Conversations with Steve Kimock and Billy Goodman
by Frank Goodman (5/2008, Puremusic.com)

Call it nepotism, nostalgia, call it near-sightedness, but it's really none of the above. When guitar icon Steve Kimock and his old bandmate (my brother) and expatriate songwriter/slide wonder Billy Goodman reunite for a record in the barn and a CA tour, it's a very musical occasion.

Billy had gone up the Kimock farm near Bethlehem PA (where we first encountered him in the '70s) looking to do a little playing with Steve's drummer son Johnny and his uppo Peter Fritz on bass, and perhaps to record a few songs with Steve if he was around and available.

One thing led to another. Billy's got a lot of push even on his best behavior, and Steve's got the inclination to play his guitar all hours of the day. Long story shorter, Bill camped out at the Circle K and when the smoke cleared (or not) there was a 10 song CD, an invite to join a SKF (Steve Kimock and Friends) tour on the West Coast, and a German duo tour in the offing (the last just a week from this writing.) *Big Red Barn Sessions* features the aforementioned rhythm section of Peter Fritz and John Morgan Kimock, as well as our old friend Jim Kost on B3.

Billy's songs and vocals are front and center, along with a side of Kimock that his fans may have seen less of in recent years. He is a very strong "song" player, along with his well known improvisational prowess and flair for instrumental composition. Like Dylan said of himself, he's also "a song and dance man," and his roots with The Goodman Brothers, Zero, and The Heart of Gold Band often centered around songs and vocals.

As we talk about in the conversations with both Steve and Billy to follow, the West Coast tour included two prestigious hitters, bassist Hutch Hutchison (known to many as Bonnie Raitt's bass player, but that's but one of the great acts with whom he has been associated) and Melvin Seals on keys, who played with Jerry Garcia for many years, among his varied musical exploits.

As we go to cyber-press, the German duo tour should be unfolding, so check www.kimock.com for details. And be sure to pick up a copy of *Big Red Barn Sessions,* it's a beauty.

Puremusic: Steve--Frank. How're you doing?

Steve Kimock: What's up, buddy?

PM: Well, it's time to do another PureMusic interview on the occasion of this musical chapter with brother Billy.

SK: Okay. Cool.

PM: Have you got time?

SK: Sure.

PM: Cool. So tell me, 'cause I don't know--previous to this musical chapter with Bill, what had you been up to previously, and how did this kind of musical rendezvous come about?

SK: What was I doing right before... I don't remember. [laughs]

PM: Yeah. [laughs] That sounds like me.

SK: The last couple years, I've been sort of a free safety, catch-as-catch-can, running to and fro, hither and yon, from one project from the next, just sort of trying stuff on and whatever you'd call it--screwing the pooch. Just basically trying as hard as I can not to have to do all the resource organization right here in the house, 'cause we just had another kid.

PM: Right.

SK: Four months old today.

PM: Wow.

SK: Oh, right--that's what I was doing before. I was doing Ratdog. I was covering for Mark Karan while he recovered from his throat cancer.

PM: Right. How is he doing?

SK: He's fine.

PM: Oh, that's great.

SK: Yeah, it is great.

PM: He's an old friend, obviously. So you were covering Mark Karan's gigs in Ratdog. How long did that go on for?

SK: A while, a couple of months.

PM: Was that a good gig? Was that fun?

SK: It was really fun. But that was what came right before, and then I stopped that. I hopped off in November 'cause the baby was due Christmas-ish. This is why I don't remember what I do, 'cause I wasn't doing anything. It took you to call me up.

PM: [laughs]

SK: So I was sitting around having kids from November 'til whatever. You know, there are a couple of miscellaneous things--there's a jam cruise in there and I may have gone off somewhere else--I don't remember. Then I was getting set to go to California and do some miscellaneous SKF stuff [Steve Kimock & Friends], kind of working under my own name but not with a solidified line-up.

PM: Not SKB, right.

SK: Not working out of the original book. Working out of the party book.

PM: [laughs] Right. The casual book.

SK: The casual book. It's actually more of a party book than a casual book. [laughs] I got a call from Billy. He goes, "Hey man. I wanna come over." I'm like, "Oh great, man. Come on over." He showed up and lived in the barn for twelve weeks or something. [laughs]

PM: [laughs] Excellent.

SK: Yeah, he just moved in. I was like, okay, great.

PM: Just like the old days.

SK: Just like the old days. It was beautiful, yeah--make our coffee, strum our guitars and have fun. It was cool. We thought about you often.

PM: It just seemed to take--

SK: And spoke no ill.

PM: Yeah. And spoke no ill, thank you. It just seemed to sprout organically. First it was--come over and let's play a little with [Steve's drummer son] John Morgan. Let's make a recording. Maybe Steve's got some time--come play--before you knew it, there was a record underway and then there was an invitation to go play some west coast dates, and that turned into--well, let's book some European dates. It just kind of seemed to sprout organically in a productive and fun way.

SK: It just sort of snowballed in--yeah, "organically" works, or maybe in an opportunistic way, which is like, "Oh, that's available. That's fine. Let's do this." Yeah, there was an

awful lot going on, because we accidentally wound up with a little bit of product. It was like--well, that doesn't hurt.

PM: Right.

SK: 'Cause as soon as you've got your little cookie--your little biscuit, your little loaf of bread or whatever it is that you can go and here's the thing--the physical product. As soon as there's a physical product, then the other media is interested. It doesn't matter how good you are--and a great guitar player--oh, where's the rest of the story.

PM: Yeah, 'cause the media needs a product.

