

Kieran McGee: My Brother Says He's The Next Real Deal (And he should know, he grew up on Dylan)

At just 23, going on 12, the Living Room in the LES is just about the only music venue where Kieran McGee doesn't get carded. That's because he's just released his third album, *Anonymous* on the Living Room's Stanton Street Records label. He regularly performs at the venue too, delighting audiences with a sound that some compare to Bob Dylan, and others to old school blues and country.

Indie Sounds caught up with McGee to find out more about his music, his latest CD, and the life of celebrity on the indie scene.

Indie Sounds: How did you get started in the music business, as a serious endeavor?

Kieran McGee: I started making 4 track recordings in my basement when I was younger and sent tapes to every label I could think of.

IS: How much of a shock was it coming to NYC from the South?

KM: Actually I'm from New York City, but most of my family is from the south so I've spent a lot of time there. Alabama is a totally different universe to say the least.

IS: You've already released three albums. Can you guide us through the first two?

KM: The first was *Left For Dead* and was recorded in Baltimore for Clean Cuts Records (part of Rounder Records). It was released in 1997 [When Kieran was just 15!].

The second was *Ash Wednesday*, which was

recorded at Sun Studios in Memphis, TN, in 1998. It features Cody and Luther Dickinson of the North Mississippi All Stars. This album was never properly released because Clean Cuts folded before it was finished. I put it out myself in 2001 though.

I guess the only huge difference with the

Rosenthal through a mutual friend. Luckily, he had just started Stanton Street Records.

IS: Ditto, the inclusion of Ollabelle, Levon Helm [The Band] and Steve Shelley [of Sonic Youth] as musical contributors?

KM: Steve R produced Ollabelle's record and



records is my age. The music is similar but has developed naturally. I've never tried to force it into a specific direction.

IS: How did the link up with Stanton Street Records for *Anonymous* happen?

KM: I had been playing the old Living Room for a long time and met the owner Steve

he knew Steve S and Levon through having them at his studio, the Magic Shop. Fortunately, they weren't too busy to drop by.

IS: Stanton Street is hardly BMG (thank goodness!), but what is the difference between releasing an album through a label, and as a true independent. How have you had to change or adapt? What does Stanton



Street do that you couldn't, or would find difficult?

KM: Having a label definitely takes the artist's focus off of having to do a lot of the leg work to get their music out there and allows them to concentrate on creating more music, which is what the majority of most artists want to be doing.

A label immediately takes pressure off the artist by overseeing the manufacturing of the record and coordinating it with the proper release dates, etc. There is also a marketing report, developed by the label, that is the general "plan" for the record that everyone tries to follow and is sent to the distributor, booking agent, management, publicist, radio team prior to the release of the record.

It's important, however, that the label and artist share the same vision or else all the work the label does will work against the artist. At Stanton Street, we have a great situation where I'm on a small label. The larger labels obviously don't care about music or they would sign artists that they could develop as opposed to one-hit money making pop stars that nobody will care about six months from now.

IS: So you have a label, a distributor, got some great press, you've opened some big gigs ... how does that translate into money? What are the economics of an indie artist who is making it?

KM: My fiance makes less money than I do and somehow supports me. Just kidding! It depends on the shows that I play. I've definitely made more money from music this year than I ever have before, which is encouraging. If I wanted to get rich quick I'd be in real estate, not music.

IS: Do you have a manager? Have you made him rich?

KM: Art Collins is my manager and has been for a few years. He gets 15-20% of what I make when I make enough that it makes



Photo from Mebeeb.com

sense to pay him. For instance, he doesn't get a cut of the tip jar at the Living Room.

IS: You've played out a fair bit of late. What are your favorite venues to play (apart from the Living Room of course). Any special memories?

KM: I really like Pete's Candy Store in Brooklyn because you can bring in 20 people and the place feels crowded plus it's really laid back. The Housing Works show this past December was probably one of the best shows in recent memory.

