

A Conversation with Todd Snider
by Frank Goodman (4/2007, Puremusic.com)

Like The Fool in a Tarot deck, Todd Snider seems both open faced and a total enigma. There is no accounting for the career he has carved for himself, save his irrepressibly knuckleheaded vision and sheer honesty and naiveté. He is a creature that, once truly experienced, one is moved to love, simply stated. And Todd and his music are beloved to so many types of people out there that it is confounding.

It's so rare to meet or listen to people or to artists who have either refused or somehow avoided being corrupted or spoiled by the world. And certainly not for lack of experience or walking the straight and narrow, that's for sure.

And that's the amazing thing about his songs, is that the enlightening fool brings you along for the ride. The old friend of his that turns out to be a hooker that he just ends up wanting to shoot the breeze with, the frat brother that turns out to be W that he beat up hippies and worse with, the roof he's got to be talked down from, these are stories and feelings that have endeared him and him alone in the crowd to the likes of Kristofferson, Prine, and Shaver. Brother, you can't get there from here.

It's just a little like talking to someone from another planet, a phone call with Todd Snider. My man's on a slightly different frequency. But it's a beautiful place he's coming from, and I like being there. And I go there a Lot now, through his records, they really take you there. I want to hang with him and meet his wife Melita, whose beautiful paintings have become part of the Todd Snider road show, and adorn the cover of his latest great work, *The Devil You Know*. If you do not have this, or (perish the thought) any Todd Snider CDs in your stack, you have a serious hole in your collection that needs to be attended to.

He's not from folk, he's not Americana, and he's not a rocker. He is all of it, and if I may say so, above it. See and hear for yourself.

Puremusic: Hello, Todd, Frank here. How you doing, man?

Todd Snider: I'm doing good. Thank you for calling me.

PM: Oh, yeah. It's my pleasure. It's finally a beautiful day here in Nashville and not so super super cold today.

TS: I'm in San Antonio--well, no, I'm in Dallas.

PM: What have you got down there for weather, is it nice?

TS: It's all right. It's actually kind of cold, though, and overcast. Not rainy or nothing, but it's cold. We're just sitting up here in--we're sitting inside. It's nice in Nashville?

PM: It's nice today. It's beautiful and clear, and it's not down in the teens. I think it got up to the 40s, today, so it's pretty good, yeah.

TS: Oh, nice.

PM: You got a good audience down in San Antonio, I'll bet.

TS: Yeah, we had a great night last night. We played Floore's Country Store. And I don't think we filled it up, but it was pretty god dang full.

PM: That's beautiful. Who's out on tour with you at the moment?

TS: Just me and my wife, and my tour manager, and myself.

PM: Wow. And did anybody good open?

TS: Hayes Carll did the show last night with us. And Robert Earl King came out during my set and sang on a song.

PM: Wow. That's a nice thing about playing Texas. I sure do like Hayes Carll, too. He's a really funny dude.

TS: Oh, I love him. I love that guy.

PM: I'd like to confess that at first I was one of the people out there that was saying, "Will somebody please explain to me what the hubbub about Todd Snider is, I don't think I quite get it." But in more recent years, and especially after listening a whole lot to *East Nashville Skyline* and now *The Devil You Know*, I totally, totally got it, and I'm sorry. And I'm never going to shut the hell up about it now.

TS: Oh, thank you, man. That makes me feel good.

PM: So even though I've read a little about it before, I'd like to hear it from you, about the kind of a home and a family you grew up in, and how music first took a hold you of in your life.

TS: Well, my dad was into music, but he wasn't into me being into music. In my house when I was a kid, when I was real young, my dad wanted us all to play sports, and we were jock-like. We had a lot of money. And my brother was sort of the light of our family, and he was a good athlete. And I wasn't a very good athlete, but I tried to be. And then when I was 15 my dad went bankrupt, and we moved to Houston. And I went with him, but then I went back to Portland.

My dad was going to go out to Portland for some business, and I rode out there with him and said I was going to see some friends. And then when I got there, I wouldn't go back. And so I stayed at this guy's house--I stayed with about a big handful of--my friends' parents would let me stay on their couches there for I think it was my junior and senior year in high school. So then music, I think, really got me--the first I remember realizing that music really was important to me I think was--well, two records. There was a guy next door who brought over Led Zeppelin's first record, that one with "Stairway to Heaven" on it.