SK: You guys are really good, you should go see them. The rest of the story needs to be there. And there *you* are. You know what I mean?

PM: Yeah, exactly. After there's an act and a product, it needs a writer to talk about it, which today is me. So let's talk about it, yeah. It's different, obviously, to play for a long time with somebody and continuously, and quite another to play intermittently or even very occasionally with someone you've known in a musical way for such a long time, so let's say something about what that difference may be, or what it was just like to play with Billy again.

SK: Super easy, kind of like falling off a log. The very intimate and really kind of mutual respect thing we all have going on, Billy and I, for each other's musical styles and directions and sensibilities and what we'll put our foot down for and what we'll put up with and all that stuff--that all developed in such a--when you think about it, all that stuff developed with us in a really healthy way. It's all very honestly felt and experienced stuff. Nobody showed up and punched the clock and did it for a couple hours and went off and did something else. We worked very closely. Something about that dynamic just as a foundation for the thing made the rest of it simple--okay, I don't gotta guess where you're going.

PM: Or why.

SK: You don't gotta guess what I can do or can't do here. You've just gotta ask me to hold up, or go this way or that way, or how about this. You know where the flexibility's gonna be in the situation. Yeah, that was super easy. You and I and Billy have a good foundation for that stuff.

PM: Absolutely.

SK: If we were all playing right now, it would not feel as if we were playing intermittently.

PM: [laughs] Yeah. Right.

SK: We would simply be playing.

PM: Yeah.

SK: It's like falling off a bike. You don't forget how to fall off a bike. [laughs]

PM: It's amazing after all these years that your son John Morgan is playing drums. What's that like for you, and what's his musical personality and contribution like?

SK: Oh, Jesus. It actually really hit me just the other night. I went and sat in with the EOTO/String Cheese drummer--kind of a techno, kind of a trance kind of thing that I've done a couple times, which is a lot of fun. John's band opened up.

PM: Wow.

SK: The gig was in Wilkes-Barre, okay?

PM: Right.

SK: So it's a Pennsylvania gig. I don't do a lot of Pennsylvania gigs. That's something that I've done intermittently, you know what I mean? I know what the rooms look like and feel like--I kind of know what they smell like--the kind of people that are coming in--the feel of the air coming through the back door when you're trying to tune a guitar--all that stuff.

PM: [laughs]

SK: You know where you are. I'm clearly not in Santa Cruz.

PM: [laughs]

SK: I'm not. I'm not in Central Florida. I'm not in the Rockies. I'm in frickin' Pennsylvania. So there I am backstage in this place in Pennsylvania, feeling very much like I'm at a Pennsylvania gig, which to me feels like I'm in my late teens or early twenties, maybe.

PM: Exactly.

SK: And my kid is playing on stage, and I couldn't get my head around that.

PM: [laughs]

SK: Just where the experience of being backstage for a "club date"--quotes, club date--where that puts me in my head and in my own timeline, what that relates to--and then knowing that's Johnny out there and he's kicking ass on the drums--I still haven't figured that one out.

PM: That's just gotta be amazing, yeah.

SK: It is amazing. He's playing beautifully, and is pretty fearlessly experimental with stuff that I think is really cool, and he writes really interesting stuff on the keyboard and on the computer. He went off to a session the other day and he goes, "I need a case." I said, "What do you need a case for?" He needed a guitar case. He had my old Oahu square neck--a Hawaiian guitar.

PM: Wow. I remember that.

SK: He's going to the session, and he's a drummer, and he's taking a laptop, a Hawaiian guitar, and a glockenspiel.

PM: These kids today, I'm telling you.

SK: You know what I mean? It's like, "Well, I just wanna play some bells and I wanna play some slide guitar and I wanna put a couple loops down"--you know what I mean? The drummer, you know.

PM: [laughs]

SK: I just think that's fantastic and cool.

PM: Wow. What's he listening to? Do we know?

SK: Today, no. But everything. He's pretty keen on the current small band improvisation stuff--Ben Russo or Bat Plus. He's kind of gravitating towards the keyboards and is listening--but starting to gravitate toward the guitar players in his playing. He's digging playing with guitar players. Plays with a lot of guitar players.

PM: Wow. He's certainly a beautiful, beautiful kid. He really turned out amazingly well.

SK: Yeah. And he's serious.

PM: Yeah.

SK: Maybe not quite as nuts as me in terms of being serious. I was so pissed at the world, 'cause I was convinced that the world thought I was nuts for trying to play at all. Then I really kind of shut myself in for a long time. I said, "No, no--I don't want the world, because the world is telling me not to do this, and I feel like doing this right now." He's a little better adjusted than that.

PM: Wow. Well, let's talk a little bit about the record that sprung up during the proceedings--the Red Barn sessions. How did the record come about? How'd it get laid down and seen through?

SK: Oh, boy. Sort of like the layers of an onion. [laughs]

PM: Right.

SK: It was one of those. Just a little stinker where you show up with two acoustic guitars and you play for a minute, and somebody shows up with a microphone.

PM: [laughs] Right.

SK: You listen back and you go, oh, that would sound good with drums. Oh, there's some drums over there. Okay, we need another microphone. [laughs] You know what I mean? It kind of went like that. I've got a room in my barn which is a beautiful room. It's basically where the instruments live, faithful servants that they are. Servant's quarters. It's a pile of guitars and amps and drums and a nice Hammond organ and a dressed up Fender Rhodes and some little stuff to play music through. It's like that. It's not a recording facility at all.

PM: Right.

SK: We're trying to get that together, but that's another bazillion dollars.

PM: Absolutely.

