

**A Conversation with Elizabeth Cook**  
**By Frank Goodman (7/2005, Puremusic.com)**

I admit it, a lot of seemingly everyday things are mysteries to me. But as I became more aware of and then deeply into the music of Elizabeth Cook, a new mystery moved up the list. Namely, how can you take a singer this great, with tunes of this caliber, who looks this gorgeous, and not be able to put it in the hoop? In this particular case, all the factors mentioned are in the extreme, so it seems like criminal ineptitude.

It's not that simple, of course. Her 2002 big label (Warners) debut *Hey Y'all* didn't really see the exposure it was due, to understate the matter. It's all too easy to deduce that it was considered too traditional, or "too Country for Country" as it's come to be called around Music Row. On the other hand, Elizabeth's authentically traditional country sound endeared her to the Grand Ole Opry and its fans. To date, she has appeared over 100 times on the Opry, more than many huge stars of the genre.

I was fortunate enough to see her perform at a Billy Block show in town a while back, and was knocked out. Elizabeth's manager David Macias is a friend, and he took me upstairs to meet her. She's such a lovely and genuine person that it kind of bowls you over, you know what I mean. Her husband Tim Carroll was talking to a fan so I didn't get to hang with him, but he's also extremely talented, both as an artist in his own right and as her bandleader.

The brand new album, *This Side of the Moon*, has been in rotation at my house since I first heard it. "Cupid," the cute and clever opener (penned with Randy Scruggs), always makes me smile, check it out:

*I been thinking bout you baby  
and I don't know why  
all you ever do is make me cry cry cry  
but I'm missin all your kissin  
and I swear it's a dirty old doggone shame  
next time Cupid oughta take a little better aim*

*That fat naked baby with the arrow and bow  
has gotta be the worst marksman that I know  
I don't know why he chose you for me  
It's just been a lesson in misery...*

And that's the tip of the iceberg, the record is full of great tracks and fab songs. The deal is that Country has gotten so screwed up in recent years that when I hear a great hard Country record like this, or like the one by Robbie Fulks (also interviewed in this issue), I remember that I may hate a lot of Country radio but I love Country music.

We're enthused to bring you a conversation with the subtly effervescent Elizabeth Cook and invite you to check out her music on the Listen page. We're excited to see her teamed

up now with David Macias—he’s the kind of manager who will take a quality artist that the machine spit out and put what should be her brilliant career right on track.

**Puremusic:** I saw you recently. We were both eating breakfast at the Red Wagon, last week. Sorry I didn’t stop and say hello—Tim and I kind of waved—but I had just gotten some plywood sawdust in my eye that weekend, and had a terrible allergic reaction.

**Elizabeth Cook:** Oh, gosh. Especially when I go out to eat, around East Nashville, that happens to me a lot: I know or recognize a lot of people there—I know them from many contexts and different places, and I can’t keep them all straight. I’m just not that smart. [laughs] So, no big deal...

**PM:** [Her mgr. had mentioned that she was stopping over for an interview after her straight job, while he made her into a household name.] Now, because of your background and your education, are you coming from a straight gig in the accounting domain?

**EC:** That’s more or less what they’re using me for. It’s a one-of-a-kind department store, called Jamie. They carry Dolce and Gabbana and Gucci and similar lines—and it’s huge. A girl that I used to know at Warner Brothers knew I needed a job when I lost my publishing deal. And I was in between Europe trips and the like, and she said, “Hey, can you come up and help out on the computer?” Or, “The lady in shoes needs help on her computer.” So I went up there—I have a degree in that, so I went up and helped her, and she just sort of kept me on. I never really have officially been hired, but I’ve been there a year. And I get great discounts on designer clothes, and kind of breeze in and out in between gigs. It’s really been a blessing, a huge blessing for me. I love it.

**PM:** Do you care if I mention any of that, or?

**EC:** I don’t care—that’s real. That’s life.

**PM:** Exactly. That’s how I feel.

**EC:** And how this whole business has been going, it’s gotten so skewed, there’s the vastly rich and the vastly poor. And I’m the Music Row crack baby where these big corporations come in, and they pay you all this money and tie your career up in contracts, but then they don’t build your career to a point that when those contracts go away, you can’t segue into the next thing, and you just—you crash, financially.

**PM:** You sound pretty smart to me. [laughs]

**EC:** I mean, you don’t crash financially, necessarily. But if you’ve become accustomed to a certain lifestyle—which was nothing great, but I did have a cute little apartment in

Hillsboro Village, and I had a little used car, and I had health insurance, and I was able to shop a little bit, and eat sushi once a week if I wanted to, and that kind of thing.

[laughter]

**EC:** And yeah, that changed. That changed. And that's realistic. I was paranoid about it at first, like if people found out that I had a certain job, maybe they wouldn't see me as an artist. But I find, especially in European countries, it's like it doesn't shake them at all. And I even happen to know of a couple of major label artists who have jobs waiting tables and such, and they have videos on CMT and singles on the radio.

**PM:** Yeah.

**EC:** And so that's the reality. And I don't know if that deglamorizes it too much for people to be interested or not, but that's reality.