PM: Sure. [It's actually on Led Zeppelin IV, though the debut was full of other amazing songs.]

TS: And then there was this other guy in college that my dad brought into our house because he thought he'd make us like sports more. It was like one of the neighbor guys--he was like, "This guy is a football player." And he'd come over and play Lynyrd Skynyrd for us. And that was really what I got from him. And then my dad loved Creedence Clearwater. Those were like my first three, I guess. But my dad thought it was kind of faggy to like music, so that was a bit of an odd thing, until I got out of my house, which I guess is my junior year in high school, then I started to become a music nut. After school was over, I didn't know where to go. And this guy named Rob was going to go to junior college in Santa Rosa, and my uncle lent me some money to go. So I went down there with him. But I didn't end up doing that. When I got there, I didn't go sign up or nothing. I just started hanging around the area.

PM: Really? That's an old stomping ground of mine, Santa Rosa and Sonoma, and around there, yeah.

TS: Really? Yeah, what's that street, Mendocino.

PM: Yeah.

TS: And so when I got there, I just remember everything sort of fell apart. The sofa circuit wasn't as kind after a while. And so I remember I had a moment when I was like being evicted--being asked to leave-- I was on the roof of this apartment building, and the police came. And somebody called and said I had to go. And I remember as I was getting dragged off--not dragged, but told to come down off the roof, thinking--I had this moment in my life where I was like--there's nothing I'm going to do. I don't have no dad to work for, there ain't no college I can go to. Nothing--what am I going to do? And I remember in that moment I thought, *I'm going to try to be a singer*. Why not? I can say I'm any fuckin' thing I wanted to from here.

PM: Wow.

TS: And so then like the next day, I called my brother. He sent me a ticket to go to Austin, where he was working construction. And I told him I was going to join a band. He was like, "What do you mean, you're going to join a band?"

PM: [laughs]

TS: I said, "I got all these lyrics and everything." And he was like, "You're kidding me." And I was like, "Yep." And so he said, "Well come on down here, there's all these bands, Austin is full of bands. Come on, and I'll get you a job in construction."

And so I went with him. It took me two days to get from Santa Rosa to San Francisco. So I got there, and I got a ticket. I had to give my records away at the airport--well, not my records, my clothes, I kept my records. I went to Austin, got there. My brother was in San Marcos, which was like thirteen miles outside of town.

I eventually got a job at this restaurant, Peppers, at The Falls. But I had the job like a real short time. It was all in like a three-month period. I got the job, busboy. And then my friend played me a Jerry Jeff Walker record, and I got obsessed with that. And then I went and saw him, and he was alone. Then I changed gears completely. I saw this show, and it changed my whole life. I was like, "Now I'm a folksinger, and I don't even know what that means yet, but I'm going to find out tomorrow." And then I went and the next day I said, "I'm going to get an acoustic guitar." At the time I wanted to be somebody's lead singer. But I saw Jerry Jeff, and I went "Nope, new plan."

PM: Wow.

TS: And I went and got a guitar, and I started making up songs. And my first song was about being a busboy. And I ended up playing at the place where I was a busboy.

PM: Wow.

TS: Then I just kept making up songs. And by the end of that summer I had like thirteen songs. And I quit my job as the busboy, and became the singer in the bar, at the same bar. And the owner of the bar was like, "Love it!" And then I'd just play a few songs, and they'd say, "Don't do that! That's crap!"

[laughter]

TS: I'd go, "Here's a Jim Croce song." And they'd be like, "You don't play well enough to do Jim Croce's songs. Just do your own songs!" I only knew like--at my first gig I knew a couple of chords at my first gig.

PM: Damn! And what was that song about the busboy called?

TS: It was called "Bus Tub Stew."

PM: [laughs]

TS: And I can remember it. Everett Falls was the restaurant. And it was a true story, in fact, because I would eat the people's leftovers. If somebody didn't really touch their food, I'd think, "I'll eat that."

[laughter]

TS: And if they only took about a bite or two--I know it sounds gross, but at least it's food.

[laughter]

PM: That's unbelievable--so it's a totally organic story, how one thing led to the other. I mean, it's not some big fantastical thing. It's like, this fell into place, then I did this and, change of plan, I did that. It's amazing how organic that story is.