SK: So all the production just sort of had to be imported on a catch-as-catch-can basis. We called up Dave Morrison, the guy that does the digital soundboard thing--does my download service--and he brought over a little computer and a couple toys and we started recording. He hung out for a while, and then he had to get back to work and left gear here, so we kept working.

PM: So he had kind of a ProTools setup and some preamps or something?

SK: It was some weird--I don't even wanna get into doing any kind of review of the software because it was bizarre how much stuff didn't work and how oddly it didn't work. You'd record a track and you'd go to play it back, and it would play back in another key--stuff like that.

PM: Yeah, right.

SK: We couldn't figure out how to do an overdub. [laughs] We couldn't figure out how to get any effect on the thing. If you used any of the little plug-ins or something like that, then the thing would continue to crash or glitch or play stuff back in different keys, which was its favorite thing to do.

PM: Wow.

SK: It's modulatory software, and it was just like jumping around between the sampling rate. It was weird. So the record was made with no EQ--no reverb on anything. [laughs]

PM: Right. Flat, no effects.

SK: I don't even think we panned anything. It was like mono for all I know.

PM: Flat and down the middle. [laughs]

SK: So the room sounds good.

PM: Right. We left it all alone.

SK: Whatever sounds we could manage to make, we managed to make. You sort of hang a mike over by the drums and you sort of hang a mike over by the organ and you kind of hang some mikes over by the guitars. So it was really a lot of fun. It does sound really good for that very minimal set-up. It was encouraging.

PM: Although there's plenty of beautiful guitar on the record from both you guys, there's little of what you would call guitar solos on the record. Did that happen organically, or was that just kind of how you envisioned your approach from the outset?

SK: I never thought that much about it beyond my own take on the thing as being--these were sort of song demos.

PM: You were playing songs, right.

SK: Yeah. We're just gonna--here, let's play these tunes. It didn't wanna get too into anything other than just sort of having the right hat on for the general vibe, you know what I mean?

PM: Sure, absolutely.

SK: It was in kind of a--well, I could play a bunch of stuff on here, but it would sort of be a misdirection or something like that.

PM: Yeah. I didn't think it was wanting for any of that. I thought it was interesting that there was very little of that, and it was just kind of very song-y--very guitaristic without being kind of solo-ey. I liked that.

SK: Yeah. It seemed like the right thing to do at the time. If I did it again, maybe I'd do something differently. To balance that out, while we were hanging around, we were both trying to pick up Elvis, basically, and bust out some of the early Goodman Brothers stuff on each other, and we found some early tracks from--I don't know where the hell they were from. I think I've got the CD sitting right here, although I don't think my CD plays all the way through, unfortunately. From the Lantern Inn, 11/5/77.

PM: Oh, yeah. I've heard some of that Lantern '77 stuff.

SK: Not bad.

PM: There's some good stuff there.

SK: It's so cool. It's a fucking great band, it really is.

PM: It's remarkably sophisticated and naive simultaneously. [laughs]

SK: We were all barely old enough to drink, but experts nevertheless. It was really neat stuff. I listened to that and I was like, oh, yeah--the lead guitar thing. That's right. That's what you were talking about--the lead guitar thing.

PM: [laughs]

SK: It's like I've more or less given up on playing lead guitar.

PM: Well, you've done a lot of it already, you know. It's no wonder.

SK: There's a listening kind of period that I know we all went through where just the idea of playing guitar in general because it was so song-based in our formative listening--here's a cool tune--that's a cool tune--it's got a beat, it's got a vibe, you know--it's got some chords. Eventually you go, oh, man. Listen to that sound. That's a cool sound. Then there's some little space in between there and you whatever--this George Harrison, whatever--plays for three seconds in between the thing and you think that sounds cool, and you try and do that. Gradually you get to the place where you're listening to pop music where there's a guitar solo, right? So there's a verse and a chorus and then maybe a bridge or a half a verse or some instrumental interlude or something like that, and there's that thing there. But it's kind of like not really part of the tune.

PM: Right.

SK: When it's really well done, it's integrated in a way that it's the right connecting material or plot development or whatever that takes the tune down to the last verse or out or whatever, but it's not the same thing as--the more rootsy music was blues or bluegrass or something like that where you never feel as if--the solo voice of many instruments is discontinuous or not part of the tune. You listen to BB King or something--the guitar's not added onto that, you know what I mean? It's baked in.

PM: [laughs]

SK: You can't get the egg back out of the cake once you bake it. You can't get that guitar out of there. It's part of the tune. You wouldn't have different guitar with that vocal. That's what that was. The same thing with bluegrass. Basically, the blues and country

blues stuff when there was the extra little bit, it was just sort of an extension of the rest of the song.

PM: Exactly.

SK: Anyway, the stuff that we were doing back then had that 'oh, here's your guitar solo' thing.

PM: Right.

SK: Post-Goodman Brothers, when I was doing music, occasionally there would be a call for me to do a guitar solo, but gradually it turned into that the instrumental space itself was a space. And then you could no longer have this idea that you could just sort of dropped some miscellaneous eight bars of whoo, whoo, whoo--some blazing shit onto the thing--who *is* that, you know? So that whole lead guitar concept has kind of vanished from my vocabulary. I'd spent all that time playing instrumental music, really trying to figure out a way to just play some guitar that wasn't that, that still sounded like some guitar.

PM: Play guitar music, right.