**PM:** And it's not just the fans who have feelings about that issue one way or the other. An artist friend of mine once asked me, "Well, Frank, what are you up to these days? Are you one of us or one of them?" And I said, "What the hell does that mean? Yeah, I'm a songwriter, yeah, I play, I do other things, I do whatever it takes to get along. I'm one of you, I'm sure, but who they are, I don't have a clue."

**EC:** Right. Merle Haggard said, "If I ever find out who 'they' are, I'm going to kick their ass."

[laughter]

**EC:** But yeah, I mean, that's just how it is.

**PM:** So I've been really enjoying *This Side of the Moon*, I think it's really amazing.

**EC:** Thank you, thank you.

**PM:** I always knew about you, but I never really went into it the way I have in recent days. I was always amazed that [Nashville luminaries] Jonell Mosser or Mike Henderson weren't huge stars, but now I'm equally amazed that you're not a huge star.

**EC:** Well, thank you. That's very nice of you to say.

**PM:** To me, it's mystifying. It just doesn't make sense.

**EC:** I don't know, I guess a lot of things have to line up. I'm not sure I have the key to what makes that formula work or not work. It seems like a decent bet that I could make my living in the entertainment business, and so that's why I'm still at it. I don't know if that will mean that I become a huge star and live with Shania on a neighboring mountain in Switzerland or [laughs] I may be able to have a nice little career and buy a chunk of

land by my parents' farm in Smith County and sell 100,000 records every time I release an album and be really, really happy.

**PM:** Right.

**EC:** So I don't know.

**PM:** Because that B plan works, as we know. It works hella well.

**EC:** Yeah. It works great. They used to block off the streets when George Jones sold 100,000 albums and have a big block party.

**PM:** [laughs]

**EC:** But the business model they've got now says they can't make money at that level, mainly I believe because they pay themselves exorbitant salaries and they have other huge expenses.

**PM:** I don't know what comes first, the chicken or the egg—but it could be said that they begin by spending \$200,000 to \$300,000 recording the record. Before they make a video.

**EC:** And then sometimes don't put it out—or if they do, they don't pay any attention to it, which is what happened to me on Warner Brothers. I know, it's crazy.

**PM:** What happened to you on Warner Brothers?

**EC:** Well, I was signed to Atlantic, and that lasted about three months before the Atlantic Nashville office was closed. So already you're dealing with a business where apparently either they're so fat that it doesn't matter or they already don't have the synergy within themselves to know that they're contractually obligating themselves to this monetary venture while they're getting ready to merge with another label...and the artist just gets tossed in the corporate blender, you know.

**PM:** Right, that's skewed from the top.

**EC:** Yeah. So anyway, they keep it secret, or whatever. But they closed that office and then Warner Brothers picked up my contract. And at first Warner Brothers absorbed everybody. They got Giant, Asylum, and Atlantic. And they had everybody—I think there were forty-seven acts on their roster at that time.

**PM:** Which, of course, was never going to work.

**EC:** Right. And so then they cut it to sixteen acts within the week. And I made that cut—and why I did is a mystery to me, to this day. I don't know why they kept me because there was really no reason—well, I think they liked me, and I don't know if it was just cool to keep me or if they thought it might stick but we'll just keep it and see if it does.

**PM:** Right, just to see if it [the traditional sound] comes around again.

**EC:** I don't even think it was that thought out. I really don't. I mean, that's my gut instinct. But they were going through a lot of transitions, and I think they had people pulling strings way above them up in high-rises in major cities outside of Nashville. So I think that's sort of what happened.

**PM:** Pardon me. [I started shuffling some papers.] I got panicky about forty minutes ago. I usually have a load of questions, and I didn't at that moment. Now I have too many pages of questions.

**EC:** [laughs] That's all right. I'm going to bring this fruit over here. Would you like some fruit?

**PM:** No, thanks a lot.

So you're youngest of eleven, born to musical parents. Are any of the other siblings musically inclined?

**EC:** No.

**PM:** Wow, isn't that something—even though the parents were, the ten before you did not even go that way as hobbyists or anything?

**EC:** Uh-uh.

**PM:** Why?

**EC:** Well, they were all half brothers and sisters. Mother was musical, but her husband was not necessarily as much so. And then Daddy, he was musical, and the same with his wife. And it was sort of a hobby in both their lives. It took off more when they met and got married and had me. They were in their forties, and were brought together by playing in a country band together. So I was born into a scene. And they were at a nice relaxed place in their life, and they did not let my emergence into this world change their lifestyle very much.

[laughter]

**EC:** So I just went along to the bar. My mom played in bars with her guitar out to here, with her Gibson just banging up against my head, singing Loretta Lynn and Tammy Wynette and everything else

And so when I was born, they didn't get babysitters very much. They just kind of took me along. So I was always in these seedy little juke joints down in central Florida. I say

“seedy,” but it was different then, I think. It was a heavy drinking culture, but not a heavy drug culture—not violent, just a lot of drinking.

