

**A Conversation with Jim Lauderdale**  
**by Frank Goodman (10/2006, Puremusic.com)**

I was surprised how long it had been since the first time we interviewed Jim Lauderdale, five years. But I've seen him play so many times since then that his music is always playing on some channel in my mind, and he's always on top of the list of musicians I most enjoy.

Jim has released a bunch of records since then--sometimes two at a time, as with *The Hummingbirds* and *Lost In The Lonesome Pines*, a Grammy winner that marked his second collaboration with Ralph Stanley. He also collaborated with Robert Hunter on *Headed For The Hills* and with Donna The Buffalo on *Wait 'Til Spring*. I like all his records, but am very partial to a 2001 release called *The Other Sessions*.

This recently-past Americana Conference 2006 was another double release occasion for Lauderdale. One is called *Bluegrass*, and the other is Country, called *Country Super Hits, Vol.1*. I was at the CD release for the Bluegrass record and shot some video, and we'll include some of that in the next issue. But this issue, at the end of this interview, we'll have a couple of video clips of Jim with the Country band playing tunes from the new CD. And in the Video section of this issue, you'll also see Lauderdale with four other great writers in video clips of a SESAC Guitar Pull, in its entirety.

The guy is vitally prolific as a writer, while maintaining a very busy touring and recording schedule. With Odie Blackmon, his co-writer on the Country record, he wrote 46 tunes together last year. And that's just one of his co-writers. He's got a very hairbrained sense of humor, so it's almost easy to forget what a focused workhorse the guy really is.

We have connected, or nearly connected, in the strangest of places. When I was living for five months in Shanghai in 2004-2005, Jim showed up in town to do some very special T'ai Chi training, an Eastern discipline in which I have been told (though not by him) he is a master. We talked on the phone a couple of times during his stay, and I heard in his voice the progressive frustration with how difficult the simplest things in China can be, but he always expressed it in a most comical way.

Whenever I shoot video of Jim, solo or with a band, I'm always laughing and hollering my ass off, so I apologize for that in advance. I can't help it. We consider him to be one of the most talented guys out there, regardless of what style he's playing. A writer's writer, and a singing fool.

**Puremusic:** It's amazing that our schedules and life are so crazy that we're doing this interview at 11:10 at night. How did your rehearsal go tonight?

**Jim Lauderdale:** It was fine.

**PM:** It was a bluegrass rehearsal, obviously. And that's what you're playing tomorrow night?

**JL:** Yeah.

**PM:** Good. I'll be there. Well, it's another double release occasion, Jim. That's unbelievable. What moves you to do it that way?

**JL:** Well, I didn't put out anything last year. But I've got some I'm working on. So I didn't want to hold up the bluegrass album, for instance, for another couple of years.

**PM:** Right.

**JL:** I want to kind of keep on track with my released stuff.

**PM:** Are both of the albums on Yep Roc, or just the country album?

**JL:** Yeah, both of them.

**PM:** So that's amazing that you struck a deal with Yep Roc, and they're releasing two albums at one time in two different styles. I mean, that's a good start with a new company.

**JL:** Oh, yeah, I'm really pleased that they were willing to do that.

**PM:** How did that deal come together? Who put that together?

**JL:** Well, I did. I mean, I've known Glenn Dicker for years. He was in charge of a company called Upstart that released a record of mine called *Persimmons*.

**PM:** Oh, he put out *Persimmons*.

**JL:** Yeah. So we've known each other, and we've talked about putting out a record again. For several years he's wanted to work with me again, and I wanted to work with him. And just finally the timing was right.

**PM:** Oh, that's amazing, because that can be a really good company.

**JL:** Oh, yeah.

**PM:** And I love that, on this double release occasion, they're two different styles, one country and one bluegrass. I like them both a lot. But let's talk about the country one first.