SK: That sounded like a song or whatever. I don't know exactly if I had any success with that or not, and I think a lot of the sounds and approaches that I'm reusing either went over people's heads on some level, or under them--or were either too minimalistic or too noisy or too something. I'm trying to make a point here that it was nice to get to do this stuff with Billy 'cause it simultaneously allowed me to play some tunes and just play some guitar, which I dug, on the record. It put some focus back on that idea that--oh, you can do that guitar solo thing too if you want to in this format. Although I didn't.

PM: Right. And still played.

SK: I think I figured out what it was that I didn't do.

PM: [laughs]

SK: I understood why I didn't do it, so that was important. The upshot to that is that I said, "Oh, okay, hell. I can do that. Or I *could* do that." So I put a set of nines back on the Explorer and got out the Boogie, right? [Set of nines refers to a gauge of strings, beginning with .009, that is much lighter than Steve usually uses, and is often favored by "lead" guitarists.]

PM: Wow.

SK: It just sort of like recreated the whole production and spent some time with it and went--oh, yeah. Okay, Okay, I got it. Okay, right.

PM: [laughs] The nines back on the Explorer and pulled out the Boogie. That's too much.

SK: I knew you'd get a kick out of it.

PM: Hell, yeah.

SK: That Boogie sounds like a million bucks. [Referring to a CA amp called a Mesa/Boogie, where Steve and I once both worked. Kimock has a very special one, customized by Steve and Mike Bendinelli, who's been the instrumental tech since the company's inception.]

PM: Yours was very special. You spent a lot of time getting that right.

I know in recent years you've been doing guitar workshops and the like about what some might consider lofty topics like tempered tuning and how it relates to guitar and playing in tune and other related deep topics. What's on your mind lately in this regard that you might share with the readership?

SK: Oh, ouch. Well, the idea that I'm working with, Frank, is that what you're really trying to learn when you're learning music, the part of it that's happening at the listener's end that you actually get to put your hands on on the guitar in terms of pitch is the resonance of each of those intervals by themselves, just learning the resonance of those intervals and trying to feel what they make you feel like. But--how do you say this? I've gotta say this right.

PM: Okay.

SK: The entire time I've been playing and trying to learn, I went through a period--and you were around for part of this period--where I was very much focused on trying to play the guitar, just to wiggle my fingers, getting around on the thing, you know?

PM: Right.

SK: It occurred to me not long after that that I wasn't actually doing anything--that there was no actual connection between any way that I wiggled and what anybody necessarily felt, and I was just wiggling. I think the stuff that actually was sticking was when you'd get to someplace and you would have some interval to the tonic that was right, that was interesting. Billy would do it on the slide and you would do it with your voice and I would do it for milliseconds on any note that I played. So I've gotten to this place where I just take each interval and try and internalize the resonance of it. Just really, really listen to and tune with perfectly and sing it and play it and try and hear it and try and hear all of its component harmonics together, and then add intervals to those, and try and find ways to play them on the guitar, fretted or not. I started going back and relearning the actual resonance of all the possible intervals--and to recognize each one of them as a discrete feeling state. Then every day, to sing and play a little bit to see where you're at with how you're feeling those intervals and then presenting them. I think it's putting me a little

closer to playing--not playing but just finding my way in that music, the same way that the listener finds themselves in it. Trying to play from the listener's perspective.

PM: Right. Not worrying about wiggling your fingers.

SK: Yeah, 'cause it's not finger wiggling and it's not music chords. It's not notation. It's some tactile triggering of emotion. It's those emotional states. You feel something in music, and you wanna play from those states, but it's not enough simply to be drunk and lonely and play, you know what I mean? That's kind of an accent or a color.

PM: Yeah.

SK: I don't know if that's any way to present musically a succession of feeling states that makes some sense. That's what I'm trying to do.

PM: Metaphysically, those intervallic resonances have profound effects on people's psyches. If they didn't, they wouldn't use tri-tones for police sirens and so forth. [Imitates a German police siren.]

SK: It's all really fascinating stuff. At this point, I'm just in the concept and the thinking of it. If there's been any recent direction beyond the trying to maintain and refine that idea that you're working every day with sort of calibrating your own emotional center to the feeling state that you perceive in the music, so at least you know where *you're* at--what little theoretical accompaniment there is to that has been going back as far as I can, just trying to learn some more about how some of these archetypical polarities in our shared consciousness has been reflected in music. This stuff didn't just show up. All of these very human sounds and organization of sound and stuff have been with us since pre-history.

PM: Right.

SK: Obviously, that's just part of what we do just as a species--our little human birdsong thing--pentatonic scales [laughs]--that's what we do. We make those sounds. These days, the modern thing with knowledge is that it's super specialized. Everybody's got a specialty. People that specialize in just this organ at this stage of development with this specific disease, or we specialize in this specific musical period and we're just super specialized. As you go back in time, the knowledge becomes more general. At some point, all that general knowledge was just stories or myth or something as it emerges from pre-history into recognizable disciplines and sciences. Even back in the day, if you were doing music, you were necessarily doing astronomy.

PM: [laughs]

SK: Now, if you're doing music, you're doing all the counterpoint. [laughs] It's like, well, what's that gotta do with music? Well, it's part of this music, but how is that part of

anything else? It's just this one specialized study. So I'm going back and looking at some kind of odd stuff. The Sumerians had an interesting take on it.

PM: I love that some people who are in the public eye and considered some niche of popular music are looking at these things so that popular music and guitar music continues to incorporate concepts that run a little bit deeper and run somewhat far afield of wiggling one's fingers.

