

# TERRY SCOTT TAYLOR

stickers on the sun

GREATER THAN MAGAZINE EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW  
by Carl S. Johnson

**SORRY TO GET ALL "HORRENDOUS DISC" ON YOU, BUT YOU SAID THIS IN 1980: "I CAN'T LISTEN TO MOST CHRISTIAN MUSIC. IT'S SO SIMPLISTIC AND OFTEN JUST DOESN'T RING TRUE. WHILE THEY MAY BE SINGING ABOUT WHAT'S TRUE, IT DOESN'T REALLY HAVE ANY RELEVANCE TO THE PERSON WHO HASN'T ENCOUNTERED CHRIST. THE CHURCH ACCEPTS IT BECAUSE IT UTILIZES A CHRISTIAN VOCABULARY, SAYING THINGS THAT ARE SUPPOSED TO BE SAID IN CHRISTIAN MUSIC. BUT THAT DOESN'T SPEAK TO THE AVERAGE PERSON WHO LISTENS TO ROCK MUSIC." HAVE THINGS CHANGED OVER 30 YEARS, OR ARE YOU STILL SEEING THE SAME THINGS?**

Well, I don't really listen to Christian music. I am aware that in the last couple years there has been a musical movement in Christian music to do worship music. That's a trend like anything in Christian music, that started out as something pure and then business got involved with it. And I think muddied the waters a little bit. Although I'm not really into that scene, I do think there is some valid stuff going on there. So I don't keep up with it very much.

**YOU MENTIONED WORSHIP MUSIC. WHAT I FIND INTERESTING IS THAT AT A LOST DOGS SHOW, THERE SEEM TO BE MORE WORSHIPFUL MOMENTS TO ME - THAN SAY AT A POLISHED WORSHIP CONCERT. AND IT'S NOT SOMETHING EXPECTED. DO YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN?**

That's the irony, isn't it? With both my solo music and with the Dogs, I've recognized those moments. I've sensed the presence of God in concerts and the connection of hearts in a common acknowledgment of our struggles. There is something obviously very spiritual happening. And it's not pre-planned. Within the context of the music and what's being said - this transparency, the connection with our common experience of faith and trust - there are those transcendent moments. A sense of worship, but not in the standard sense of it. It's something beyond us. And that excites me. I live for those moments.

**CHARLIE PEACOCK WROTE AN INTERESTING ARTICLE LAST YEAR ABOUT THE FUTURE OF CCM. SOMETHING HE SAID STOOD OUT TO ME: "IRONICALLY, LARRY NORMAN, BOB DYLAN AND U2 WILL BE REMEMBERED AS THE BEST OF CHRISTIAN MUSIC CREATED DURING THE "CCM" ERA."**

That's interesting. I respect Charlie, but I think that's fairly subjective. I depends on who you're talking to. I would say that the fans and supporters of our music (Dogs, DA, The Choir, 77's) would probably disagree. I think it's very individual and that's where it gets fuzzy. You know, what is Christian music? That is the subject of a world view. When it comes to Christian music, what are you really thinking of? That's a long discussion...

**ONE OF MY FAVORITE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD IS THAT HE IS CREATOR. YOU'VE STRESSED OVER THE YEARS THAT WE NEED TO BE CAPTURING & EXPRESSING THAT DIVINE CREATIVITY. YOUR WORK IS PROOF THAT YOU ENJOY THE CREATIVE PROCESS. HOW ARE WE DOING?**

Well, I can only speak for myself. I feel outside of Christian music. Obviously, I thrive in the creative atmosphere. I love nothing more than being in the studio with my friends making music. I've had a particular standard, a honing of my own craft, and I think I've gotten better at it. I would like to see more people in the faith creating music that is whimsical, that has an impact on the individual, that's real, that is not cliché-driven, or stereotypical. Music that explores what David did in the Psalms, where you're not just talking about the positive and victorious life. You're willing to grapple with some of the darker aspects of the faith. When you begin to do that, what happens is a certain disconnect from the Christian community. This is something that many people don't want to face. I've spend my whole career believing that God is in the creative process. Just in creating we are reflecting Christ.

Here's a story. We were in the Rijks museum in Amsterdam doing a tour over in Europe. There's a huge painting by Rembrandt called "The Night Watch" I believe. Rembrandt would do his religious paintings, but like a musician who also has to go flip hamburgers to pay his bills, he would do these portraits of local town councilmen. That's what this painting is. Nothing religious about it at all. But the story goes that the first man who entered the museum and saw this painting fell to his knees and began to worship God. That story has always resonated with me. In the mere act of creating we are reflecting the image of God. I forget who it was that said that "Art needs no justification." There is this idea that's been around for a long time in the Christian community - in order to justify art it has to have a utilitarian, obvious message to it. It would be like God deciding that aside from creating the sun, he had to put a sticker on it that says "And Jesus loves you." I feel like when I'm in the studio with my brothers, that God is with us in that. From there, you get into the particulars of the song.

