavez, “Cancion” is a Mexican standard ballad about homesickness. Tom cites Harry Dean Stanton, who sang it accompanied by Ry Cooder in Wem Wenders’ Paris, Texas. He also tacked it on at the end of his studio re-recording of “Rose of the San Joaquin” on the *Cowboy’d All To Hell* disc.



Picasso's Goat

de KOONING

Recorded 2004

Rootball Studio, Austin

As I was putting these notes together I found out that Yard Dog in Austin, one of the galleries that handles Tom's artwork, put together a CD that included this song, although Tom doesn't recall that. I'm trying to track it down to see if it's the same take. Either way, I'm sure it will be unfamiliar to most fans; I know it was to me when it showed up on my doorstep in a box with "Better Left Unsaid," "The Coat Hank Williams Wore," and a few others, quashing any fears I had of more recent material for this set.

Tom and Gurf Morlix make a great combination, kind of like Daniel Lanois and Dylan. Gurf has a way with building the sonic layers as a song progresses, increasing the dynamics until you feel like what started as a joyride has turned into an out of control locomotive that might jump the tracks at any second. "What Work Is" from *Borderland* springs to mind. If by chance Gurf should hear this disc, I hope he doesn't mind that I added some compression and limiting so that this track would play well with the others.

That Tom would be intrigued by the private lives of fellow artists is no shock. It's a continuation of those *Mesabi* themes he was exploring with actors, musicians, and other childhood idols. These characters have populated his work as far back as "The 27th Parable" on *Ring of Bone*. Back in my acting days, I was in a play based on the life of Modigliani, another one of those goat-smelling, on-edge painters who may not have had the most appealing personality, but whose talent couldn't be denied. My favorite line from that show, which is applicable here, was "Everyone wants a Van Gogh in their parlor, but who wants Van Gogh?"



[Click the image to view a clip from the movie](#)

SMALL ENGINE REPAIR

Recorded April 25, 2001

KOPN, Columbia, Missouri

Tom approached me when he was finishing up *Borderland* with the idea of doing an accompanying lyric book featuring his daughter Jessica's photography from the El Paso-Juarez area. My concept was to make it a book of postcards with the photography on one side and the lyrics on the back as if someone was writing home, describing their journey. It turned out very well—numbered letterpress cover, metallic inks, Posada woodcuts for the “stamps”—the works. I think there might even be a few copies left at villagerecords.com. Get it while you can.

When Tom sent me the lyrics for it, he included the words to “Small Engine Repair.” Under the pretense of wanting to hear it “for inspiration” on the book, I asked him to send me a recording of it. He said he hadn't recorded it. I kept pushing him for it. Those who know me aren't surprised to hear the words “persistent” or “relentless” associated with my name. While we were on the road in the Midwest, he was doing an in-studio spot at KOPN in Columbia with the Radio Ranger, Steve Donofrio.

I was sitting in the control room when he started talking about a “Springsteen-like” song that he hadn't recorded yet and the next thing I knew he tossed Andrew a few chords and launched into it ([click to hear](#)). A month later, we offered it as a free download for anyone purchasing the lyric book. As I mentioned earlier in these notes, the sound quality was heavily distorted and needed a lot of work.

How the song ended up being turned into a movie made in Ireland is unclear, but it almost certainly had to originate from someone who bought the book and downloaded the track so they would know how the song goes. You might be able to find the DVD online, but be warned that it's not compatible with U.S. players. As with *Road To Nowhere*, my part in all this has gone uncredited. That's show biz.



"Pancho Villa's Horse"

JOHN DOE MEXICAN

Recorded April 7, 2000

Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

The details regarding the history of this song are almost as unknown as the anonymous subject of the song. There were very few new songs that Tom was playing in concert around this period that didn't end up on *Borderland*. Just as notable is its scarcity. Neither Ed nor myself were familiar with it, so even though it pre-dated *Museum Vol. 1*, it wasn't on our lists for consideration on either compilation.

Over the years fans have sent me many, many audio CDs and video performances of Tom, quite a few of which were from this era. In between all the "Next Thing Smokin's," the "Down the Rio Grandes," and the "Touch of Evils," this song only turns up once, part of the La Casa Music Series in Bloomfield Hills. The label has the credit "Recorded by Dave Brogren and Burr Huntington" on it, so thanks to Dave and Burr for capturing it for posterity. Dave is a longtime fan of Tom and the late Carl Brouse. I'm not sure when he sent it to me, and until I started combing through things in 2012, I think it had been completely overlooked.