**PM:** And your folks are still around, right?

**EC:** Yeah.

**PM:** I’ve seen a picture of your mom on your site.

**EC:** Daddy is on there too, somewhere. Yeah, they’re great. As a matter of fact, Daddy just turned 80. He got a bass guitar. Tim and I found him a new little bass for his birthday. And Tim just called me yesterday, he was playing in a music store with Chuck Meade [of BR549 fame] and he called me. He was like, “Hey, I found a little amp that your dad can carry around,” because it’s small.

**PM:** Wow.

**EC:** We’ve got him an amp, so now all he needs is a cable.

[laughter]

**PM:** What bass did you find him, do you know?

**EC:** I don’t know, it was—

**PM:** An old bass.

**EC:** Yeah, it was just an old bass. So probably some sort of copy—it looks like an old Fender P Bass.

**PM:** So if Tim was playing in a record store with Chuck Meade, what were they doing, an in-store for Chuck, or?

**EC:** They were just playing. There’s some sort of little music room in some music store in Kansas, and back there they just sell out shows regularly. And so Tim and Chuck happened to be the attraction, and they just played together. They share the set, and they go back and forth and trade songs.

**PM:** What a cool show, Tim Carroll and Chuck Meade.

**EC:** It was the first time they ever did it. And Tim called me after and he said it was great. He said, “We sold out two shows.”

**PM:** That’s a lock. I mean, who thought of that? Who booked that show?

**EC:** I think Cowboy Keith [road manager of BR549 and other acts, he co-produced *Tangled in the Pines*].

**PM:** What's the venue called, where is it? We wanna link to it.

**EC:** He wasn't even sure. We were sort of discussing it. I'll give you his email address.

**PM:** Okay. You hit the stage early, performing before you were 10—but by the time you got to school at Georgia Southern, you were moving in another direction, in the computer and accounting area?

**EC:** Yeah, I double-majored in accounting and computer information systems.

**PM:** So were you performing also then at that time in your life, or had music kind of taken a back seat at that point?

**EC:** I would go and find little bars and little country bands that were playing, but it was rarely part of the college scene, it was usually part of the backwoods Bullock County scene that did the kind of the music that I understood how to do. This was a time when a lot of the hippie jam bands and things like that are taking off, and the Dave Matthews Band, and all those. And I liked the Allman Brothers, and the Kinchafoonie Cowboys would come down from Athens, and we'd go to Athens to see bands. I loved some hard rock bands that would tour through, one was called Roscoe. And so I either liked the heavy metal stuff and the punk stuff or the back country stuff. I wasn't so much into the other.

**PM:** Into the jam band thing.

**EC:** No.

**PM:** Never were much of a hippie, say?

**EC:** Well, I own a pair of Birkenstocks that are pretty well worn out.

[laughter]

**EC:** I don't know. I don't know. I'm probably just a product of a little bit of all that.

**PM:** Yeah. And musically you'd come from a different world—

**EC:** I did.

**PM:** From a stone country world.

**EC:** I was raised by people who had skipped a generation. I did not know anything about the Beatles until I met Tim. [laughs] I mean, I knew who they were, but...

**PM:** Wow.

**EC:** I'd hear them and then I'd later be thinking, "Oh, that was in that car commercial." But there was never any of that in my home.

**PM:** The Beatles and the Rolling Stones and the British Invasion, that wasn't part of your growing up?

**EC:** No, huh-uh. My parents weren't against it or anything, it's just—

**PM:** Holy jeez. That's unbelievable.

[laughter]

**EC:** So that music has been a wonderful fun discovery for me.

**PM:** Since Hardie McGehee co-wrote a lot of *This Side of the Moon* with you, would you tell us something about him? I don't know anything about him.

**EC:** Yeah, yeah. The first publishing deal that I was signed to here in Nashville, there was only one other staff writer, and that was Hardie McGehee. And he is an old-school Rolling Stones/Gram Parsons guy from Birmingham, Alabama. He would come up here and write. And he can play any chord in any position on any instrument you can possibly imagine, and can walk in this room and do very credible performances of all this music that I don't know about, plus the music I did know about. So I was able to sit in a room and sing to him melodies and lyrics that he could immediately put in the pocket.

**PM:** He could voice them in such a way that would really turn you on.

**EC:** I could look at him and go (singing) "How'd we get on this side of the moon?" And he'd go "Do, do, do"—he'd just immediately have it. So together, we just—it was a very productive writing relationship.

**PM:** Wow. And so the symbiosis from those early days has persevered and it still goes on today?

**EC:** No, I think that I'm probably segueing into the next thing now. And I think on the next project, it will be very interesting to see the stylistic evolution of what happens.

**PM:** Oh, you mean, so not just moved on to other writers, but other music?

**EC:** Uh-huh. I think one is sort of a function of the other. I mean, I haven't been writing with Hardie in recent days. He's down in Birmingham, he doesn't make his way up to Nashville much anymore. I had lost my publishing deal, I had to go out and get jobs and



all, so life just changed. I've been writing more by myself, and an occasional co-write. So it'll be different, I think.

**PM:** Wow.

**EC:** But it needs to be.

**PM:** Yeah. I mean, it's natural, it's evolution.

**EC:** I think Hardie and I reached a real good stride in a lot of what we did on the *This Side of the Moon* album. And I'm not sure where we would go from there.