**I REALLY ENJOYED THE ARTICLE YOU WROTE ABOUT JOHN LENNON FOR HM MAGAZINE SHORTLY AFTER 9/11. I OFTEN WONDER WHO LENNON WOULD BE COLLABORATING WITH THESE DAYS, AND WHAT TYPE OF ARTIST HE WOULD BE IN HIS 60'S.**

Oh, it would be interesting, wouldn't it? Yeah, what a loss. I've heard some strange stories about Lennon getting a hold of Oral Roberts, but who knows. He had a fist up towards God but he wanted the truth. He was obviously a real influence in my life. When the Beatles came out it just opened things up for me. And John was the guy. When I was kid it was Motown and the British Invasion, and when I became a Christian it was like, "Ok, what do I do with this?" If I start expressing my faith in these songs, where do I take that? The first Christian record I heard was Love Song. That resonated with me because that was a band, and at the time they actually had production values. There were Beach Boys and Beatles influences. And that turned a light on for me.





SHOTGUN ANGELS - 1978



STREET LEVEL MUSIC



LOST DOGS - 1996

**“MIKE AND I WERE TALKING ABOUT THIS LAST NIGHT. HE SAID THAT CHRIST CONTINUES TO COMPEL HIM.”**

**YOU’VE HAD YOUR SHARE OF CLOSE PERSONAL LOSS, I’M THINKING OF GENE EUGENE. HOW OFTEN DO YOU STILL FEEL THAT LOSS AND FIND YOURSELF THINKING ABOUT HIM?**

I think about him often. As a matter of fact, I was listening to one of the Dogs records last week, trying to remember a song that we were thinking about including in the set. But every time I hear that voice it just cuts me to the quick. The soul of that voice. Of course it brings back a lot of memories and that time in which it was recorded. I remember that Gene worked really hard and Gene didn’t sleep much. He was in the studio constantly. I saw my friend often and thought he needs to slow down, he’s doing too much. Because he loved the artists that come into his studio. He cared for them. And in a way, he gave too much of himself. He couldn’t spread the duties around, he sort of had to do it himself because he felt this passion. When I would see that, I would really bother me. The times when I really saw him happy was when the Dogs were gonna do a record. Our routine, our tradition was Mike would come into the airport, I would pick him up and drive back to the Green Room. We would all go out for breakfast and catch up on stories and talk about the record. I remember the light on Gene’s face, that impish grin, you know? He was absorbing all this, taking it in. So, when I hear that voice, it conjures up all those memories. There’s a melancholy to it. It was such a shocking loss. I never thought I would get over it, but I can look back now. When it happens, you don’t think there will come a time when you’ll be able to smile again, but it happens. There’s that little see-saw of being very sad, but also being able to recall all the great times.

**WERE YOU CLOSE TO MARK HEARD AT ALL?**

I wasn’t close to Mark...he was a friend, but we didn’t work that much together. I remember Mark indicating to someone that when he heard the Swirling Eddies record -

**(INTERRUPTS) - THAT HE FELL DOWN ON HIS KNEES AND WORSHIPPED GOD?**

(Laughter) Right. Yes, you stole my thunder! No, that he wanted to be in the band. I heard that before he passed and I thought that’s a great idea. I should call Mark and have him join the band. The thing I remember most of all was that he was probably one of the funniest people on the face of the earth. He would have me crying tears. He did an imitation of Billy Graham that floored me. (laughter) I greatly respected Mark. He was one of the first people I met at Solid Rock. That’s when he was sort of into his James Taylor phase, which was pretty early on. But then he evolved so quickly and found his own voice. I always admired his creativity and enjoyed the time I was around him.

**YOU’VE EXPRESSED BEFORE THAT FLANNERY O’CONNOR IS AN INFLUENCE ON YOUR SONGWRITING. WHY IS THAT?**

I’m a reader, and you have these different people that have inspired you in your life, and it gets absorbed in the brain. It

comes out in various ways, and sometimes you’re not even aware of it. Flannery’s stuff just intrigues me. She was a strong woman of faith, and I’m intrigued by her approach to the gospel. The use of shock and violence to bring about that moment of transcendence in her writing...where the character suddenly has that moment of revelation. Usually it’s at death’s door that this happens. I like the style and the eccentricity of it.