SK: I think the stuff is all in there, and will continue to all be in there naturally. I think that there's an over-specialization in the study of music these days, with a tremendous understatement. The stuff that gets studied as being important to music is *so* super narrow and specific, and this is so much that I don't even know where to start. Here's where the good work's getting done, I think, right now. Right now there's good work going on in the whole general field of psychoacoustics--how the brain processes music. A couple of good books--*This is Your Brain on Music,* have you ever read that? That's good. Let's see, do I have a copy here? Daniel J. Levitan. Great book. Oliver Sachs' book called *Musicophilia*--

PM: He is an amazing fellow.

SK: Amazing stuff. I think that's important stuff. I think that there are potentially some advances coming in the field of intonation generally, partly by way of synthesized music, although that hasn't really worked its way into the pop thing yet, where it's actually gotten worse by using pitch correction on the vocals to twelve-tone and shit like that. [laughs]

PM: Exactly.

SK: Oh, no! It's backwards.

PM: De-tune, de-tune. [laughs]

SK: Good grief. On the way home from that gig where Johnny opened up, I got out *Astral Weeks*. [Van Morrison's Warner Bros. 1968 debut--although MOJO in 1995 listed it #2 in 100 Greatest Albums and Rolling Stone #19 in 2003's The 500 Greatest Albums Of All Time, it took over 30 years to go gold.] I'm riding in the car and I'm listening to *Astral Weeks*, and it's insane. This shit is like, everybody in that entire session is tuned to some totally different thing. It's got a string section on the entire record which is basically--I can't even imagine how this came about. It was like, I'm only playing two chords, and I've got four strings. It was like, oh, well. The cellos and the violas or something like that--you guys just play the third and the fifth or something, and then the violins, just jam. [laughs] Got a string section on there, and it's just--play whatever you want. It's in between a couple of acoustic guitars and the vocal and the upright bass and some horns.

PM: And after all these years, it still sounds so amazing.

SK: Holy good grief! This is some really experimental shit. [laughs] It's really a very avant-garde record. When you go back and listen to it, you go, oh, this is some cat who completely got the whole kind of beat poetry kind of thing, but he's just some drunken Irishman or whatever he is, and he only knows two chords. He's completely getting the jazz thing. I mean, completely getting it, just on a beautiful level, and presenting it harmonically with a one chord and a four chord--okay, we're done--and making up the difference by seeing the entire thing uses ten thousand pitches randomly. [laughs] It's so cool.

PM: It's really so much about the spirit of the enterprise, which is the ingredient that gets left behind on so many records today. It's like--what do you mean, the spirit of the enterprise? It's like--well, that's the thing, actually, my friend. [laughs]

SK: Exactly.

PM: What about this last run of SKF dates on the west coast that included Billy in a lot of these songs?

SK: That was a riot. So much fun.

PM: How were the crowds? How was the lineup received?

SK: It was a North Coast kind of scene, which I love.

PM: Oh, yeah. It's a beautiful thing.

SK: The band was very well received, and it was just a whole lot of fun to play. It was a great bunch of cats. Hutch Hutchison on the bass [from Bonnie Raitt's band, currently, though Hutch has played with many greats].

PM: Billy said he's just an amazing dude as well as a great musician.

SK: Those guys have so much fun. It was a great bunch of guys--and Melvin on keys, who is amazing.

PM: What kind of a guy is Melvin Seals? I've never met him, actually.

SK: He's just a great big friendly, sweet, very mild-mannered, soft spoken, very unassuming kind of cat. He'll kind of sit down and you work on the stuff and he'll kind of pad through, and like--I'd better listen to that again. He's not hopping up there going, "Oh, let's just change this to this. Let me go back and do this again." He just sort of sits there and takes it in. He kind of doesn't do anything, and then you get him on the gig, and it's like--oh!

PM: I didn't know you were gonna do like that. [laughs]

SK: He just does the spookiest stuff. It's so cool. He makes sounds on organ that I just don't hear anybody else making. He'll play some very beautiful and funky--very churchy stuff, and then there will be some really nice out kind of harmony stuff, and then the whole thing will end with this sound like the wind blowing through the midnight graveyard trees kind of thing.

PM: Wow.

SK: He really paints some beautiful pictures. Where the rubber meets the road, man, this cat is *down*. It's beautiful. Anyway, it was big fun. I'm gonna try and do some more of that at some point with Billy, although I don't know the rest of the lineup. Billy and I are both kind of keen on the idea of playing some rock and roll on the guitars, which would be fun, because there are honest-to-god three-chord rock bands, you know, but as many of them as there are, there's just not enough of them.

PM: And there's not enough good ones, I know that.

SK: At some point, we'll do a little bit of that. You know the cool thing that Billy did on this trip? He didn't do enough of it, but he'd get up there in the middle of some of those jams on the slide and just stick his little foot in.

PM: Right.

SK: We got some really cool weaving spaces with the two guitars going and we just sort of held it up there in some equilibrium or something. It wasn't so much about what was being played as the density and the give-and-take of it. It's just rewarding. That was a lot of fun.

PM: Now there are some European dates coming up, right? Duo dates.

SK: Yeah. We're gonna go and attack the continent. [laughs]

PM: Have you done much continental playing yet?

SK: No. Mostly none. I've been over a couple of times visiting and stuff, 'cause my lovely wife Jen is a Swiss citizen also, and has family back there.

PM: Oh, yeah.

SK: We go back once a year, for the last couple years at least--visit and hang out. I love it over there. Switzerland, Italy, southern Germany.

PM: Have you ever seen Ken Zuckerman when you were over there? [A great Indian musician who's from America, one of our oldest friends.]

SK: No. Last time I saw him, he was here.

PM: He came to the house.

SK: Yeah. He had a brand new Sarod, and he was gonna try it out on me--long 26" scale throat and I was trying it out.