TS: Oh, well, thank you, man.

PM: I've heard or read you describe yourself as a deadhead Portland guy, like a rainbaby. Did the songs of the Dead ever influence you at any point?

TS: What, the Dead's songs?

PM: Yeah. Did you like them?

TS: Oh, yeah, yeah. I still would like--I got a friend that knows Robert Hunter, and I'm trying to get to meet him. He does a great abstract thing--I love the Grateful Dead.

PM: Yeah. And so few people will say that in music today. I'm a closet deadhead, for sure, being a California guy.

TS: Right.

PM: Now, is the friend of yours that knows Hunter Jim Lauderdale?

TS: No, but I do know Jim. Do you know who Peter Cooper is?

PM: Yeah, sure.

TS: He writes for the Tennessean? [The main Nashville Newspaper.]

PM: Sure, great guy.

TS: He's like one of my main drinkin' buddies, and he knows Hunter. In fact, when Hunter came to town, I think he might have stayed at Cooper's house one night. He said he had--what are those things, a didgeridoo.

PM: He did?

TS: He was playing a didgeridoo and smoking pot through it.

PM: Holy jeez.

TS: I know. I just love his lyrics, like "Box of Rain," or "Saint Stephen," "Truckin'." We used to play, "I Need a Miracle" when I had a band. Off that one weird record--not a disco record, but that was the record that had that chick singer on it.

PM: Donna?

TS: Yeah, yeah.

PM: Yeah, I saw her just the other day [laughs] as a matter of fact.

TS: You're kidding me!

PM: No. I ended up on this Caribbean Jam Cruise.

TS: Wow.

PM: My friend Steve Kimock was playing with his band Zero, and Donna was singing with him. And she's an old buddy of mine.

TS: No shit?

PM: Yeah.

TS: And what was that like? Who else was on that cruise?

PM: You know, like Galactic and all these jam bands, like Derek Trucks, Greyboy Allstars, ALO, New Mastersounds, tons of them. It was really great.

TS: I like that stuff.

PM: I would love to help you meet Hunter sometime too. We got to hook that up--

TS: Oh, man! I would love that. I've been kind of fantasizing about trying to get a lyric lesson from him, somehow. Because I've had a few guys that I've succeeded at that, like

when I just saw it in my mind, "I'm going to find Kris Kristofferson, and that guy is going to teach me something about songwriting, or I'm going to die trying."

PM: Did that ever happen, per se? I know he's a friend, but did you ever take a lesson from him in that way?

TS: Yeah.

PM: Wow.

TS: Him and Prine. I'm not going to tell you what they taught me, because sometimes they said, "Don't tell nobody that."

PM: Ah, that's really good.

TS: I know specifically Buffett taught me something one time, and he said, "Now, that's not up for"--you know, "Don't go telling everybody what I just told you."

PM: Oh, wow.

TS: That made me happy. I said, "I won't." And I use it every fucking night.

PM: That's incredible, that somebody told you something that's a secret, and that you actually can use it in terms of songwriting. I hope someday we're good enough friends where you say, "Okay, Frank, now don't tell anybody this."

[laughter]

PM: We may get there.

Is it fair to say that although this last great record, *The Devil You Know*, was 33 in the *Rolling Stones* Top 50, and 14 in *Blender*, and whatever it was in the twenties in *No Depression*, that after like eight or nine really well-received albums in all these years, you're still looking for that right audience and the support of the press in your hometown East Nashville? Is that the way it is?

TS: Well, I don't know how to answer that question, because I like it when people think that. My dad used to call people a "lunch money pimp." And I think it's true, man, because--

PM: [laughs]

TS: --it didn't take very much to make me satisfied when I started my music. I don't know what a rock star would necessarily feel like for sure, but I know the very first time I ever played and there was like three people in the audience and two of them were looking

at the table and one guy clapped a little, man, I just thought, "Damn, I just nailed it at Carnegie Hall, and nobody is telling me different." [laughs]

PM: Wow.

TS: I don't know, it's like sometimes people will say, "Do you ever wish you had a bigger audience?" And I'm like, "God damn, did you just say I had an audience?" And it's like, "You're saying that I'm in music and I have an audience that could grow. God damn, so there's one person out there, right? Damn! I'm ready to do a rock band."