**JL:** Okay.

**PM:** The first thing that grabs you is that almost all the tunes were co-written and co-produced by Odie Blackmon.

**JL:** Yeah.

**PM:** I don't know a thing about the man. So I hope you'll acquaint us with him, taking it from the top.

**JL:** Okay. Well, I've known Odie for several years. And we started a song a few years ago, and our schedules didn't permit us to finish it. He wrote a song last year that did really well called "I May Hate Myself in the Morning, But I'm Going to Love You Tonight."

**PM:** Oh, lord. That's a great song. Who did he write that with?

**JL:** He wrote it alone.

**PM:** Oh.

**JL:** So that was a big song for him. And we finally got together, oh, gee, I guess it was about last January. And we just really started churning things out. We'd get together and sometimes write two or three songs.

**PM:** Wow.

**JL:** But we wrote about, I don't know, forty-six songs, I think--

**PM:** [laughs]

**JL:** --this year.

**PM:** Together you wrote forty-six songs last year?

**JL:** Yeah.

**PM:** That's unbelievable.

**JL:** And I just decided I really wanted to do--we clicked so well when we were writing, and when we'd go in the studio and do stuff, I really liked his producing sensibilities. So I wanted him to co-produce this record, because he does a great job. Had a guy mix it

named Chip Matthews. He's really mixed a lot of the big hit records currently coming to Nashville.

**PM:** Right.

**JL:** And yeah, I really have enjoyed this process, he's really, really a great guy. We've become good friends.

**PM:** Is he more or less a contemporary?

**JL:** I think, yeah.

**PM:** And where is he from?

**JL:** He's from Arkansas, originally. And he lived out in L.A., and said he used to come to the Palomino a lot when I'd play out there. There's a big country scene out there.

**PM:** Right. But you didn't meet him until you came to town?

**JL:** Yeah.

**PM:** Wow. So tell me about that first song together, the first one you finished. Can you remember what the first one was that you did?

**JL:** No. I'd have to look. I'm so fried right now I can't think of it.

**PM:** Yeah. And if you wrote forty-six songs last year with him, it's no wonder you can't remember which was the first one.

**JL:** Yeah. Well, one good thing that happened is out of the first batch of songs that we wrote, Gary Allan recorded one cut, "Tough All Over," and made it the title track of his last album.

**PM:** Wow.

**JL:** Also, Lee Ann Womack is cutting one called "Slow Boat to China" which is going to be on her next record. I'm not sure exactly when that's coming out.

**PM:** That's a great title.

**JL:** But dang it, now I can't remember that very first song we wrote. But it's not one that's on the current record.

**PM:** What's your process with him like? Is it different with everybody, or more the same with everybody? What is it like when you guys sit down?

**JL:** It's different with everybody that I write with. But with him, we just sit and start talking. And one of us--sometimes one of us will already have an idea, and we'll play it for the other. And then if it clicks, then we pursue it. It's very much of an equal collaboration. But it's real fun to do that, it really brings a lot to the table.

**PM:** On this country record, the only two that you didn't write with him are "She's Got Some Magic Going On" with Shawn Camp, and the great one with Leslie Satcher, "I Met Jesus in a Bar."

**JL:** [laughs] Yeah.

**PM:** Let's hear the story on that Leslie co-write, please.

**JL:** Well, that one was written October--it will be two years ago. And my dad had gotten ill the summer before and passed away--

**PM:** Oh, I remember...

**JL:** --in September. It happened very quickly. And I was pretty slow to get back in the swing of things writing-wise. But Leslie and I did write that October, and finished one song. And then she came back in the room and said, "Hey, I've got this great title for a song, "I Met Jesus in a Bar." And I thought, well, I don't know. That doesn't--you know, I don't know, I just...

**PM:** "I don't know if I hear that," yeah.

**JL:** And then she said, "No, look, really go with me on this." And so we did. And it was just real emotional for us writing that song. And she was right, definitely. As a matter of fact, I just did a video of it, it was in the desert in California, at a cool place, kind of around this club I've played at a good bit through the years, called Pappy and Harriet's Pioneertown Palace, in Pioneertown, California. It's out on the way to Joshua Tree, off of Yucca Valley. So yeah, I did a video of that, and hopefully it will be out fairly soon.