My assumption is that Tom might have thought it was too similar in theme to "California Snow," and he preferred using a co-write with Dave Alvin for the disc. Or maybe he just didn't like it as well. We'll never know: As I was trading emails with Tom regarding song choices I noted, "I really like 'John Doe Mexican'—don't remember ever hearing it before. Not sure if it's a cover or not." To which I received the reply, 'John Doe Mexican' I think was mine . . ." Pretty impressive to have such a deep catalog that you don't remember this heartfelt of a song very well.



The Outcast on Dave Van Ronk Street, May 25, 2009

THE OUTCAST

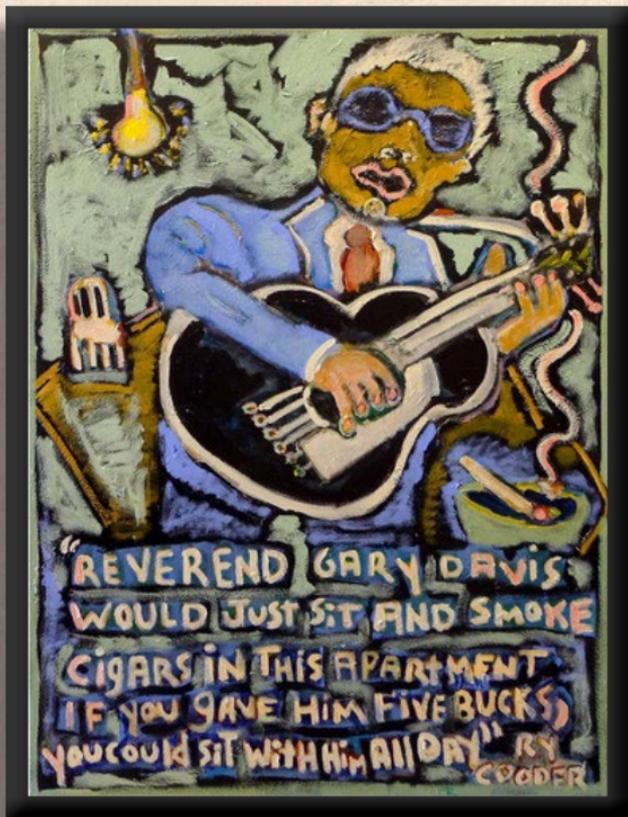
Recorded April 30, 1999

Off Broadway, St. Louis, Missouri

This could have been recorded at any one of the “Gigs in God Knows Where,” but I’m almost positive it was from the Off Broadway show in St. Louis, Ed thinks so, too, but I didn’t bother sifting through the tapes to check since I already had the finished file on my computer. It was originally intended for *Museum Vol. 1* until being swapped with “When Irish Girls Grow Up” at the last minute, but we always knew it would make it onto the second set. (Eventually!) Tom was in rare form with the raps for both of the songs, and we wanted to provide the fans with his vocals of them. The “Irish Girls” track was actually a composite between the Off Broadway show that night and his performance the next night, May 1st. Full disclosure: I cheated and edited two nights of raps into a single one. I don’t recall doing that for “The Outcast,” though.

I was fortunate enough to meet the great Mayor of MacDougal Street, Dave Van Ronk, at one of his gigs not too long before he passed away. I mentioned to him after the show that Tom had once told me I was fourth in line behind him, Tom Waits, and Shane MacGowan for doing the vocals for the “Outcast” part on *The Man From God Knows Where*. In complete sincerity, he apologized to me for having taken away a possible opportunity of mine. I explained to him that I didn’t think Tom was really all that serious, and that he had been perfect for the role, anyway.

What a humble, sweet guy. He was the real deal. Dylan slept on his couch. He was drinking down the street when the Stonewall riot occurred and jumped right in, one of thirteen to be arrested. The sign on the street named for him is purposely very high up, to keep fans like me from stealing it. I’m anxiously awaiting the Coen Brothers’ *Inside Llewyn Davis*, which is said to be loosely based on Dave’s memoir. Tom’s tribute to him on *Hotwalker* is one of that disc’s highlights.