[laughter]

TS: I've always just been so grateful since the first time anybody ever gave me anything. I mean, I can't prove there's a God up there, but if there is, sometimes I'd really like to say, "God, man, thank you so much for letting me get to be a person that sings." But then I figure if I had God's attention for a minute I'd get pretty mad about all the other stuff. But I don't want to get on about God too much.

PM: Well, tell us, then, a little bit about your wife, Melita, whose painting is the great cover of *The Devil You Know*.

TS: Yeah. She's with me right now. Some of the places we play are like bars, but sometimes we play theaters, and on those nights of this tour, she's brought like 18 paintings, and we're doing a show for her stuff in the lobby before my show.

PM: Really?

TS: That's what I would like to travel around and do. I'd like to actually someday combine our stuff together into some kind of thing that we don't know what to call. But that's kind of pretentious, I guess. But it's still, if you're honest about it, it's a neat endeavor to think about--I mean, we travel to your town, and it costs you 15 bucks, and something is going to happen when we get there, but I can't tell you what it is.

PM: Wow. That's a really cool idea. I mean, there's got to be a way do that. It's part of the new emerging paradigm that has nothing to do with record companies that are all spiraling out of control. It has to do with little companies and DIY, and people saying, "Well, okay, my show is going to be like this now, because I said so."

TS: That's what I feel like. That's what I feel like, too. I feel like, gosh, you don't necessarily have to have a name for what you do anymore.

PM: Right. And then suppose you had a backdrop that was like fabricated of a whole collection of Melita's paintings.

TS: Yeah, that's what I'm thinking too, yeah. That's what I'm thinking, too. And like last night we did that, on the stage there was like five of her things. And we had like gypsy flags up everywhere, too.

PM: Wow.

TS: And then in the lobby there were some of her paintings last night.

PM: So how did you guys run into each other? Where did you meet your wife?

TS: I was in, well, drug rehab.

PM: Cool.

TS: Yeah, yeah. I try to say that--I try to just be blunt and say that. It's embarrassing. But I went in 1996, it was after my second tour, I just felt like I was drinking too much and taking too many drugs. So I went in there. And I was in there for about a week--a few days, I think. And I met her, and I felt like I pretty much knew that we were going to get married, pretty quick.

PM: Wow.

TS: And then we stayed together--we didn't make out and all that when we were at that place, because we knew we had stuff to do.

PM: Right.

TS: But I knew, like I said, "Well, when I get out of here, if I can keep my shit together, I'm going to find that girl." And I did. I went up to New York. When I was making my third record, I could mix it wherever I wanted to do. And I didn't know nothing about mixing. Fuck, I was like, "Yeah." "Where do you want to mix it?" I went, "Well, what difference does it make to me, man? I don't touch those buttons."

[laughter]

TS: But I thought, well, I want to go to New York. I found somebody that knew a studio in New York, and I made it out like I had to go use that place--

[laughter]

TS: --because that would put me up there in New York for two weeks. And I went and found her at her house, and I started dating her. And then I got her to move to my house in Nashville. This was like nine years ago. And we've been together ever since.

PM: That's an unbelievable story. You hear a lot of places--"Oh, I met my wife at so-and-so"--a party, at this or that. That's the first time ever somebody said, "Yeah, I met her in rehab."

TS: Rehab. It's funny, too, because it's like when you're sitting in a circle, that circle holding hands and they're making you recite poems about how much you want your life to be, you can't be any more humiliated. It's a good place to start.

PM: Yeah, you start out with somebody totally emotionally naked.

TS: Yeah. That was what I thought, too. I liked that.

PM: So there's another relationship or two that I'd like to ask you about, since people, when they describe their close friends, it's doubly revealing. Let's talk a little bit about Will Kimbrough.

TS: Sure. Well, I could go on for hours about him. I'm jealous of him almost 99 percent of the time.

[laughter]

TS: His songs, I love. I really mean that, too. And it's not a competitive relationship, either. It's funny, because I remember when I started getting in music I wanted away from jock stuff. In my mind, there was no scoreboard. And in my fantasies when the Allman Brothers and Skynyrd got together, they didn't care who was selling more tickets or more shows. What I didn't foresee when I got here was--I have a few friends, and I just don't, we just don't count our stuff. But when he says--like you'll hear a lyric, and you'll go, "God damn it, man!"