**PM:** That's an amazing song. Who thought of that second line? ["I guess you just can't fall too far..."]

**JL:** I can't remember. She probably did. She's really amazing.

**PM:** You guys have written some terrific songs together.

**JL:** Yeah, all kinds. We've written a fair amount together.

**PM:** I see my old pal Kenny Vaughan played almost all the electric tracks here, and mighty fine ones.

**JL:** Yeah, he did. And Kenny was on some of *Persimmons*. But yeah, he's on the bulk of this record. It was really great to be in the studio together.

**PM:** Isn't he kind of a new go-to guy for you? Was it because Pat [Buchanan] was out with Faith or something, or you just decided that flavor was what you were looking for?

**JL:** Well, Odie kind of suggested that. And he wanted to try some different things. I, of course, have worked with Kenny in the studio, like I said, on *Persimmons*. And he did some gigs with me several years ago, and I really loved playing with him. We'd also worked together in Lucinda Williams' band during the *Car Wheels on a Gravel Road* tour. I was opening up for her, solo acoustic.

**PM:** That's right.

**JL:** Then I'd sing harmonies. Also Kenny was in the band for a long time.

**PM:** Unbelievable dude.

**JL:** Yeah. Oh, he's a great guy, a really great guy. And now he's with Marty Stuart. And really, boy, what a band!

**PM:** Oh, yeah.

**JL:** The show Marty puts on, and just what a stellar band. They're just really, really great.

**PM:** I've never seen Kenny so happy in a band as he is with the Superlatives. It's really great.

**JL:** Yeah.

**PM:** So on to the record called *Bluegrass*. First thing is [laughs] how about that [dobro player] Randy Kohrs?

**JL:** Yeah, man, he's really great. Randy, through the years, when I really kind of started playing bluegrass again after many years, and was kind of getting back into it before I did the records with Ralph [Stanley], Randy was just such an influence. I love singing with him. He kind of can finish any twists and turns I might do vocally. It's like he intuitively knows what I'm going to do.

**PM:** It's unbelievable how he follows you, as you say, through every appoggiatura, every little turn.

**JL:** Yeah. And he's just such a great player. He's really been helpful in directing me to players. And I felt like it was really natural to have him co-produce the record. I wanted to work with Bill Vorndick, who's a great engineer, and has a really terrific studio, called Hillside Audio Lab.

**PM:** Way out there on the ridge, right?

**JL:** In Bellevue, yeah. And Bill has worked with, gosh, you know, for over thirty years with just tons of great people, and great music.

**PM:** So many fine records.

**JL:** Yeah. So it's just a good natural feel to work with him.

**PM:** I love the playing of Randy Kohrs. I mean, he's the most aggressive dobro player I think I've ever seen.

**JL:** Yeah. Yeah, he's really got his own style, and he's just really a consummate musician.

**PM:** I mean, I've never heard the dobro sound so macho, because the bar and that slide-y--the nature of it, it's just kind of a mellow thing. I mean, Jerry Douglas gets a lot out of it. But Randy is just so macho. He makes it much more like a slide guitar, or I don't know what, a whole different thing.

**JL:** Yeah, oh, yeah.

**PM:** And here, on the *Bluegrass* album, you write half the tunes yourself, and spread the rest around.

**JL:** Uh-huh.

**PM:** Leslie Satcher pops up again with a great tune.

**JL:** Yeah.

**PM:** "Who's Leavin' Who" It was reminiscent of one of my favorite Lauderdale songs "What's On My Mind."

**JL:** Huh. That's right. Another Lauder-Satch composition. We used to joke years ago that we would call our publishing company Lauder-Satch.

[laughter]

**PM:** That's catchy. So what's Leslie like? I've never met her.

**JL:** Oh, she's just really creative and full of life. It's really fun writing with her, it's really inspirational. And she has great ideas. Really a good person. Yeah, it's very good to be around her.