**IT WOULD SEEM THAT YOU ARE NATURALLY DRAWN TO BROKEN CHARACTERS IN YOUR SONGS.**

I think you have to go there. You are compelled to tell the truth, and this is Flannery’s thing too. You take a character, and reveal that character in all his or her flaws. Brokenness, fear, anger... so that when the moment of redemption comes, it has weight. It rings true. That’s my problem with the Tim LaHaye thing, the end times deal. And I’ve only skimmed them, and from what I understand you have these cartoonish, pre-Christian characters that never cuss, etc. So when their moment of revelation comes - when they are born again, or see the light - it really doesn’t have any power. Because they felt like do-gooders in the first place. When I do a character study in a song, I see my tunes of having a dependency on one another. The arc of the narrative. I think as a writer, you need to speak the truth to the listener. Otherwise it doesn’t have resonance with them. I have a song called Capistrano Beach, that is a character study. It’s sort of dark and sad. But it’s people I’ve met in my life. It’s partly me. We all share that in our humanity...falling short.

When I did a song about my dad, I struggled so long...because I heard Christian songs about dads or moms that passed away. A lot of it was heartfelt, but shlocky, sentimental sort of stuff. Going for the tear ducts, you know? I thought when I wrote about my dad, that I needed to say something of the truth of the man. My struggle to be close to him in relationship. When people hear the song, they feel they’ve really visited that relationship. They understand there is a brokenness not just with the father, but with the son.

**ARE YOU REFERRING TO THE SONG PAPA DANCED ON OLVERA STREET, FROM THE AVOCADO FAULTLINE RECORD?**

Yes. My father was a man of very few words. He was somewhat shy, but also hostile towards social situations. He hated small talk. So going to Olvera Street in L.A. is a tradition of ours. It’s said to be the oldest street in Los Angeles, and the family has been going there for generations. It’s a mexican marketplace, and there’s a food stand on the corner. Cielito Lindo is where you get tacquitos. The thing you are looking for is this green sauce that you can’t get anywhere else. My dad loved to go there. We didn’t know it at the time, but we’d gone down there the last Fathers Day of his life. It was a beautiful day. There was a mariachi band playing in the distance. After he’d finished eating his tacquitos he stood up and did this little dance that I’d only seen him do a couple times in my life. It did it front of everyone, which was so uncharacteristic of him. People were laughing and applauding. I’d been thinking about writing a

song about him and wrestling with it. I wanted it to be true and not hurtful. That inspired Papa Danced on Olvera Street. I finally recorded it and sent it out to dad, and it floored him. I was so joyous in that I was able to give him that gift before he passed. Because after that he found out he had cancer. The story goes that on the last day he was on earth, someone had been playing Avocado Faultline. We were all gathered at my brothers house in Riverside. Hospice had come in. Dad had a struggle with the faith his whole life, but came around fully into his faith again, because of the encroaching end of his life. That was a catalyst for him to embrace Christ. He closed his eyes and spoke, "It's so beautiful" - which were words I'd never really heard my father speak before. So I knew he was seeing something beyond at that point. And he passed, and at that very moment we could hear in a distant room that song that I'd written for my father. I tell that story often in concert. I want people to know that even in those situations that God can make his presence known. There was much sadness, but also a sense of Christ being with us in that journey.

**YOU HAVE BEEN FORTUNATE TO HAVE BEEN SURROUNDED BY SUCH AMAZING TALENT THROUGH THE YEARS. IN WHAT WAYS HAVE THESE PEOPLE SHARPENED YOU AS AN ARTIST AND AS A PERSON?**

Getting back to Gene, I respected him so much as a musician. I would always get a little bit nervous when I was going to show Gene the songs I'd written for the Dogs. It was extremely important that Gene responded positively to what I had written. It's the same with all the guys. With Gene it was especially acute, and it always meant so much to me when he'd say, "Wow, that's really great." I've found with the Dogs, because of the high degree of standard and music ability, that it made me a better person and musician. Less lazy. I'm wired to write a lot of music. And I'm a person who likes deadlines. it doesn't freeze me up, it propels me. When we did Gift Horse, I probably wrote 10-12 songs. And it wound up that I wrote every song on that record. There was a little bit of a backlash, because fans of Mike or the