**PM:** Now, you're married to an extremely talented cat.

**EC:** Yeah.

**PM:** Co-writing—is that part of your relationship, or?

**EC:** Not in the Nashville definition of it, and not in the publishing company definition of it.

**PM:** [laughs]

**EC:** He writes things, and sometimes he'll write a song two or three ways, and he'll play it for me, and I'll pick one. And then I come up with hooks in the car, and we write them down. If he comes up with a hook, I'll write it down for him and stick it in his book. So we nurture each other, I feel like, but we don't sit down at the same time and try to go through the creative process together. We sort of feed each other in a different way. We support each other.

**PM:** It's more like you're part of each other's songs rather than you're both part of the same songs.

**EC:** Definitely. Very much so. That's a true statement.

**PM:** Yeah, that's a beautiful take on co-writing that I've not heard before. But it makes so much sense for a musical couple, a talented couple.

**EC:** Thank you.

**PM:** And there are other co-writers in the mix, right? Don't you write some with Nanci Griffith, or this person, that person?

**EC:** Yeah. And it's such a variety of people. I have such a random world that I operate in musically.

**PM:** Do you like co-writing?

**EC:** It can be extremely gratifying and beautiful, and it can also be extremely tedious and painful.

**PM:** Truly. It's a really mixed bag, I find, too.

**EC:** Yeah.

**PM:** And once you find some good chemistry, boy, you just hold onto it.

**EC:** Yeah. And even with that chemistry, if you do hold onto it, you get it in that place where it's about the song, it's not about each other's feelings, it's not about each other's egos, and it's all about *this*, then you're going to have ups and downs in that relationship, hit strides, hit blocks, argue. I mean, Hardie and I sure did. We were like an old married couple pounding it out over lines and chords.

Or then when you have that initial relationship with someone—or you're just starting out with someone, there's sort of a hierarchy. I'm the new artist, I'm southern, and I'm a woman. So it's all like I'm down, down, down!

[laughter]

**EC:** Bam, bam, bam.

**PM:** Thrice removed.

**EC:** Yeah.

**PM:** I don't know anything about Jeff Gordon, who produced a lot of those cuts. Who's he?

**EC:** Oh, he's the mystery man. He's a well-kept secret, too secret. He runs the Nashville office of the company called Carlin America. And Carlin America is a giant publishing company based out of New York run by Freddie Bienstock. They have all the Starday and King record collections. They have Meatloaf, "What a Wonderful World," blah, blah, blah. But in that Starday and King collection, they have a Nashville office, because they own the first five George Jones albums, and all this great old country catalog, which is all on vinyl, lining the walls in his office.

**PM:** Wow.

**EC:** I met him on the premise that he was looking for a traditional girl country singer to come in and re-demo some of his catalog. So I came in and met him, and he offered me a deal there that day. I got to sign a publishing deal with him. And then I just quit—left my,

for the time, lucrative job at Price Waterhouse to move into the office and sleep on the floor, and drink beer and—

**PM:** Move in the office and sleep on the floor. Really?

**EC:** Yeah.

**PM:** Right from Price Waterhouse to his floor. Ain't you something?

**EC:** I had a great apartment in Bellevue with a swimming pool, everything else, but I was not happy. And yeah, I left Price Waterhouse, broke up with my boyfriend that I was seeing—who was this shady old bartender guy—and then moved into the office and just sort of went under his wing, where he gave me the creative space and freedom to write by myself a lot, and sort of discover—

**PM:** You just changed your life, like that. [snaps fingers]

**EC:** And then immediately I wrote “Demon Don't Get in Bed with Me,” “Mommy, You Wanted to be a Singer, Too,” “Dolly, Did You Go Through This?” all these things that I didn't even know—I mean, I did not come to him with some back catalog. It was completely off his gut feeling that he signed me, he thought that I could write.

**PM:** And you must have blown his mind when you churned out these songs.

**EC:** He was very happy. He was very, very happy with me, and that kept me wanting to do it more.

**PM:** Holy jeez.

**EC:** And he wanted to be a producer. He wanted to produce me.

**PM:** And he hadn't been a producer up to that point.

**EC:** Not really. He kept trying to break in, and he was all around it, and he had acts that he would develop that would have major label deals, but then, ha, here would come the big bear—

**PM:** Right. Then they'd move on.

**EC:** Here would come an A & R guy, producer guy, with the big salary that slaps his name on the backs of all the records and elbows him out of the way.

**PM:** And take all the credit, yeah.

**EC:** And that happened repeatedly. So I was yet another act going through the process, and he developed me, and just gave me a haven to do that. I mean, there were not a lot of publishing situations—

**PM:** And you were the first true blue partner that stood by him and his name got on the record, and all that stuff.

**EC:** Well, then—yeah—we started going to the studio, trying to get deals off the demos that he was cutting on me. And the demos from those sessions became the first independent album, the *Blue* album.