IS: If you weren't a musician, what job do you think you'd be in?

KM: I'd be a DJ and play house music all night long. Is this thing on?



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Indie Sounds NY is the only publication serving the New York independent music scene. Each month, Indie Sounds NY will seek out the singer/songwriters, the bands and the people who make up a unique and vibrant artistic community.

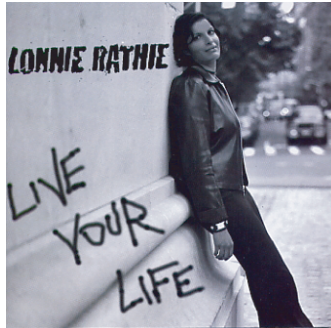
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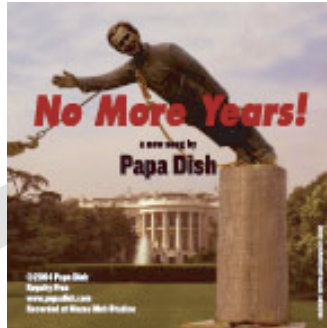
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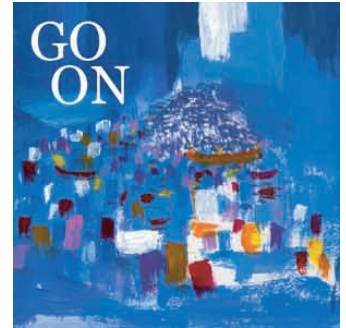
WHAT'S NEW ON CD



Lonnie Rathie
Live Your Life
www.lonnierathie.com



Papa Dish
No More Years
www.papadish.com



Chris Brown & Kate Fenner
Go On
www.chrisandkate.com



Local Music Now
New York Cares About Local Music: 2004 Compilation
www.localmusicnow.net



Queen Esther
Talkin' Fishbowl Blues
www.queenesther.com



Team Spider
Bush Bush Bush
www.teamspider.com

SCENE AND HEARD

* Best wishes to Juliana Nash, who has left Pete's Candy Store and plans to take a break and write some new songs, as well as look out across the ocean from her Long Island summer house. The new booker at Pete's is Jacob Silver.

* Cafe 111 in Brooklyn is closed for major refurbishments although our spies tell us that

no works are taking place. It may be RIP for this friendly little establishment.

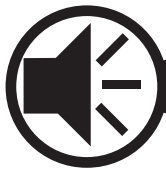
* Sadly, it's RIP for sure for the Luna Lounge on Ludlow Street. The venue is being demolished to make way for an apartment block. The owners say they are currently looking for a new space.

* Better news is that Union Bar, on Park and

17th, has begun to showcase live acoustic music on Sunday evenings.

* Also good news is the opening of Rockwood Music Hall at 196 Allen Street, just south of Houston. It's a small acoustic venue, reminiscent of the old Living Room. See www.rockwoodmusichall.com for more information.





THE LISTENING ROOM

Kenny's Castaways

We talk to the people who make NYC's music venues what they are. Not just the owners, but the bookers, the sound engineers, the bartenders, the bouncers. For starters, we caught up with Peter Fogel, recently installed as booker at the venerable and re-emerging Kenny's Castaways in the Village.

Kenny's Castaways
Date Established: 1965

Location: 157 Bleecker Street,
Greenwich Village (Thompson and
Sullivan).

Capacity: 250
Facilities: Two bars, two floors. All
shows are 21+.

Music Nights and Genres: Seven nights
a week. Mostly local bands, sometimes
touring bands from the Northeast.
Music usually from 7pm, with 45-
minute sets. Headline slots at weekends
begin at Midnight and play two sets.