PM: Wow. Well, it's great to get up with you. We don't get to talk enough. Sometimes it's even something like this that'll get us on the phone, but it's always great to connect. I like the record a lot and I'm just glad to see it going around, that I'm actually working on some material now that maybe we'll kick down the road together and it may show up in future gigs. I'm working on a song today called "Save it For a Rainy Day" that really has the Goodman Brothers/Kimock thing all over it, and that's what it's about.

SK: Hey, man, there's definitely not enough Monkey Brothers stuff out there. Listen, I know you're writing other stuff these days, but I just want to make this clear. You can always write in that direction and do something with it. That whole thing is never lost to us. When you think of placing stuff--I just don't want you to ever think that there's not ways to go. "Oh, I have an idea for this, but I don't know where to place it."

PM: Yeah.

SK: We can always do the Monkey Brothers bag [another name for The Goodman Brothers], play our guitars and stick a mike in front of it, and get it out there, 'cause it's stuff that we can do I'm sure that nobody else can do.

PM: Okay, well let's write some songs for a band, see where that goes. Before long--in Nashville or in PA or somewhere--we'll do some recording our own selves of jazz and rock and roll and god knows what.

SK: I'm not afraid, Frank. [laughs]

PM: Oh, I know! [laughs]

SK: Very good.

PM: Take care, Steve.

continue to interview with Billy Goodman

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Puremusic: With all the interviews I've done for this webzine of ours, I run into all these strange situations, but I didn't anticipate that one of them would be interviewing my brother. But here we are.

Billy Goodman: Indeed.

PM: On the splendid occasion of you reuniting with our old friend and hippie guitar god Steve Kimock, a very interesting occasion. So I'll ask you some of the same questions I asked him, beginning with this one: what had you been doing previous to this encounter with Steve, and how did this recent musical chapter with Steve come about?

BG: Well, I was walkin' hard, baby.

PM: [laughs]

BG: I saw this movie *Walk Hard* last night [laughs]--you gotta see this thing, man. Oh, it's food for musicians. You can't take anything seriously after you watch this movie.

PM: That John C. Reilley is a very funny dude.

BG: I tell you, the guy's amazing in this movie, and he's just a great actor.

What was I doing? I was doing my normal thing over in Europe, trying to get gigs at culture centers, and I was working on a batch of songs. I had wanted to do a record, and when I had the chance to go to Florida for Christmas--

PM: Right, the dysfunctional family Christmas.

BG: --I called Steve in the hopes that he would be able to maybe demo up some songs with me, because I think the way that he sounds on the guitar--anything he plays is gonna make your song sound better. He had a little time, so I went up and saw him. That's what I was doing, and how this chapter started to come about.

PM: Right. And so when you got there--I forget--was the original intention to start doing some playing and recording with his son Johnny and then bring Steve into the mix, or was it Steve from the top? I forget how it went.

BG: Well, I had heard Johnny [Kimock's drummer son, John Morgan] and [bassist] Peter Fritz play when I was in California in October. I wanted to try playing in a band with those guys because they were so young and they sounded so good. But the real reason I went to Steve's was very casual--just to visit him and play a few songs. You know, John was in the back of my mind, but really I needed to see what these songs sounded like with Steve Kimock playing on them.

PM: Right. So it's different, obviously, to play continuously with someone for a long time, and quite a different one to play with them intermittently, or in this case, even very occasionally with someone you've known in a musical way for such a long time. What was it like, then? How did it turn out playing with Steve again? Was it like it used to be, or a different kind of thing?

BG: No, it was as if we had just left off the day before, like playing with a family member.

PM: Like no time had passed.

BG: Like no time at all.

PM: It's really strange, isn't it? Now, interestingly enough, it's his son, John Morgan, whom we first knew as an infant, that's playing drums. What's that like, and what's his musical personality and contribution like?

BG: Well, Johnny's a really thoughtful young man and very serious about what he does. When you're playing with Johnny, he takes it really seriously. It's hard for me to judge any drummer as the session is going down. I have to listen back to the tapes or watch the videos in order to get a really good perspective of what's happening with the drums. I was always really surprised at how excellently John always played when you listen back to him.

PM: Yeah, because it's confusing, in real time.

BG: It was as if you were playing with a guy that had been playing the drums throughout the 60s or 70s--an old-school drummer. Really just a great musician overall. He really listens to the songs, Johnny does.

PM: Yeah, and with a dad like that, you kind of inevitably take it seriously, I think. We recall what Steve was like. [laughs] He took things very seriously as well.

BG: Yeah, well those are hard shoes to fill. I think Johnny tries his best, right.

PM: Well, let's talk specifically about the record that kind of sprung up organically during the early proceedings that turned into this disc called *The Red Barn Sessions,* which is a very good disc. How did that come about, the record specifically? How'd it get laid down and seen through to the end?

BG: The day that I showed up at Steve's house, he had a friend come over with a laptop and some microphones because he knew that I wanted to record the songs if at all possible, because he just knows that's my style.

PM: Right.

BG: I went up--recorded fifteen songs with Steve in duo, and he said he really liked them, but he wanted to go back and take a pass at them with the band. So we ended up using basically half and half, you know--duo, trio, and full band.

PM: Right.

BG: Well, that's not half, is it... [laughs]

PM: But it was just a guy showing up with what--a laptop with Protools on it and a couple of mikes?

BG: Yeah. He showed up with a laptop, some German music software that I've never heard of--yeah, no real equipment to speak of, just a couple of microphones.

PM: Yeah. Was it Steinberg or Nuendo or Cubase or one of those things, or something else?