PM: "I should have said that." [laughs]

TS: Yeah, that's it. And I go, "Oh!" And then you're happy for them. It's kind of like all my favorite people in the whole world, and my favorite songs, are the ones that I hear with a sense of dread, almost. Like when Brian Henneman from the Bottle Rockets and Kevin, Kenny, and Will--I'd say Will might even be my favorite. And then he also--I like the way he produces music. We met--I had always liked the way his records sound. Like the last--almost all my records--he had already made records, and he was the ringer in our band. And he was the person that I would tell him all my ideas, and he would turn them--he would help me communicate to the producer.

And he actually has taught me--like I can speak pretty good now, but when I started, he was my translator. Now we just have our own little language that we use. I'd guess you'd call it that. But yeah, he had been in a really popular band, and they broke up, and my--

PM: What, the Bis-quits?

TS: No, before that. Will and The Bushmen.

PM: Right.

TS: And they were having one of those record company conventions-- like they still do them all the time--I guess South by Southwest was the first one I ever heard of that, that deal if you don't have a record contract and you go and everybody goes, and then everybody meets and tries to see if they can get record contracts.

PM: Right.

TS: And I had gotten in one of those in Nashville.

PM: NEA.

TS: Yeah, yeah. And they had a deal at the beginning where you could get free shrimp and everything and meet everybody.

PM: [laughs]

TS: Right? And Will was at that. And him and I both have a nervous nature, and we met actually like getting as far off from the crowd as possible--I was really nervous about having to play that night, and I could tell that he was too. And we were both like over by where everyone was putting their coats, and just trying to stand by ourselves because you had to be--it felt like it--I remember the people that got me in it told me I had to be at this event. And so I'm standing there trying to not be at the event as much as I can. And then that night I got my Margaritaville's contract and that night the Bis-quits got their deal. But they had a record that they'd already recorded. They were ready to give it to somebody. And I'd never even been in a studio.

PM: Wow.

TS: So their record came out two months after that, and mine didn't come out for another year after that. So the Bis-quits record came out, they had the tour, they broke up, and Will was looking for something to do. And Eddie Shaver was going to be our guitar player, and then his dad needed him.

PM: Eddie Shaver was? [The extremely talented son of Billy Joe Shaver, now tragically deceased.]

TS: Yeah.

PM: Wow.

TS: And his dad's record, that one with "Hottest Thing in Town"--all of a sudden his dad's record was really working great, and they had a big tour they had to go do. And so

Eddie left. And I remembered Will from just meeting him that night. I asked him if he wanted to come be in our band--or if he wanted to come audition, I think. And he came down, and we sat up at this place called Movies. And we just played a couple of Billy Joe Shaver songs, actually. I played a couple Shaver songs, and I said, "Do you know the album?" And he was like, "Yeah." And I trusted that he did. And I said, "Well, let's go get a drink or something." Then the next day we went on the road.

PM: Wow. Unbelievable.

TS: And he's been probably my best music friend that I've made, and my closest friend. I hope--Jesus, if you call him he'd probably be like, "That prick? God dammit! Tell him to stay away from me!"

[laughter]

PM: He just did our first Monday night show the other night, the ones that we're videotaping with three cameras. He came and played with Paul Griffith, and he was unbelievably good.

TS: Just the two--oh, I love it when he does that. Well, that's the thing that I am so excited for him about is that his--oh, I know the one thing that he's always wanted was--like if you're the singer, you get to decide when everybody tours.

PM: Right.

TS: That's the only rub in his whole life, and that's a pretty good life--or the only one that I know about that he shares with me. And that's just totally changed in the last year for him.

PM: Right, exactly.

TS: That *Americanitis* record. Well, it seems like he just made three really great records in a row, and all of a sudden now it's like he goes out and tours--I just know that he is really thankful for this last couple years because he gets to go tour, and it's Will Kimbrough is the one who decides what night it is.

PM: I'd love sometime--it's just becoming a personal mission at the moment--to get you and Will on stage together and put that on videotape sometime, just a duo of Todd and Will.

TS: Oh, we could do that. I'd do that anytime--I mean, shoot, we've done that a million times.

PM: Because you know the little theater above Bongo, every Monday we're shooting three good cameras and starting to get really good stuff on video. And so sometime you're both in town, I hope we can do that.