BUSINESS END OF THE BLUES

Recorded 1994

Like “Big Fool” from *Vol. 1*, “Business End of the Blues” is from Tom’s prolific period of co-writes with the amazing Katy Moffatt. This studio duet features guitar great Amos Garrett, a founding member of the legendary Great Speckled Bird. Ed remembers Billy Troiani, the Tom Russell Band bassist, singing this one in concert to give Tom a break, so it might have been around a while before this recording.

Until the “rarities” got underway in earnest, this was one of the few unreleased tracks Tom had sent me in a while following the release of the first collection. I think he had become wary of sending me things with the rise of internet, fearing I would pass things along to fans that he would rather not have out there in cyberspace.

This recording was problematic though, in that Amos’ voice was recorded too hot and was distorting in several spots. It was annoying enough that I had written off using it, but it was one of the few that Tom was insistent on. In the ten years since *Vol. 1*, I had learned quite a few audio tricks, but getting rid of distortion can be practically impossible in many instances. It was a very painstaking process, but I went through the track and manually adjusted very minute segments of the sound wave and impressed myself that I was able to eliminate it almost entirely.

Turned out that without it, I changed my mind about the track and came to like it quite a bit. Glad Tom was persistent.



NEIGHBORS (BILL AND JOAN)

Recorded 1991

This is from the same live radio broadcast from Cactus Café where we took “Big Fool” for the first volume. A very problematic tape. There’s music playing in the background and I’ve never figured out if it was in the background at the gig, or if the tape just didn’t get erased properly. I identified it as a Bob Dylan song playing underneath “Big Fool,” which is why the stack of tapes I created for the back cover art of *Museum Vol. 1* shows one of my old Dylan tapes crossed out ([click to view](#)) with “Big Fool” written on it. Just having fun.

I still haven’t identified the music playing underneath “Neighbors.” I was able to remove quite a bit of it but, even with today’s remarkable technology, I couldn’t completely scrub it. It’s most prominent during the quieter guitar picking toward the end of the song. But the track was just too cool not to use it because of sound issues, and we don’t know of any other performance.

Listen to the way Tom keeps the audience riveted to his narrative. Sometimes I get caught up in what a great writer he is, and it takes something as simple as the way he delicately slides through the line “They left behind everything they owwwwned” to remind me he’s also a helluva singer.

Tom’s fascination with the beats and his friendship with Bukowski are well known, but those of you who haven’t explored it yet can find copies of Tom’s book, “Tough Company,” still available through [villagerecords.com](#). The cashier at Ferlinghetti’s City Lights Bookstore in San Francisco recognized Tom’s name when I name dropped it.



“Night of the Prickly Pear”

I HATE TO TELL YOU I TOLD YOU SO

1990

I had already sent Tom what I thought was the final test pressing of this project when he pulled this one out of thin air. A MIDI-ish, drum machine type of demo popular around that time of a co-write with Doug Sahn. Dig that Augie Myers-styled staccato keyboard pecking! It had to go on it.

Oh, and did I have a way of pulling things off a DAT tape? he asked.

Turns out those machines are pert near antiques these days. But I knew the perfect guy for the job. Chad Meise. He has his own studio in the West Bottoms of Kansas City and still records on analog equipment to achieve that fuller sound. He ran sound for one of Tom’s shows here and really knows his stuff.

He told me the DAT tape Tom sent me, marked “Band Demos 90-92 and 94,” was deteriorating, especially toward the end, but he was able to transfer it off for me. There was another unreleased track on there, “Continental Drift.” Who knows? It might make an appearance at some point as we continue to reissue Tom’s catalog.

Beware: This MIDI-ish, drum machine demo is incredibly infectious. It will become an ear-worm, I promise. I hate to tell you I told you so.

By the way, Chad also recorded a song with the band In The Pines for a tribute disc to Mother Jones that Ed Becker has had in the works for years. Mother Jones was a mining rights activist who is buried in Mt. Olive, IL, where Ed is the caretaker of her grave site and memorial. The goal of the project is to raise money for its upkeep. Tom has agreed to let us use a demo, or maybe a live version he did with Gretchen Peters, of his song “The Most Dangerous Woman in America.” Gretchen has given us a song, as has Katy Moffatt, Billy Bragg, and many others. We even managed to get permission from the estate of Gene Autry for a track. Watch for it!