BG: Soundscape or something.

PM: So then when you got the recordings done with the duo, the trio or whatever, and a band, then what did it take to get product out? Who was in charge of getting the rest of it done?

BG: Dave Morrison brought the equipment over, Brian Abramson ran it when the band was there, and then Brian and I mixed it up at his house without any outboard gear.

PM: No real effects or anything.

BG: No effects.

PM: Right.

BG: We had some effects in the software, but I didn't know the software, so I didn't dare go in and start messing around with it. We used a very minimal amount of effects that were in the software. It was just the bare tracks. No effects, no compression, no mastering, no nothing.

PM: That's a nice change of pace.

I really do like that opening song that I ended up getting on, "Johnny Anonymous." That's a very anthem-like song. What's the story behind the song?

BG: Well, I had the pleasure of meeting Johnny Thunders before he died. He came to see me play in New York. He was a really complicated kind of--let me rephrase that--he was an interesting guy. [laughs] Very deep, good sense of humor, didn't take himself seriously. But he was a real legend in New York City. I didn't know that when I met him. We ended up hanging out. He had a little problem that I tried to help him out with, and he died in New Orleans before we could finish a song called " Johnny Anonymous." So, many years later, I was able to finish this song, and it's kind of like my story about Johnny--my time with Johnny.

What happened was--Johnny was a career heroin addict. I got him down to a rehab in Baltimore that a friend of mine knew about. A friend of a friend. I took Johnny down on the train. I mean, a lot of people dispute this, but I was there.

PM: Right.

BG: I took him down on the train. We put him in this place in Baltimore where this friend--an ex-Green Beret--ran the rehab. Johnny did get clean, and he stayed clean for, I think, about a month. Then he called me up one night and said, "Listen, I just want to thank you a lot for helping me out, but I don't think this is gonna work out for me, this sobriety thing."

PM: Wow.

BG: He said, "You know, I just don't think I can make it. But you were the one guy that I really liked, hanging around these type of people, and I just wanted to thank you." I said, "Well, what's up? You sound like you're saying goodbye or something." He goes, "Well, I've gotta go to Tokyo. I've gotta do some shows over there. When I get back though, if you want, we can finish up this song I've been working on called 'Johnny Anonymous.'"

PM: Unbelievable.

BG: He went to Tokyo, and before he came back to New York, he made some kind of stop over in New Orleans. They said he laid his guitars and red suit down on the bed and overdosed.

PM: Wow, and all that stuff ended up in the verses of the song.

BG: Oh, yeah.

PM: That's amazing. Yeah, and although you and I won't name any names, you and I both know that he's not the only famous musician you helped into the rooms, but that's another story.

So before this scenario developed stateside, we ought to tell the readership the likes of what you've been up to in recent years in Europe, 'cause a lot of singer/songwriters who read Puremusic, or the fans of that kind of music, don't really have much of a picture of what it's like to be an American singer/songwriter in Europe. How has it been for you, and what's your picture of it?

BG: Well, I'd always heard stories about Big Bill Broonzy and other blues musicians making it in maybe the Paris scene or the Europe scene--sounded cool to me, you know? It was pretty hard to make a living here playing folk blues, which was basically what I really do--folk blues and singer/songwriter music. I knew a guy in Philadelphia, Jerry Ricks--who just recently passed away.

PM: Really? He passed away?

BG: Yeah. He said, "Go over to Germany and get yourself a blues chick." [laughs] I thought that was pretty funny. I knew two people in Europe--a girl in France and a Deadhead in Heidelberg. I went over with $75 and a Stratocaster and it didn't work out for me in France, but I ended up staying in Heidelberg with this Deadhead, Norbert. It's a hard scene to break into, the European scene. My experience was, you had to leave your happy home, go there, live there, start out playing in people's backyards, at barbecues. One thing leads to another, you get your first gig. If you're good, the word of mouth gets out--another person hires you. The Germans are good people to play for because they're thoughtful and they're consistent. They'll pay you at the end of the night, which is important. [laughs]

PM: Yeah.

BG: They're culture vultures in Germany. Germany, Austria and Switzerland--this is the best place for making money doing the gigs, I think. France and Italy are more interesting, perhaps, but trickier getting in and out, getting your money.

PM: Yeah, because the French and the Italian, to say it in a certain way, they're more self-focused. The Germans, the Swiss are more like other-focused--what do you got? We're interested in the culture of it. The French and the Italian people are more interested in their own cultures.

BG: The French and the Italians think they're doing you a favor by hiring you. [laughs] The Germans have the opposite approach.

PM: That's really interesting.

BG: But the lifestyle in France and Italy is so--what can you say--

PM: They know how to live.

BG: They know how to live, man.

PM: So would you say that this rash of recording and touring with Kimock has you thinking about returning to your homeland on a more permanent basis, or will you be going back and forth from Europe to the States, or what's the plan?

BG: Well, like yourself, I was able to get an Irish passport by having an Irish grandparent. I'm lucky enough to have two passports--American and Irish--and no, I really like Europe. I like the style of living there, so I won't give up residence in Europe, but I will probably come over to America more now because you can get lost in the Europe thing and you kind of lose your presence in America. I'm planning on kind of a half-and-half thing.

PM: Some of the Nashville songwriter types, friends of mine, have got a little scene rolling--I don't know how lucrative it is--in Scandinavia. Have you checked that out much yet, or do you plan to?

BG: I've played in Denmark and Finland and Sweden. It's just a damn long way away from Heidelberg, Germany.

PM: It is. I don't think a lot of people have a sense of that. How far is it by train, for instance?

