

Put Your Toes In The Sand And Gather Under The Moonlight

Article by John Clayton

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Being the musically connected big-shot that I am, I'm going to an exclusive CD release party tonight and I don't even have to fly to a hip and trendy spot like Nashville, New York or LA.

It's in Portsmouth.

And the New Hampshire Seacoast is the perfect place for a CD launch party when the artist in question is a native Granite Stater and the CD in question is called "A Night on the Beach."

That's the title of the newest release from Scott Kirby, the pride of Merrimack Valley High School (circa 1972) who continues to live a life of amusing-but-confounding contradiction.

By day, he's the buttoned-down director of communications for an important state agency — that being the staid, conservative Bureau of Securities Regulation — but by night (and on weekends), he is a crooning saloon singer of the highest order.

Proof of that last statement can be found on his new CD.

I got my copy on the QT last week.

Colleen and I were R & R-ing on our boat up in Maine when Scott called to tell me an advance pressing of the CD was in hand last Wednesday. Thus, we agreed to abandon ship and hook up with Scott. We did so on the deck of a Kennebunkport watering hole called "The Wharf," and we did so over adult beverages and in the intervening six days, the CD has not been out of earshot.

Unlike his four previous studio CDs, "A Night on the Beach" was recorded live, literally, on the beach. The beach is in Key West, the site of his greatest musical success (and life-style excesses) and in essence — three new songs notwithstanding — it is much like a greatest-hits recording. But it's better than that.

Because of the setting and the vibe of the live audience, it's a greatest hits album that's greater than the sum of its parts, and a large part of that is due to the musicians who answered Scott's call.

There are his regular running mates, guitarist Dave Edmisten and US Army Staff Sgt. Emily Leader, who is a fiddle player extraordinaire. Then there's Peter Mayer (who's the lead guitarist for Jimmy Buffett's Coral Reefer Band) and Warner Brothers artists Matt and Andy Thompson (better known in these parts as the Massacoustics) and Irish keyboard virtuoso Gabriel Donohue and the list goes on and on.

"I'd like to lie to you," Scott laughed, "but there was a lot of luck involved in this. We had a one-shot deal to do this show back in November and there were bad storms in Key West, so a number of the guys in the band couldn't get onto the island until the day of the show.

"For that reason alone, I had no expectation of getting a full album out of that evening," he added. "I told them all that if we got three or four great tracks that I could use somewhere down the line, that would

be great. I said, 'Don't be conservative. Forget the tape's running. Let's just play a great live show,' and that's when you find out how awesome these musicians are.

"Because of the live audience, I think we were all in hyper-mode. These people didn't know the songs cold, so they just followed their instincts, and when you can let a guy like Peter Mayer go wherever he likes, you're going to come away with some amazing music."

Yes, the musicianship is dynamite, but beware, lest the magic of the music distract you from savoring Scott's lyrics.

Perhaps it's evidence of his New Hampshire upbringing, but his wry writing style reveals him to be either an optimistic cynic or a sunny pessimist, and whichever you choose, you'd best be listening to his lyrics with both ears or you'll miss half the fun.

Who else would advise you that, "When you're walkin' on thin ice, you might as well dance," or imply that the secret to a long and happy life is owning "Four Good Dogs," (although not simultaneously). And then there is his twisted take on an annoying bromide which, in his view, comes out like this: "We're not Getting Older, (We're Just Getting Bitter)."

And now that I've said so many nice things about him...

If I can be critical of a friend — and I can, because I picked up the tab in Kennebunkport — Scott can be too deferential when he shares the stage with others. That can be attributed one of two things, his inherent modesty or more evidence of a good New Hampshire upbringing, but on the night of Nov. 2, 2006, he had step forward to be the focal point of the show.

And he positively soars.

"That means a lot to hear that," he said. "When you're in front of a thousand people, it's about being entertaining. You have to have something to say between the songs or there's going to be some dead air on the recording.

"As the artist, it was my job to keep things rolling along, and when we were finished, the stage manager — a guy named J.L. Jamison — he said the best thing you could hope to hear. He said to me, 'Kirby, it was like you were playing in somebody's living room.'"

He could be playing in your living room, provided you have a sound system in your living room and you pick up the CD, which is available through his website at www.scottkirby.com.

Or, you could head over to Rudi's Restaurant (formerly the Metro) at 20 High St. in Portsmouth for tonight's 8 p.m. party or, you could wait until tomorrow and catch his 7 p.m. show under the tent at Makris

Lobster & Steakhouse on Rte. 106 in Concord, but catch him while you can. Over the next month, he'll be performing — in order — in Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Kentucky, North Carolina, New Orleans, Alabama, Florida, Virginia and New Jersey.

He can launch that kind of a tour because, after 10 years on the job, he's relinquishing his full-time position with the Secretary of State's Office in New Hampshire. He'll be on board as a consultant, but in the meantime, he'll be pushing "A Night on the Beach."

And take it from me.
It's like a day at the beach