**PM:** Right.

**EC:** So I got that. And then, right before we were putting that together, I got on the Grand Ole Opry. Then I had *Blue* come out, so the timing was really good. Then Atlantic signed me based on that. And so then we began the process of making the *Hey Y'all* album. Then he kind of got unhired by the president of the record company for the job of producing the album. And he was sort of okay with that. He was like, “Maybe I’ll co-produce it, maybe I’ll just be the publisher. But I’m in, I’m here to support, or whatever.” We were close, very close.

**PM:** Right.

**EC:** And he saw me through that, but quietly. I know it was hard for Jeff to watch a lot of what happened, for his four years of work.

**PM:** Right. Because when you made that first record that started at Atlantic and went to Warner Brothers, I mean, I’m sure it was thought at the time that, “Hey, this is going to be big. This is going to be a return to real country music,” and the scene probably looked ripe. But then when it came time, as so often happens, they apparently just didn’t know what to do with it.

**EC:** Yeah. I don’t know if they even thought about it and decided that they didn’t know. [laughs] I think they were all so busy worrying about their jobs and what was going to happen tomorrow—I mean, it was like, “Are we going to get here in the morning and have our computers boxed up, or what?”

**PM:** Yeah. And that’s how they earned the name the “Artist Protection Program” there for a while.

**EC:** Yeah. Well, you could get on it—and I could have stayed on that label. I could probably still be on that label, if I chose to be. I don’t know, maybe it’s arrogant to say that. But I did not see how it was going to advance my career. Even knowing I was probably going to lose my nice little publishing deal, I had to go to the president of the company and ask to be released from my contract.

**PM:** And who was your publishing with at the time?

**EC:** Warner Chappell had gotten me from Jeff's company.

**PM:** Right. So when the Warner Chappell deal ended, why didn't you resume some kind of a publishing arrangement with Jeff?

**EC:** Well, I think that he couldn't resign me, then. I mean, there were people above him—

**PM:** Yeah, right.

**EC:** It's not necessarily all his choice.

**PM:** Got it.

**EC:** And I think they had put four years into me, and they had bought all of my catalog that they felt like they needed to have.

[laughter]

**PM:** Although you and Tim don't write together in that classic or that usual Nashville sense, you guys play a lot together, right?

**EC:** Yeah, yeah. He plays with me, but when he does his thing, it's his thing.

**PM:** Right.

**EC:** But he's my right arm.

**PM:** Where do you do your thing?

**EC:** I've got to play tomorrow night without him—and I certainly can, it's just gotten very comfortable having him there. I don't have to watch what's going on behind me with the band so much. I know—

**PM:** He's the bandleader.

**EC:** Yes. I know if there's a diamond coming that his headstock is going to drop, and that the drummer is going to stop. [A diamond is a chord change that is sounded once and held for a measure, usually four beats. His headstock is the top of his electric guitar, where the name is.]

**PM:** Oh, yeah. [laughs] So where will you play tomorrow, and who will take his place?

**EC:** I have no idea. Well, I'm going to play at the Midnight Jamboree as Jett Williams' special guest, as further evidence of my very random world.

**PM:** [laughs]

**EC:** And it will be a house band situation, and I have no idea who's playing with me.

**PM:** Oh. Now, I saw that on the site, but I don't understand the gig. What is that, exactly?

**EC:** The Midnight Jamboree?

**PM:** Uh-huh.

**EC:** That's the old-time traditional show that took place at the Ernest Tubb Record Shop, when the Opry was at the Ryman. There would be Ernest Tubb's Midnight Jamboree, and the party resumed at midnight on Saturday night. That still goes on.

**PM:** Oh!

**EC:** And it's broadcast on radio. But they moved it from downtown to the Texas Troubadour Theater, which is over off Music Valley Drive, because the Opry is over there, and Opryland Hotel is over there, so people come from the Opry. And then some people come in who are just cult fans of what goes on there. You have to see this.

**PM:** That sounds totally cool.

**EC:** It's like a parallel universe, but it is a beautiful place. I mean, artists like Darryl McCall, and these great old country singers are featured. It's great, it really is. Jett Williams is hosting tomorrow night, and she's a friend of mine.

**PM:** So you'll just show up with charts?

**EC:** Uh-huh, show up with charts.

**PM:** And just hope that the charts are really great.

**EC:** It's on a wing and a prayer.

**PM:** You already know that those charts are golden.

**EC:** Charts are golden. I'm also not going to choose the most difficult thing that I have.

[laughter]

**EC:** Yeah. I'm going to make, hopefully, a good decision about what I'm going to take them, and if they haven't heard it before, I'm going to give them a count, click it in. And

when you've been in this situation where you don't have lots of resources and you just have to keep struggling, you get really good at winging it. And I have no fear—

[laughter]

**EC:** —of winging it with charts tomorrow night.

**PM:** Well, you needn't have any fear. Since we're all here, let me ask you how you came to join forces with our friend and your new manager, David Macias of Emergent Marketing.