"Blue Desert"

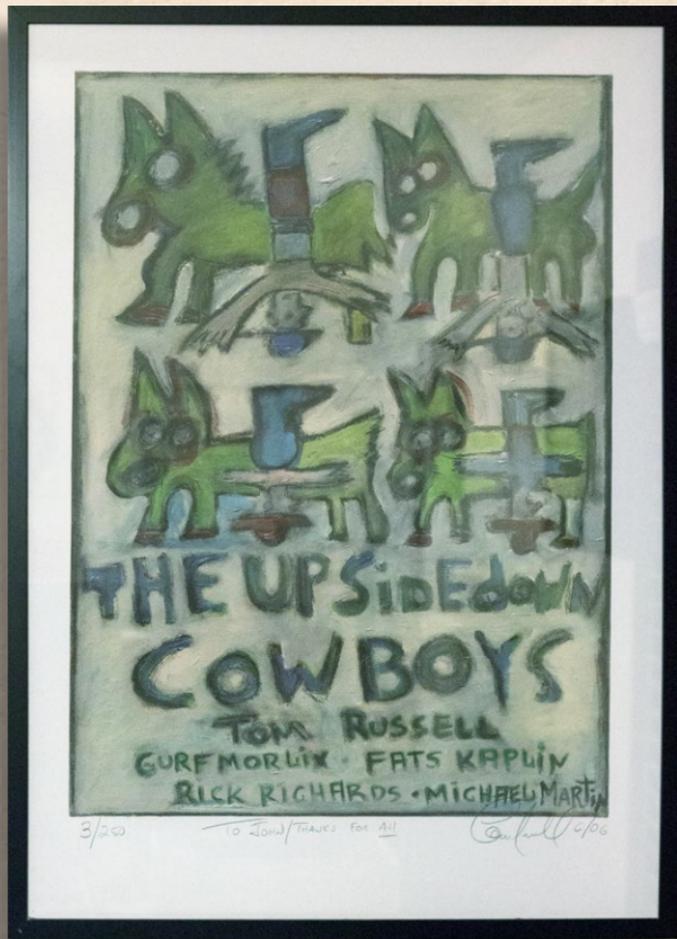
HOMELESS HEARTS

Recorded 1988

"Homeless Hearts" is the only known outtake from the *Poor Man's Dream* sessions. At least from those recorded in Oslo. "Northern Towns," which appeared on the limited edition Dark Angel label version, was recorded at Bones Tones in New York, and there are a few other demos from that period recorded elsewhere. Ed and I lobbied to put it on *Museum Vol. 1*, but we were turned down. I recall Andrew Hardin being the primary one to put the kibosh on it at the time. Seems like he told me "it will never see the light of day" if he had any say in the matter. Ed remembers that Andy didn't like the Norwegian backup singers.

For sure, it didn't seem as relevant in the 2002 economy as it must have when Tom wrote it in the 1980s. Knowing it had been rejected the first time, it wasn't up for consideration this time around until I heard it again and decide to recycle it as a possibility. Homelessness had once again become a visible news item with the economic downturn, so subject matter might no longer be a stumbling block. Tom gave it the thumbs up, but then I was the one waffling a little bit, thinking it might be best to hold it for the eventual *Poor Man's Dream* reissue. Nah. Better get it out there before he changes his mind.

I think the sound quality is amazing considering the source recording I had to work from is a well-worn old cassette.



DAKOTA

Recorded live in the studio, December, 1984

The first *Museum* didn't have any cowboy songs, a situation Ed and I wanted to rectify. We almost ended up with three. Joe Ray Skrha, a major fan from Alaska, sent me a large box of DVDs from the *Roots on the Rails* Canadian train trips Tom had hosted. I sifted through them and found the Paul Zarzyski co-write, "Heart of a Bucking Horse." I had to splice together two performances, as it was Tom's first time performing it and there were a couple of slip-ups. It was ready to go when some last minute shuffling of other tracks meant it would have run the disc over in length, so it was pulled. But you can find a studio version of it as a bonus track on Tom's *Cowboy'd All To Hell* collection.

We had also hoped to come up with "Alberta Blue." We had cover versions by Bob Dant and Lesley Schatz, so I tracked Lesley down and asked her if by chance Tom had given her a guide vocal for the track. Surprisingly enough, he had and, even more amazingly, she thought she still had it. We corresponded for months while the project was taking shape, but it wasn't until after the discs were pressed that she found it. She's having it digitized, so expect it to turn up at some point, too.