**PM:** Do you ever write three-ways, as is often done in this town?

**JL:** I'm trying to think--I haven't done that too much. I've only done it a few times. I'm not opposed to it. It hasn't really happened that... Well, actually, I did--Odie and I wrote several songs with Gary Allan last year. And actually, chronologically, I guess I started writing with Odie about a year and a half ago. Yeah, but we wrote several tunes with Gary Allan. And I think he's recorded one for his upcoming album.

**PM:** I hear he's a good dude.

**JL:** Oh, yeah. He's a good guy.

**PM:** Somebody told me a funny Al Anderson story. [laughs] I don't know if it's true. But the way it goes is: A new co-writer asks, when they're just getting started, I guess just to break the ice, "Well, Al, what kind of a song do you want to write today?" [laughs] And Al just gave him the hairy eyeball and said, "A f\*!#in' hit. What the hell do you want to write?"

**JL:** I never heard that one.

**PM:** Even though you get a lot of cuts, you write so many great eccentric songs, too, that I'm curious to know what you're generally thinking when you start a song, what you want out of it, kind of a thing. You know what I mean?

**JL:** Well, I just want to be able to finish. I start so many things, and it's easy for me just to come out with a melody, but the challenge is for me to finish one.

**PM:** Right.

**JL:** And mostly that's if I'm writing alone. But I think I enjoy the process in doing it, because you never know what's going to happen. And I sure enjoy making my own albums. So that's kind of a big test. And then if somebody else--if it's maybe something I'm not sure I want to record, I'll still make a demo. But you never know, it's really out of your control if somebody else might want to record it someday. You can just do your best, as far as if you think you've accomplished writing something you like.

**PM:** Right. You're just trying to finish a song, trying to make it a song you like and what happens after that is just in somebody else's hands.

**JL:** Yeah.

**PM:** Yeah. It makes sense to me. There are a couple three songs on these two discs that have those one note melodies, like "Cautious" or "Single Standard Time."

**JL:** Uh-huh.

**PM:** That's almost like a Lauderdaleian move, now, a signature move.

**JL:** Hmm.

**PM:** I mean, you write so many great melodies it really sticks out when you do that [singing] "dayer, dayer, dayer, dayer, dayer," thing.

**JL:** Uh-huh.

**PM:** [laughs] And is that purposeful when you do that? Like almost a monotonal melody?

**JL:** Well, it just kind of happens. I mean, it's not something I even really think about. When I get a melody, it just kind of comes to me. I know that sounds kind of corny or something, but that's really the way it happens. They just kind of come. They're sometimes complete things. But that's kind of the fun part of it.

**PM:** Yeah, you just let it happen.

**JL:** Yeah.

**PM:** That's a great Jon Langford illustration on the cover.

**JL:** Oh, man, I've been wanting to work with him for a long time. And I really feel fortunate and honored that he agreed to work with me. He did such a good job.

**PM:** Really! I mean, it's Rushmore-like.

**JL:** Yeah.

**PM:** It's fantastic.

**JL:** Yeah.

**PM:** How did that collaboration, if you'd call it that, come about?

**JL:** Well, Ollie O'Shea, an old friend of mine who plays [fiddle] in my bluegrass band, set it up through John Rice. This fellow named John Rice in Chicago is a really great picker, and he's done some work with Jon Langford musically. Because Jon does really great music on his own, as you probably know.

**PM:** Oh, yeah, a great musician as well.

**JL:** Yeah. So anyway, so I tracked him down through John Rice, and just proposed it to him. And luckily, he agreed. And Ollie was the one, too, that had kind of prodded me to work with Odie.