TS: Yeah. Well, get Tommy too. You know Tommy Womack?

PM: Yeah, right, and Tommy. [We didn't succeed in getting Todd and Will in the first series, but we did end with Tommy Womack, also interviewed in this issue.]

TS: Have you heard his new record coming out?

PM: Yeah, it's really good, right?

TS: Yeah. I'm just so happy for him on that one. Well, actually, that's another one of them things. I heard those songs in a row, and I was like, "Oh, God, you fucker! I love you!" [laughs]

PM: He's really something.

TS: I remember Billy Joe Shaver told me a story once. Someone told him about this guy, that he had to hear Bob Dylan. And he went and got "The Times They Are A-Changing," and put it in his cassette player in his car, and listened to it; and after he heard it all the way through, he rolled down his window and threw it out in the street and yelled, "Fuck! God dammit!"

[laughter]

TS: And that's how I feel about my friends sometimes. Although it's like funny I say that, and then what do I do? I sit around at home and listen to the records.

PM: Of course.

TS: It can't be that bad.

PM: I asked Shaver one time in an interview, I said, "Well, how does it feel, Billy, to be a veritable icon?" And he says, "Ah, well, I don't know, Frank. Is that like an acorn?"

[laughter]

TS: Oh, that's funny.

PM: He is a funny dude.

TS: He's the fuckin' greatest, man. I love him.

PM: What about Eric McConnell, where you make records, I don't know him. Where did you guys begin your friendship?

TS: I have a song called "Play a Train Song."

PM: Oh, and I loved Skip, too. [Skip was a friend to many who played at the Radio Cafe on the east side. He was often heard to holler "Play a train song!" from the back of the room.]

TS: Oh, yeah. Okay. So Skip and Eric--I don't know exactly how they knew each other, but when I first got to East Nashville, I found out pretty quick that Skip was like the mayor, and he knew everyone. I was like the Robin to his Batman there for about four years. I was getting ready to make a record called *New Connection* at the time. And I needed to try to record some songs to give to John Prine.

PM: Right.

TS: I just had to turn them in to see if I could make my record--you know, like, "I have these twelve songs, should I go make a record?" That's kind of how it starts, right? And so Prine said he knew a guy. And I went over to Eric's. And Eric let me do it for free because of Skip.

PM: Wow.

TS: We met that day, and we kept running into each other in the bars after that. We were bumping heads, and everything, and that was kind of a connection. And then when I'd walk in the mornings, I would walk by his house.

When I was getting ready to make that *East Nashville Skyline* record with "Play A Train Song," I went down to Memphis with a friend--and I won't say who because it's not--I was going to have a friend of mine produce me, and I started playing that song, and I couldn't get it the way I wanted it to sound. It kept sounding like Hank Jr. or something. And I was like, "I want it to sound like"--in my mind what I kept saying was, "I want it to sound like something that would have been on *Ragged Glory* by Neil Young, but kind of a lighter--like less, just a smidge less--more suited to a folk record. And the guy said to me, "Man, you can't do that. This song is not going to sound like that." And I thought, "Well, that's a crazy thing to say to somebody." I thought it was condescending, too.

PM: That is a crazy thing to say.

TS: So I went up to Eric's and I said--and I told him what I had, and I was just sitting on his porch. And to be honest, I think I went over there to see--we were going to smoke a joint and see what was going on. Right?

PM: Yeah.

TS: And I told him, I said, "Man, this guy is not--I mean, isn't that insane?" And he's like, "That's crazy." He's like, "Come inside. Play me the song." And I said, "Okay." And I went into his house, and I took his guitar, and he sat on the drum kit. And he put a mic on the drum, and he put a mic on me--and I was playing electric guitar. And we just played it

through. And right away, the beat was what I was talking about. And then he grabbed the bass, and he played a bass line that sounded more like something off *Ragged Glory*. And I said, "I knew that I wasn't crazy, man."

Then that night--it was started in the afternoon, by the time we were done it was dark. I said, "Let's call Will so that the guitar part will be in time." Because now by this point we'd done everything--tambourines, harmonica, everything, we were ready. And I called Will, and I said, "Man, come over." And we started to record. When he got there, I said, "You know, let's just make the record, let's do it."

PM: Wow.