"Dakota" was flying under the radar. Maybe because of its length, it wasn't on our original proposal lists, but I came across it on a tape marked "Live 1984," and was nonplussed that it was a studio recording. Ed says it was marked that way because Tom had some extra studio time available and had run through several songs "live" in the studio. "Dakota?" asked Tom when I suggested it, "Sounds like something I may have written . . . can you shoot me an .mp3?" It's the tale of a broken-hearted cowboy who relocates to New York, driving a carriage through Central Park and hoping to find his lost love. Sound like it might have some veiled autobiography in it?

I need to re-listen to *Cowboy Real*. I swear it has a track with a similar melody. Maybe that's why he didn't use a version of it for that project; it certainly would have fit.



“Guadalupe #3”

AMISH LULLABY

Recorded in Nanci Griffith's living room, 1983

Andy sent Ed a tape with a jam session feature Tom, Andy, and Fats recorded in Nanci Griffith's living room. Nanci can be heard in some of the dialog, and I think she might sing on one of the songs.

“Amish Lullaby” is a wonderful tune from that recording. It eventually morphed into “Cajun Lullaby,” a song that Tom would put out on *As The Crow Flies*, one of two cassette-only releases he was selling at gigs during the period between the (Patricia) Hardin & Russell vinyl albums and *Heart On A Sleeve*. “La Galué (The Glutton)” from *Museum Vol. 1* was also from *As The Crow Flies*.

The other cassette was called *Joshua Tree*, which contained early versions of several songs that would eventually find their way onto the *Road To Bayamon* album. I haven't brought up the idea with Tom yet, but maybe someday we'll discuss putting those two tapes out on a single disc. Did I mention I have to pick my battles?

Thanks to modern mastering technology, at least if I've done my job, it's hard to tell just how lo-fi this original source tape really is. Fats' fiddle cuts right through, and Tom's voice is passionate and sincere. Maybe more so than the “Cajun Lullaby” it became.



“Midnite Kachina #1” (and its twin)

TALKING DRUM (for Phil Everly)

Recorded 1982

From Tom: “Ibeji is a carved statue or set of twin statues—when twins are born they represent the twins (I have some). Nigeria has the highest incident of twins in the world. The center of the song is a white priestess named Suzanne Wenger (Google that!) who has an incredible history. I met her and saw her lead forty talking drummers . . . she was Austrian. Phil Everly was blown away by the story. This was written after we spent a night jamming and chatting about my time in West Africa.”

The quality of the cassette for “Talking Drum” wasn’t the best, but while I was looking for another song I stumbled across a dupe of it. Really, you have *no idea* how many Tom Russell tapes Becker has laying around! Not only was the dupe much better quality, but the drumming at the end went on for a considerably longer time. Like “Business End of the Blues,” this is a track I didn’t fully appreciate until after the mastering process brought it to life.



"Sacred Heart"

THE HEART CAN'T STAND IT

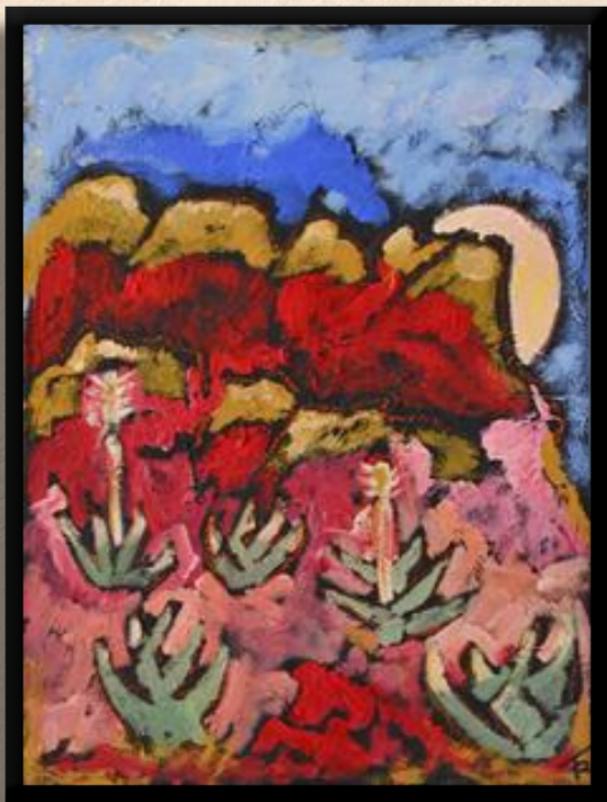
Recorded May 13, 1981

Lonestar Café, New York City

This is from the first concert Tom and Andrew Hardin played together, opening for Grateful Dead lyricist Robert Hunter. It's a well-worn story, but for those who don't know it by heart: Tom had bailed on music completely and was a hack in New York when he picked up Hunter as a fare and sang him "Gallo del Cielo," resulting in this gig at the Lonestar Cafe in New York.