BG: You've gotta fly to Scandinavia. It's just too damn far to drive, or train effectively. But the Scandinavians have a good economy and it's a really great scene. It can be pretty spread-out in Sweden, for instance, but it's a real good scene in Scandinavia. I really wanna get up there more in the summer months. It's not an easy scene to break into, but it's doable.

PM: Now, where do they fit in culturally? Are they more like the Germans--that is, very interested in what you've got to offer? Or more like the Italians and the French that are more interested in just their lifestyle and their music, and you're kind of there at their whim?

BG: I see the Scandinavians more like Americans. They're easy-going and they seem to have a better idea of what's happening in America than the other countries in Europe, if you ask me.

PM: And they're so responsible for so much of the pop music scene and also the software that's coming out. Sweden and Denmark are very in on the drum software, the recording software, and just very cutting edge rock and roll-wise.

BG: You know, they say there are seven million people in Sweden and seven million bands or something like that. [laughs]

PM: Right, exactly.

BG: Plus, they all speak English up there.

PM: Right. I've been sounding to myself like I'm knocking the French, but that's not really what I mean at all, because they do have a lot of interesting music of their own. It's just that when you and I played in Germany, we would often see a room full of people staring at us like we were from another planet, with interest.

BG: France and Italy have got it going on so hard. They're at it too--they don't need anything. They've got it all. But they are socked away there in the European continent and they love American music, whereas the Scandinavians, they don't have the food culture and the slow lifestyle--nor do the Germans--that you find in France and Italy. I

love France and Italy. I would love to get to play there more. It's just harder to make good money.

PM: Right. Speaking of money, how was this run--you did a run with Steve Kimock and friends on the west coast. How many dates did you play out there? How were the shows and how was it received and all that?

BG: It was a small northern California tour. I think it was only five shows, but they were all basically full. I was treated exceptionally well by the Kimock family. Got to play a lot, got to sing a lot, made good bread. That was a small dream come true for me, because I was playing with Hutch Hutchinson from Bonnie Raitt's band, who I'd heard a lot about.

PM: Yeah, great bass player.

BG: He was just an absolutely great guy--amazing player. The cat on the keyboards, Melvin Seals, had been playing with Jerry Garcia for years, I think he was the longest standing member in the Jerry Garcia band. He was from another planet on the B3. Such a sweet guy. Johnny on the drums, Steve Kimock on guitar--I mean, that was just an absolutely perfect situation for me.

PM: It's a really different kind of a line-up, right? Some of the other members are more, let's say, predictable. But to have a singer/songwriter in the middle of the Steve Kimock and Friends ensemble, that's kind of a new look for that group, right?

BG: Well, the Steve Kimock and Friends project is what Steve calls "between movies" for him. He was thinking more in terms of playing songs. Steve's a big lover of pop music, along with his improvisational background. I know he's a big Beatles fan and a big Crosby Stills Nash and Young fan. So we did our little version of that, and I think he liked it a lot. We played a lot of three-chord rock and roll. We played "Jigsaw Puzzle" by the Rolling Stones, "Slow Down" by the Beatles. We did the whole record that we had made in the barn, and then Steve also did his extended original songs, so everybody got a little of what they wanted, I think.

PM: I was glad that you and I got together on a few of the songs that ended up on these Red Barn sessions, but let's say something about your other co-writers on this record. Who else had songs on that record, or contributed to songs on that record?

BG: A good singer/songwriter up in Berlin, Christoph Deschner--he wrote the bridge for "Part of You." A poet friend of mine from Nashville who's in his mid-sixties, Lou Symoens, wrote some of the lyrics in "Part of You"--

PM: Really? A guy from Nashville?

BG: Well, from Lebanon.

PM: Oh, wow.

BG: Yeah. Lou helped me get back on my feet when I was having a little trouble, and I wanted to pull him in, in the songwriting scene, as kind of a like way to pay him back for the help he gave me. I continue to write lyrics with him. George Chavles down in Miami was a punk rock guitar player in the 80s. He helped me with the music on "Johnny Anonymous." Thomm Jutz, my old buddy from the Black Forest--who lives in Nashville now--co-wrote two songs with me on the record. Besides yourself, I think that's it for the co-writers on the record.

PM: Yeah, well, I was glad that you and I got to write some stuff on that. That was a lot of fun. What comes up next? Are you gonna do more stuff with Kimock? What's on the agenda?

BG: There's some talk about putting a band together again for some dates into autumn. I know Hutch said he had a little time. I'm hoping that that will happen. I look forward to doing some more show dates with Steve in America. We have a small tour booked in southern Germany and Switzerland the last half of May--

PM: Duo tour, right?

BG: Yeah--the Deadheads in the Germany and Swiss scenes helped us put that together. Basically I'm a one-trick pony. For me it's about just writing another fifteen songs, making another new record, and just trying to go out there and play them, pay the bills, rinse and repeat.

PM: Indeed. Well, let's try and write some new songs for this new project and this band type project coming up, and see if we can get that on stage and on record.

BG: Steve loves to play blues and rock and roll, and does it better than anyone I ever heard [laughs], so there's some talk about that.

PM: Well, thanks, Bill. That was fun. Like I said, I never thought I'd be interviewing my brother for PureMusic. But you know, on the occasion of this great record with Steve Kimock--and I'm sure his fans and your fans, too, will pick up on this record and enjoy the hell out of it. I certainly did.

BG: Thanks a lot, Frank. Thanks for the call. Just keep walkin' hard, all right? [laughs]

PM: [laughs] That's right. Alright, brother, catch you later.