**EC:** All right! He's my superman. I had put together a little independent album last summer, because I was going to Europe and needed some product, and could not afford the \$9.25 a unit that Warner Brothers wants to charge me for my own record—

**PM:** Yikes!

**EC:** —to go over there and sell. So I put together this little project, which I needed to do, and was excited to do, got with some girlfriends, had a photo shoot, had a blast. One of my best friends is a great graphic artist, put it all together. Whipped it up, packaged it up, went to Europe and sold it. And to come back during the winter, and I'm still paddling around town sort of trying to start the next thing, I don't know what it's going to be, and one of my contacts being Pete Fisher from the Grand Ole Opry—

**PM:** He's a good man.

**EC:** —and he emailed me David's name. He said, "These folks might be a good match for you and what you have." So I emailed David, immediately he emailed me back. We met at Sherlock Holmes Pub—[to David] remember that? It seems like twenty years ago [laughs] and it was like three months ago or something, I don't even know how long. And yeah, he had his notepad and his pen, and started just planning it all out. Immediately, unlike any experience I'd had before, everything that he was saying was going to happen, started happening.

**PM:** Right.

**EC:** They were concrete things. It was not this big vague picture, "We're going to build a market of your demographic," and all of that. It was like, "No, this is the obvious thing to do, and then we'll try this, then we'll try this." Sort of reacting to opportunity, which is also how I've operated. And it's been...so far, so good, he hasn't killed me yet!

[laughter]

**PM:** You've been playing abroad a lot in recent years, right?

**EC:** Yeah. Last year we played in Korea, Poland, Sweden and Norway.

**PM:** Wow. Have you been much to the UK?

**EC:** No, never.

**PM:** Because that seems like, hey, that's a good fit for you.

**EC:** Sure does.

**PM:** They like real country music over there—

**EC:** Yeah.

**PM:** —which includes yours, of course. Who books your foreign dates?

**EC:** In Asia and Eastern Europe, it was Judy Seal. Festivals or military is what I've had so far. I have not yet had the experience of going overseas and playing the little club circuits, which I'd really like to do.

**PM:** Yeah, that's what we've got to get David to do, hook you up in the UK.

One of my favorite people and musicians is all over this record, Kenny Vaughan.

**EC:** Yeah. [laughs] He's been with me since that *Blue* record, the very beginning.

**PM:** He and I are old cronies. I love Kenny Vaughan. I've not seen it yet, but my sister has a tape of—she saw him play on *Sessions at 54th*, the show from New York, and I guess she caught him when he was playing with Lucinda—

**EC:** Yeah, I remember that.

**PM:** Kenny was one of two guitar players. And she says that on the tape a guy in the audience kind of stands up and says, "Let the geek play!"

**EC:** Oh!

[laughter]

**EC:** What did Kenny do?

**PM:** I don't know. I haven't seen the tape. But I keep forgetting to get a copy of that tape, so [laughs]—

**EC:** Kenny!

**PM:** He'll probably say, "I remember that night." [laughs]



**EC:** I don't know. He might not. He has an insatiable appetite for playing guitar, and will literally go from the stage of the Ryman and get on stage with somebody at the most not happening bar on Lower Broadway and play until 2 a.m.

**PM:** Right. He's one of those guys, I know, that is always playing the guitar. You can call him up at any time of day and you don't have to say, "What are you doing?" You know what he's doing, he's playing the guitar. [laughs]

**EC:** Right, right.

**PM:** He's walking around the house playing the guitar and he picked up the phone, maybe.

**EC:** Yeah, yeah.

**PM:** Have your songs been covered by other artists?

**EC:** A little bit, but not to any great extent that anybody would really know. It's a strange experience to hear somebody else singing your song—but no, not really.

**PM:** And have you seen any action with your songs, or much action, in film or TV?

**EC:** Yeah, surprisingly so—keeping in mind how little support or thrust there has been in that world, it's been very surprising. Shocking, really. The *Blue* album that nobody knows about, Steve Buscemi got and became a fan of—

**PM:** Steve Buscemi got it?

**EC:** Yeah, and he used a song off of it in a movie called *Animal Factory* that had Mickey Rourke and Willem Dafoe and Edward Furlong in it.

**PM:** Yikes.

**EC:** Yeah. And it's this prison movie. There's this scene where the wardens are these big old bad—just sloppy old slob guys that nobody likes. And they're listening to this old radio, and a song of mine is playing.

[We lose a line or two here, turning the tape over.]

**EC:** I don't know how many of these people got my record. But there's this young independent film company out in California, and they made a film that came out last year called *American Reunion*, and it's on some of the independent film festivals. They used the song "Blue Shades." It's about a class reunion that takes place after twenty years, and they never make it to the reunion, but everybody coming home and bumping into each other, and the complexity of the story—

**PM:** Is it a cool film?

**EC:** I loved it, yeah.

**PM:** Oh, wow.

**EC:** It just freaks you out! My song comes on, and I'm singing for like two minutes during it, going up and down in the mix. But it's wild.

**PM:** That's totally cool.

Are you much of a reader? I ask because it's sometimes surprising who is and who isn't. Do you enjoy the world of books?

**EC:** I do enjoy it. I like books and movies, and use them for the same purpose, to find a little inspiration or just entertainment.