**PM:** Really?

**JL:** Yeah. So I'm real grateful for that.

**PM:** Well, there are two good solids on Ollie's tab, there.

**JL:** Yeah, yeah. That's right.

**PM:** Odie and Langford.

**JL:** Yeah.

**PM:** So you mentioned a couple of Gary Allan cuts, and also a Lee Ann Womack cut that's in the works.

**JL:** Yeah.

**PM:** You popping any other good cuts lately? Has it be a good year for that?

**JL:** I think that's it for right now. But hey, I'll take that.

**PM:** Absolutely. And there's a new manager, right?

**JL:** Yeah. A guy named David Macias.

**PM:** Yeah, a buddy of mine. A real sharp character.

**JL:** Yeah, a good guy.

**PM:** How is that going?

**JL:** Fine, fine. We've been working good for a few months now, and I think he's doing a really good job. He's really working hard. Nancy Quinn is working with us, too.

**PM:** Oh, good. So you got the both of them on your case.

**JL:** Yeah, yeah.

**PM:** So yeah, I was just interviewing Anne McCue. Of course, she's working with them as well.

**JL:** Oh, that's right. Yeah, Anne's great. I sang a harmony with her on her record.

**PM:** Yeah, we talked about that, for sure. Yeah, Anne is an old buddy of mine, and we really like her a lot. So yeah, you'll be on the cover with her. And if I can corral him in, Tony Joe White, as well.

**JL:** Oh, wow. Boy, that'd be nice.

**PM:** So what's the touring scheme for this coming year? Any plans coming together for that with Macias?

**JL:** Oh, man, yeah. Tell the folks to check the website. It's got the most intense tour schedule I think I've ever had, starting next week, a week from this Friday.

**PM:** Will you be going out with somebody, or solo, or with a band?

**JL:** I'm going to take Bucky Baxter on pedal steel and Ollie on fiddle and mandolin.

**PM:** Fantastic. Yeah, I don't see enough of Bucky Baxter anymore. [Bucky played in Dylan's band for many years. In any Lauderdale videos of the new country band in this or next issue, Bucky's playing steel.]

**JL:** Yeah. And a really talented singer/songwriter is going to open up the first leg of the tour for me. His name is Jimmy Barrett.

**PM:** Is he from Nashville? Where's he from?

**JL:** Yeah. He's from Florida originally, but he lives in Nashville now.

**PM:** Have you scored a film for anybody yet? You could do the hell out of that.

**JL:** No, I haven't. I'd really like to. I hope someday that'll happen.

**PM:** Yeah. That's got to come your way. You're a natural. So last question: You're all over this Americana Convention this week, right?

**JL:** Oh, yeah.

**PM:** I didn't get a ticket for the awards show this year, but you're hosting that, no doubt.

**JL:** Right, yeah.

**PM:** And how many shows you doing around that whole week?

**JL:** Well, I've got the record release party tomorrow night at the Station Inn. And I'm playing Friday at the Cannery. And well, and there's a bunch of little things like--

**PM:** Isn't there a Basement show in there somewhere.

**JL:** Yeah, that's 6:00 to 8:00. I'm going to do a few songs. That's the Yep Roc show. And I think it's Thursday afternoon, it might be Wednesday--I'm not exactly sure. I'm doing something for SESAC with Kevin Welch and Ray Wylie Hubbard. [There are clips of that great show in this issue.]

**PM:** Oh, that'll be fun.

**JL:** Yeah. And Saturday I'm in Ashland City doing a show, a festival.

**PM:** Oh, yeah, The Riverbluff Festival. [Rained out, unfortunately--we were there.]

**JL:** Yeah.

**PM:** I'm going to go out to that, too.

**JL:** Good.

**PM:** So if it's okay with you, I'm going to show up at these various places with a little movie camera and put up some clips with this interview--so people can get the whole Lauderdaleian vibe going on.

**JL:** Sure. Oh, that'd be great.

**PM:** Well, thanks for taking my call, Jim, so late.

**JL:** Hey, thank you, Frank. I'm sorry I'm so fried. And I hope that I have given some coherent answers to your questions. I really appreciate it. Thanks for doing what you're doing.

**PM:** You bet. And I'll see you at the shows in the next couple of days.

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