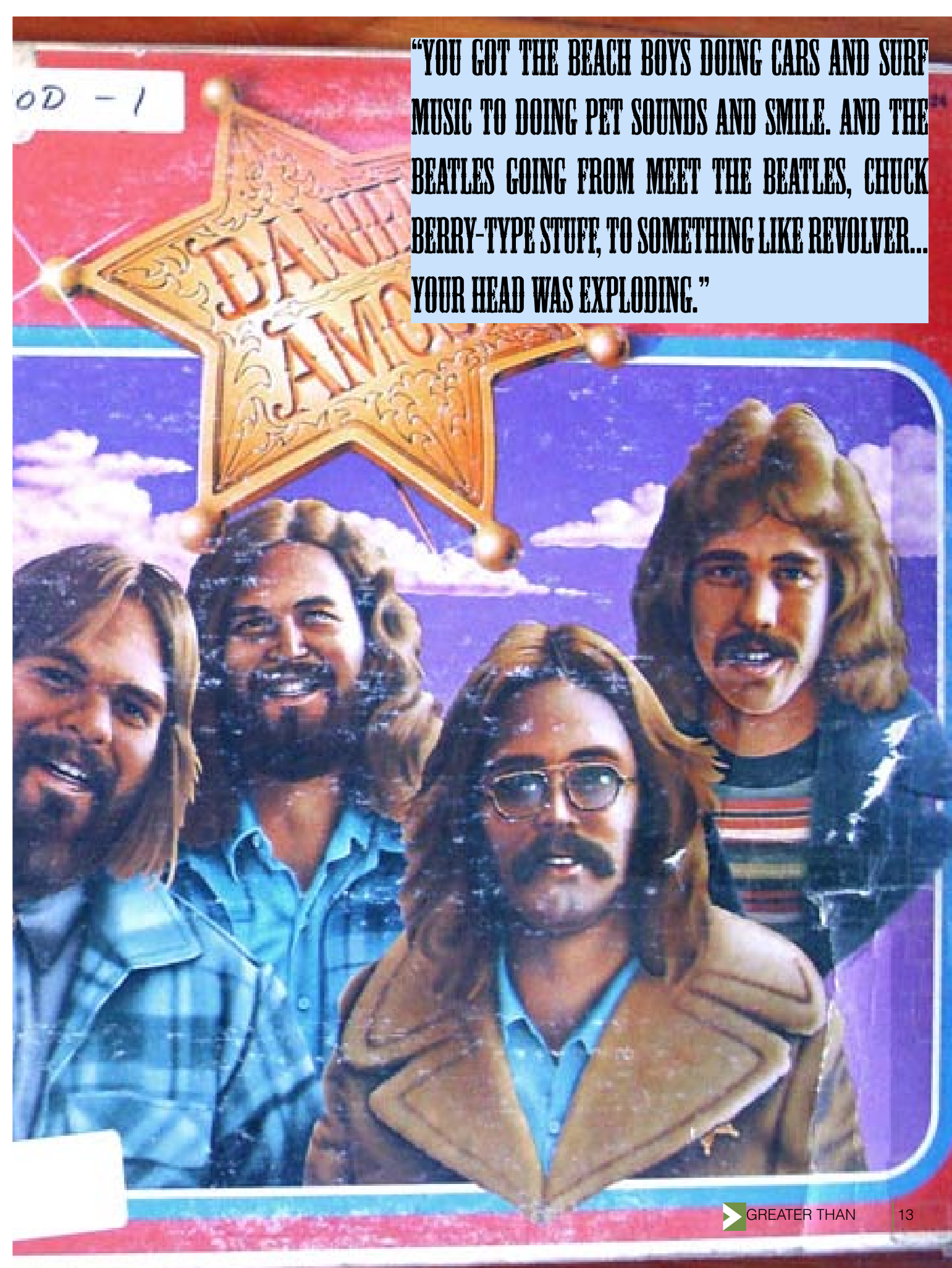
Choir were going, "Where are your songs?" It's a two-edged sword, when you have this assignment. But I was never one, even in the days of Daniel Amos, to discourage anybody from writing songs. But I'm one of those guys who catches the wave and rides it all the way in. I love writing.

**COULD RANDY STONEHILL EVER JOIN THE LOST DOGS IF HE WANTED TO? WOULD YOU GUYS LET HIM IN?**

(laughter) Well, we've thought about different people down through the years. I never say no to anything. Anythings possible in the future. When Gene passed, there was a time where may have thought, do we need another guy? There was sort of this sense of can we find our own musical legs in this situation? We've been through so much together. Can we find our place musically? And we struggled at first with the first couple of efforts. But I think now we've found our rhythm. We got through recording the entire record for Route 66. A whole range of songs. I think it's a beautiful piece of work. To answer your question, sure Randy could join the band. But right now, we're in that sweet spot.