TS: And so it was like, "Okay, we'll come back tomorrow." And I said, "You guys will be the producers, and I'll do it." Will had always sort of been our producer anyway, it's just we weren't old enough to ask for credit for it.

And so then we called Dave Jacques. And the next day we just started cutting all the *East Nashville* songs. I think I maybe was finishing some of them, too, as we were working.

PM: Again, that's a totally organic series of events. It's an excellent story--you know, having nothing to do with the powers that be, or this guy told that guy, and this producer--nothing like that! It just comes right out of your life.

TS: Oh, well, thank you, man. That makes me feel good.

I guess before that I'd never been the person who told everybody they were going to get paid, I just always showed up--at that time I didn't even have a manager or nothing. And we didn't tell nobody we were making a record. We made it, finished it, mixed it. And I don't even think that they knew I had any songs--I don't think Al or John [Al Bunetta and John Prine of Ohboy Records] knew I had songs. I had just been working on them. Of course, everybody else was just hoping that I'd get my shit back together so I could work.

PM: Right. So the label on this last record is New Door. Does that mean that the Oh Boy days are behind you, or is that the--

TS: Oh, I hope not. I know that Oh Boy is putting out an album in like a month or two that's just all kinds of outtakes and stuff that--because there's a loft of extra crap down there. Well, some of it is crap, if you ask me. But this first one that's coming out, I think it says Volume One. The first one that's coming out, I like. And then, I'll be honest, with each release I think they start to get shittier and shittier, and I have a feeling that eventually it'll be like Volume Six, for a dollar.

[laughter]

TS: It's just awful. But the first one is good. And I still see John. And that was mostly my connection.

PM: John which?

TS: John Prine. I guess it's been a few months since I saw him. I opened for him not long ago somewhere. So I mean, I still love them. Then they know--the guy that I'm with now is a guy named Bob Mercer who was the guy at Margaritaville. So they all know each other. That was where I started--after the *East Nashville* record, technically, I could do whatever I wanted to, and obviously didn't give a damn.

PM: Right.

TS: And then the greatest hits thing--I got called--they said MCA--a bunch of people were trying to get me to make a new album--like not too many people, but a few.

PM: Yeah.

TS: And then MCA--or whatever they're called now--they said--well, Bob just called me at home and said, "Hey, they're going to do a best-of album..." And we just have always been friends, he was in my wedding. The man that ran Oh Boy and the man that runs Margaritaville were at my wedding. And he said, "I just heard they're going to do this, and if you want me to, if you care, I can get you in charge of the whole thing." And I said, "Well, call Vickie Lucero, she handles things for me." I didn't expect--there weren't big people like that that were calling us good people. And then he came in and I guess essentially just like made me an offer I couldn't refuse. He got me a better thing than I deserved just because he was my friend. That's the way I always thought. And it's only I'd do this and then another one, and then I don't know what I'll do after that. I mean, I wonder how many songs can a guy make up?

PM: [laughs]

TS: But I do have maybe a bit of another album in me. And I know I'm supposed to make it for these guys. And then after that I don't know what I'll do.

PM: So who is managing you? Is it Vickie Lucero and Bob Mercer and somebody--

TS: No. It's that Gold Mountain company, Burt Stein. And that was from Bob. When he came--he asked me if I would be interested in working with him. And I was like, "Gosh, I don't know"--I wasn't expecting all that. And he said, "Well, you'd have to get a bigger manager." And it's been a really lucky year for us, because then he said, "I want you to go meet this Burt Stein." So me and Burt started hanging out a little bit.

PM: He's a good dude.

TS: Yeah. And then two things that I thought were so cool is Vickie Lucero said to me, "You got to go with those guys, because they're so great." And I thought, "You're the sweetest person in the world." But the coolest thing is, Burt said, "She's got to come with

you." And I thought that was really sweet. And now they're having a lot of fun. Me and my wife try to stay out of it, but I mean, they obviously--it seems like--we got to be on TV, and we got to do all kinds of fun stuff last year, so they can't be doing too bad. And I've never asked anybody one time in my life how many records I've sold. I can always tell by the way everybody looks at me when I come in the room if I'm still on the label or not.

[laughter]

TS: But I've never in my life ever asked anybody. And I tell all my managers and people like Burt knows and everybody knows that I want out of it. And I always tell those guys that are singers that say, "Well, I look after every inch of my"--I'm like, "I look after shit all."