**PM:** And read anything lately that turned you on?

**EC:** My favorite thing that I've read lately is a book called *Popular Music From Vittula* by Mikael Niemi. It's a book that's been translated from Finnish into English, and it's connected short stories from a little boy's perspective—his discovery, through the 50s and 60s, of popular music, of the Beatles, of forming a band, of sitting in a sauna with his dad and his grandfather, and funerals and weddings and drunken brawls, and just his whole world.

**PM:** Wow.

**EC:** And it's extremely entertaining. But it takes me a long time to read a book, because I don't have as much time to read. I knit when I travel—knit and read and watch movies.

**PM:** I was going to ask you that: are there other things you like to do with time when you're on the road or home? Are you into gardening or—

**EC:** Yeah, gardening, too. I've got a lot of flowers planted around my house right now. And we've got a tomato bush and a cucumber vine. I've got an Heirloom tomato bush I'm very excited about—there's not a tomato on it yet, but I've not given up. And my parents also have a big garden out at their farm, and they bring us the real food, and we just kind of... [laughs] And I have a little rose garden. Every anniversary, that's what Tim and I do. We plant a little rose in our rose garden for our anniversary. We can't buy diamonds and vacations and stuff like that, so we do that instead. [laughs]

**PM:** Wow. How long are you guys together?

**EC:** We've been together eight years, and we've been married two.

**PM:** Religiously or spiritually speaking, how were you raised? I mean, what you've described so far didn't sound like religion was a big part of the deal. [laughs]

**EC:** Well, yeah, but oddly, again, adding to my random life, my father then later became involved in the AA Program, which is sort of a spiritual guide through life.

**PM:** Certainly, yeah, most of my family has been there, too.

**EC:** It does utilize scripture, so that became part of my household, but not until I was around eight or nine, really. When I was smaller, my mother would dress me up on Sunday mornings, and right around the block was this old white stucco Spanish church. A little church with a big oak tree and Spanish moss hanging down. It was the Sunset Heart Church of God, and it was an extremely intense musical, wild Pentacostal church. That's where I would go on Sunday mornings. Then even through my teenage years, I went there, up until we moved to Georgia. And some great musical experiences and times I had were there.

**PM:** Wow.

**EC:** Also a realization of learning about religion and the extremes of it.

**PM:** And where are you now, as an adult, with that side of life, spirit or religion—

**EC:** Still trying to figure it out.

**PM:** Yeah, right. Ain't it the truth?

**EC:** Don't know.

**PM:** That's a beautiful answer. You'd be surprised how little I get that one. And it's something I always ask about, it's important. You so rarely hear, "You know, I don't know."

**EC:** I really don't. I wish I did. I wish I read something or saw something or somebody told me something that made me go, "Oh, well, okay."

**PM:** Yeah.

**EC:** I just have to trust that I have a good heart, and I try to operate and do the right thing and be a good person and not be bad all the time, and hope that leads me to someplace good, here, later, never, in a million years, I don't know.

**PM:** I don't think you can go wrong in that way.

[laughter]

**EC:** It's sort of noncommittal. I do have commitment issues, as well.

**PM:** Well, eight years, you're not toxically so, anyway.

**EC:** [laughs]

**PM:** How driven would you say you are about your career or about the pursuit of music in general?

**EC:** I'm extremely driven—but not necessarily just about music, it's usually whatever I'm doing at the moment. If I'm cleaning my house, cleaning my floors, I'm in the corners. If I'm listening to music, all the TVs have to be off.

[laughter]

**PM:** Even in the modest way that you guys live your life, is there a place that you Tim like to go when you get away? Is there a place that you—

**EC:** We go to Mom and Daddy's. When we're home, usually like once a week or so—my mom is a great old hillbilly cook. She cooks a lot, and Tim loves that. And they have a dish network, and we watch the Braves.

**PM:** Watch the Braves. [laughs]

**EC:** And they have a big, long deck that sits on the side of their little single-wide trailer, overlooks a holler, and there are bird feeders and flowers everywhere. We sit on that swing and just zone out. And it's blackberry season, the blackberries are starting to come in, which is Tim's big thing. His big stress in the summertime is to try to be out at the farm enough to pick enough blackberries—

**PM:** [laughs]

**EC:** —to get Mama to freeze so we can have blackberry cobblers through winter. And every year it's like a contest to see if he picked enough—

**PM:** You're killing me.

**EC:** —to make cobblers through the winter or not, and also not to get red bugs—which he does pretty good. But it amazes me, we'll go out there in the middle of July, and he'll put on long sleeves, long pants, Daddy's got an old jug with the top cut out of it and a rope slung through it, and he'll strap that over him. And he'll go out there with dishwashing gloves on and pick and pick and pick, and come back drenched in sweat and have to get right in the shower to keep the red bugs off of him.

**PM:** Because the red bugs are bad, yeah.

**EC:** And then Mama will rinse the berries out in the sink, and then put them in freezer bags and put them in the deep freeze. And he'll do that—well, they're only in for a few weeks. And Mama has been telling him, "It was fields white as snow with blooms, and now it's red, they're all turning red, and they're going to be turning black here soon."