**ROE SAID THAT LETTERS FROM FANS ARE WHAT KEEP HIM GOING WHEN HE WANTS TO GIVE UP - IS IT THE SAME FOR YOU?**

Oh, gosh yes. Mike is my go-to guy when I'm struggling, because I know he's under a similar weight. He has been immensely encouraging to me, and I hope I have been to him on some level. Just sharing our fears and being able to talk about it is encouraging in and of itself. He's so often given me incredible advice. And I have quit a couple times. I've resigned in my heart that I'm gonna sell the guitar and go work at Starbucks or something. I've had those moments, but here I am. I'm still doing it. The emails are great, but going on tour is the most encouraging thing. Because I'm actually able to meet these people face to face. I'm up there on stage sharing and telling stories about my life, but meeting people afterwards I'm hearing theirs. I got a recent email from someone who wants to



**"YOU GOT THE BEACH BOYS DOING CARS AND SURF MUSIC TO DOING PET SOUNDS AND SMILE. AND THE BEATLES GOING FROM MEET THE BEATLES, CHUCK BERRY-TYPE STUFF, TO SOMETHING LIKE REVOLVER... YOUR HEAD WAS EXPLODING."**





DANIEL AMOS - 1982



WITH SIR STONEHILL



THE DUDE RANCH - 1976

use of my songs for their father's funeral. These sort of things go deep, and sometimes that's all I have. And it seems as though the timing is perfect in those situations. Someone will come up with tears in their eyes and say "You don't know how much your music means to me." When that happens, it's a confirmation.

**WHAT'S BEEN THE BEST DECADE FOR POPULAR MUSIC...OR AT LEAST YOUR PERSONAL FAVORITE?**

It had to be the 60's. Because of the impact it had on my life. That was a moment where I said this is what I want to do with my life. Then around '77 or so, when disco was happening, it was like, where do I go for something that is inspiring again? That's when I found Talking Heads 77, Elvis Costello, Sex Pistols and some of the old excitement came back again. Here's somebody going against the grain. But there will never be another time in my life where I had that sense of wonder and thrill when Sgt. Pepper was in the window of the local record store. Or I got Rubber Soul for Christmas and for the rest of Christmas Day I'd go into my room, put that on, and listen to it over and over again. I don't think I'll ever have that thrill again. I get a little bit of it when I'm listening to Grizzly Bear, or Fleet Foxes or Flaming Lips or something like that. They get it and they're doing it and making beautiful music. It's only a shadow of the 60's when there were creative leaps and bounds. That thrilled me to no end, and I wanted to be part of that. My idea with DA at the very beginning was to do that - take people in different directions. Unfortunately, and mainly our fault, we got tagged as this country band. But it was never my intention. It was my intention to be the Beatles.

I think it was being surprised. I'm not surprised anymore. The idea of creative leaps and bounds. You got the Beach Boys doing cars and surf music to doing Pet Sounds and Smile. And the Beatles going from Meet the Beatles, Chuck Berry-type stuff, to something like Revolver...your head was exploding. Look what they did in such a short period of time, that sense of birthing that was going on. Evolving and coming up with things you haven't really heard before. When I hear stuff today, I can hear the influences. Ok, that relates back to something I heard back in '68, you know? I just got through listening to Fleet Foxes today; obviously there's some Brian Wilson stuff going on there. Some of these groups are rediscovering harmonies. There was a shying away from that as being too corny, and now it's come back. I've always loved harmonies.

**AT THE END OF THE DAY, WHAT KEEPS YOU HOLDING ONTO A PERSONAL FAITH?**

Mike and I were talking about this last night. He said that Christ continues to compel him. I don't know how you account for it. I don't know why some fall away. I personally had such an incredible initial encounter with Christ. In my spiritual life and in my mind's eye, I sort of built an altar at that place and in the memory of that moment. Sometimes that's the only thing I can come back to - that moment of revelation. But sometimes when

you have those dark nights of the soul, and I've had many of them, I have to go back to that place, the first encounter. In that there was a sense of someone speaking, saying "remember this moment." Those words have rung true to me over the years. That was real. That happened. That's truth, remember that.

**SO THAT HAS SUSTAINED YOU?**

It has been a refuge in times when I feel abandoned spiritually. But there are so many other elements to a sustaining of the faith. The thing with father and the song playing at the moment of his death. I call these holy coincidences that have resonated with me and kept me going. To be able to get on the phone with my friend Mike and have a conversation about our faith and our struggles; I see Christ in that. I see Christ in the people that have been moved by the music. I was reading Romans yesterday morning... and the power of Paul's words was like a slap across my face. Like a wake up thing - not in a bad way, but in a very joyous way. My family. My wife, who is a tender-hearted, loving, caring person who has a gentle faith about her. I see Christ in all of these things.



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