PM: "I look after me and my wife."

TS: That's right. I'm like trying to listen to jazz music on my porch and make out a little bit.

[laughter]

PM: That's unbelievable. I think it's amazing how, in the world of singer/songwriters, you seem to be totally apart from the whole crowd, both the folk crowd and the Americana crowd, operating in your own sphere, your own universe. Is that how it seems to you?

TS: It seemed that way to me, but when you said it that sounded neat. I know I'm having a fuckin' ball doing it. And especially on this particular tour because my wife brought all her paintings and stuff, this one I've been--I woke up this morning and I thought, "God, I"--but then on the other hand I was like, "God, do I have the songs this time?" I got some new songs and I'm--I'm still staring at them, though. I don't know. We'll see what happens. I would like to make some new songs. We are making a DVD in the spring that's going to be cool.

PM: Really? Are they going to shoot a special concert or put a lot of concert footage together?

TS: Yeah, it's all this stuff. It's a bunch of stuff they're putting together. Like in the fall we went out and played on one of them TV shows. And the day before we went to this place called Rehearsals.com.

PM: Right.

TS: And they filmed like nine hours, or whatever. They put a few things out already, and we're not using those. But there's all this other stuff.

PM: Yeah. I went and watched some of that at Rehearsals.com the other day.

TS: Oh, did it look okay to you?

PM: Yeah. It looked really cool.

TS: Well, this is a little different. The one we're going to put out I think is more like on the band. And then also I made two videos one for a song called "Unbreakable." Every song from the new album is going to be on there, plus a few others. And then we made a little short film called *Come to East Nashville*.

PM: So are you what you'd call a spiritual dude?

TS: I pray a lot.

PM: Yeah.

TS: I'm not sure. I can't prove that I'm praying to anything for sure.

[laughter]

PM: But you do.

TS: But I do, yeah. I'm not one of them people that's going to stand there and go, "And I know it works! And I know there's a God that's listening." I don't, man, I don't. I know what I know, and I don't know what I don't know, and I'll pray anyway... I never understood why everyone thought confidence was so important, too. It reminds me of the same thing. You hear people say like, "I know when I die that I'm going to go to heaven and be with my loved ones." Well, you do not. You do not. I would do anything I could to make that the truth. In fact, I'm trying to live every second of my life like that's really the truth, and I want it to be the truth, and I want to see my dad again, man. Man, that's what I would love. I'd trade nearly anything for it.

But I don't know, I consider myself a spiritual person. And I like to read all them books. And I love to read the Bible. And if I was pressed I'd say I was a Christian. I wouldn't feel funny telling somebody that like I'm only that because my dad asked me to be that, and I feel like that's a valid enough reason to say, "If I have to pick one of these, I'll be on this team over here. But I ain't going to hassle nobody for this, and I don't necessarily have to go." But like when I pray, I pray to Jesus, but I--I read all the religious books. I had a few years of my life where I really got into all kinds of religion. And it's funny, you know who was giving me the books to do it? You know who Pamela Des Barres is?

PM: I know that name. Who is that?

TS: She's my spiritual adviser.

PM: Pamela Des Barres?

TS: She's that groupie--she wrote *I'm With the Band*.

PM: Right, right.

TS: I met her in L.A. a long time ago. And I never--you know what I'm saying--

PM: Right. You never got together with her.

TS: I'm not one of them--but I just thought it was just fascinating. And she started sending me all these books, a bunch of different religious books. And I got real into it for a while. It's a funny thing to define. I love to think about it, though. And all my songs seem sort of like they're written in Catholic, I think.

PM: [laughs] Well, yeah, I think the songs are deeply spiritual. And that's what brings up the question.

You're really kind to give me a bunch of your time today, Todd. I've really become a huge fan of your music.

TS: Well, thank you for saying those nice things to me. And I sure appreciate you putting us in the webzine there.

PM: Absolutely.

TS: And if you ever can--you're in Nashville, so let me--

PM: Oh, yeah. I'm going to get you and Will together--

TS: That's right.

PM: --and we're going to do one of those Monday night shows. I'm going to bother Vickie about it.

TS: Get on her. That'll be easy to put together.

PM: Okay, Todd, thanks a lot. It's really good to talk to you, man.

TS: You too, Frank, thank you.