Museum Vol. 1 featured "Cross of Guadalupe" from the same set. The guy running the sound had adjusted the levels substantially mid-way through that song. Fortunately, by this point in the concert, he had gotten his act together and the tape was much easier to work with for mastering.

It attests to the talent of both Tom and Andy that they could sound this good their first time out. Listening to it, you would think they had already been playing together for quite some time.



“Land of Little Rain #1”

VALLEY OF THE RIO GRANDE

Recorded c. 1975

Here's a couple of Hardin & Russell-era tracks. Patricia Hardin has posted an interesting article about the duo and their recordings on her website ([click to read](#)). Ed and I were under the impression that after *Ring of Bone* and *Wax Museum* there were plans for a third album. But based on the article, the deal they made with Vanguard would have been their second album, but when the deal fell through they released that material independently on *Wax Museum*.

The tapes Ed has with “Shipwreck Kelly” (from *Museum Vol. 1*) and “Leaving Texas” are dated 1974, which would make them outtakes, or even precursors, to *Ring of Bone*, which was released in 1976. Tom says there's a good chance Patricia helped write “Leaving Texas,” but he doesn't remember for sure.

He also thinks, and it sounds like, he wrote “Valley of the Rio Grande” on his own. It's harder to substantiate the recording date for this track. It was tacked on to the end of a cassette of material from 1984, so I mistakenly marked it with that year for a while. Obviously, Tom and Patricia had parted ways by then. The singing and songwriting on the track are starting to reveal Tom coming into his own, and it lacks piano or other instrumentation attributable to Hardin & Russell, so I suspect it may have been recorded anywhere from '75 to as late as '78. The original cassette I worked with was pitted at one point in the song where the tape had been eaten. Fortunately, I found a cleaner duplicate of it on another one of Ed's tapes.

Tom was dead set against releasing “Valley of the Rio Grande” for *Museum Vol. 1*. I was shocked when he kept it on the list this go around, but certainly wasn't going to let him know. I think of it as the missing link between Marty Robbins' “El Paso” in 1959 and Dylan's “Romance In Durango” from *Desire* in 1976.

LEAVING TEXAS

Recorded 1974



TRUCKER'S FAREWELL

Recorded 1973

Tom took the Mule Train band that had recorded the 1972 "Strung Out" 45 that lead off *Museum Vol. 1*, and went into a Vancouver studio early the next year to record some demos, four of which made their way onto a cassette that fell into Ed Becker's hands. Of the four, "Trucker's Farewell" (aka "God's On The End of The Line") definitely closed this collection the best and brings us (almost) back to where we started.

Ed first met Tom after he read a review of *Ring of Bone* in *Rolling Stone*, and bought a copy directly from Tom through the mail. The two began corresponding, even during Tom's cab-driving "retirement" from the music scene. They met in person at the Kerrville Folk Festival; Tom had brought his new guitarist, Andrew Hardin, and multi-instrumentalist Fats Kaplin, Ed brought a boom box to record the all-night campfire jam sessions. Tom and Andy would subsequently send Ed tapes of songs they were working on, which is how these two volumes of rarities came to be. So, will there be a third one?

I barely finished telling Ed the final track list for this one when he began asking about "Listen To Your Heartbeat" and "Lights of Oslo," and saying how "White Horse Road" was a great track, but Tom held it back after Steve Earle released "Copperhead Road" because they had similar themes and he didn't want people to think he was a copycat . . . OK, OK, Ed, I get it! We're already planning a free download of "Streetlights and Snow," a song originally planned for a 1997 Philo artists' Christmas collection.

Tom has indicated he wants to continue reissuing his catalog with bonus tracks like he did with *Heart On A Sleeve* (it had six extra songs, a couple of which were originally targeted here). I know there are plenty of tracks to make those worthwhile. Even following the reissues, there is definitely enough quantity of material for another volume. But we've set quite a precedent, so it will depend on whether we judge the quality of the leftovers to be up to the same standard. Give it another ten years or so to see how things shake out.



"James Joyce"



"Charles Bukowski"



Photo: Thad Beckman