**PM:** [laughs] So are there things you'd like to do with your life that you've not attempted?

**EC:** Well, I think I'd like to maybe have a baby one day, not to say that I haven't attempted it. [laughs] But yeah, I mean, the list is endless. It's endless, all kinds of things.

**PM:** Again, you'd be surprised how few people say that when I ask.

**EC:** Really? [laughs] Do they have really specific things already prepared to say, like "I would like to climb Mount Everest"?

**PM:** Yeah, some people do. And some people just kind of rehash the goals of moment.

**EC:** I mean, I could look around here right now and think of like, "Wow, I'd really like to go to the Sounds game," or, "Wow, I'd really like to go have a beer at Bobby's." I mean, I can always think of a million things I'd like to do, [laughs] so I will never be at a loss. Life will always be exciting with that attitude.

**PM:** Yeah, because that would be my answer. It's like, "Things I'd like to do? How about everything?"

**EC:** Right. I know. I mean, I'm very easily entertained.

**PM:** Along similar, but musical lines, is there a kind of song or a kind of music you'd like to write or try that you've not attempted yet?

**EC:** I can't predict that.

**PM:** Anything in particular you see coming up ahead?

**EC:** My video, I can't wait to see it.

**PM:** You did a video?

**EC:** I did, this week. Got back from New Mexico two days ago.

**PM:** Wow. Which song?

**EC:** "Before I Go That Far." Flew to New Mexico and filmed a video for two days with Stacy Dean Campbell. There were five people in an RV, that was it, and shooting for two days. It was so fun! So I'm dying to see how that's going to come out.

**PM:** That's a fantastic song. I can't wait to see that video.

**EC:** Thank you. I love it, too. Now, those are two guys that I like to write with that came from the co-writing mill.

**PM:** Who?

**EC:** Jim McBride—smokes cigarettes, talks about all his divorces, just an old Alabama boy. He wrote Alan Jackson's "Someday," and "Chattahoochee." Then Jerry Salley, who's just hard driving, kind of comes more from a bluegrass world. And the three of us, well, I love writing with those guys.

**PM:** Are there songwriters or artists working today that have a big influence on you?

**EC:** Well, I don't know about influence, because I don't decide that I'm going to do something creatively like it's this other thing, I just sort of do it, and maybe things that I've been listening to fall into that, maybe they don't. But I bought the White Stripes album yesterday. And I've been listening to Neil Young's *Zuma* a lot. My CD player is screwed up in my car at the moment. It's made me so mad. I had *The Best of Dolly Parton*—I love the stuff that Porter produced on Dolly, and I love the stuff that Billy Sherrill produced on Tanya Tucker.

**PM:** How specific. That's wonderful.

**EC:** Well, it's really different, if you really dig into it. There's a certain layering of the musicality there and the whole—it just works.

**PM:** That's very interesting.

**EC:** If you know that and can ever A/B a recording of them under those producers, and then under anywhere else, anywhere in the timeline, it is noteworthy, to my ears.

**PM:** Is Tim really into traditional country and some of the vintage singers that you may be?

**EC:** Extremely. Extremely. I think he started getting into that when he was in a punk band in Indiana, and then he started getting introduced to that by the guys he was playing punk music with, and it was George Jones and Hank Williams, primarily.

**PM:** That cross-pollination between punk and country is always very interesting.

**EC:** I know it. Isn't it? Isn't that wild...

**PM:** Yeah.

**EC:** Then when Tim was up in Manhattan—he talks about just listening over and over again, and then finding Ernest Tubb. And like when he had a band, the Blue Chieftans, covering “Thanks A Lot”—

**PM:** [laughs]

**EC:** I mean, what a great wealth of material to choose from and pull great songs out of, songs that wouldn’t be the expected covers, that would be great crowd-pleasing bar songs to play.

**PM:** Robbie Fulks and I were talking about punk and country yesterday.

**EC:** Yeah, I love Robbie.

**PM:** He’s got very strong ideas about how punk and country really don’t go together, they just kind of happen together, and some interesting things happen, but they really don’t go very well together.

[laughter]

**EC:** I think the connection between them isn’t in a similarity in where the kick drum is in the mix or where the phrasing is, it’s in the approach to how you’re communicating. With real country singers, it’s always been straight to your gut, and they’ll just say something that will cut right to you. “It’s been a good year for the roses, and there’s the baby down the hall, crying.” With punk music, it’s the same sort of directness. It’s not a lot about the moon and the stars and the silvery clouds and stuff, [laughs] the rainbows over the river. The in-your-face part is where the similarities come from, in my opinion.

**PM:** You know how traditional country has come to be called alternative country—do you feel at all part of alternative country, or Americana, or any of that?

**EC:** I don’t know. I really don’t know what to think about all the labels and stuff. I have always felt I didn’t belong, all my life, really.

**PM:** Never did, and I still don’t.

**EC:** Right. I was the only girl on the cheerleading squad from the white trash side of town. It’s always been that way. And now I have a really country album that’s coming out sort of in the alternative world. Why is that? I don’t know. All part of my random life.

[laughter]

**EC:** I wouldn’t have it any other way.