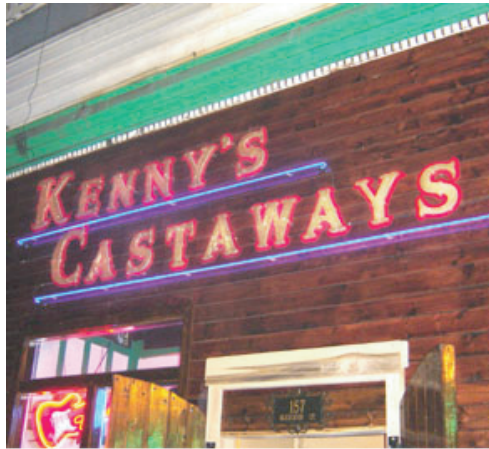
Cover Charge: \$5 to \$10. Bands
generally get a cut of the door, which
varies. Headline bands usually get a
guarantee plus a cut.

Contact: Peter Fogel books Thursday
through Saturday nights.
nycbands@nyc.rr.com.

Web: www.kennyscastaways.net

Indie Sounds: I've always thought of Kenny's is a cover band venue. But it actually has an amazing history. Tell us something about it?

Peter Fogel: Apparently, the agent I replaced, who had been there for 15-20 years,



did book a lot of cover bands. However, I'm going in a different direction, and will be focusing more on good original bands. If you look back at what the late owner Patrick Kenny was doing during the first 20 years at Kenny's, it has a very impressive history. Bruce Springsteen's first ever gig with the E Street Band was at Kenny's. Dee Dee and Joey Ramone met at a New York Dolls show at Kenny's. The Smithereens were the house band in 1980, and Phish played their first ever NYC show at Kenny's in March of 1988. I want to continue in that tradition!

IS: So now it looks like Kenny's is investing in the venue.

PF: Right. They've put in a brand new PA, which sounds great! The owner, Tommy Kenny, is basically redoing the whole place, including the facade, which hadn't been touched since the 70's. New bathrooms, more room for the band's equipment and just general renovations have begun and will continue. I love this room now. In 2005, it's going to be even better!

IS: What's your history in music? How did you come to be booker at Kenny's?

PF: I got into the music business through Donald Fagen of Steely Dan. I was promoting his first appearances in 16 years at the time, back in 1990. The shows were at the Lonestar Roadhouse on West 52nd Street. When the Fagen shows were over, the owner

of the Lonestar, Mort Cooperman, offered to keep me on as the local booking agent. After the Lonestar, I started the music scene at Le Bar Bat. That gig lasted 12 wonderful years. When the club finally closed its doors earlier this year, I hooked up with Tommy.

IS: What's the most difficult/challenging aspect of your job as a booker?

PF: Trying to make every bill good and compatible. We do multiple band nights so you have to be on the ball and be very organized.

IS: How proactive is Kenny's in promoting the music at the venue? Are you advertising? Emailing?

PF: One of my priorities at Kenny's is to help promote the venue. My partner will be handling the Internet promotion. We just put up a new website. It's still a work in progress, but we wanted to get something out there. Kenny's has had little presence on the web in the past, and we are going to change that.

We advertise in Time Out NY and will be in the Village Voice much more this year. Despite the fact that Kenny's doesn't do a ton of advertising, the room is always busy and very popular. Everyone has heard of "Kenny's Castaways."

IS: Why does music never run to time at venues? How good is Kenny's in that respect?

PF: I can't speak for what it was like before I started here. I personally love to run a tight ship when I book my nights. If the bands are professional and all show up on time, there's no reason why every band shouldn't start on time, and get a full set. I'm pretty good at making the nights run smoothly. The soundmen at Kenny's are excellent at moving things along as well.

IS: What music do you listen to for fun?

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INDUSTRY INSIDER

Industry Insider: Burning Beagle Studios, Teddy Kumpel

A monthly exploration of the people who help make the NYC music scene into an industry. Over time, we'll talk to producers, engineers, bookers, PR reps, managers, promoters, etc. to find out how they make a difference.

Indie Sounds: So who is Teddy Kumpel and what is Burning Beagle Studios?

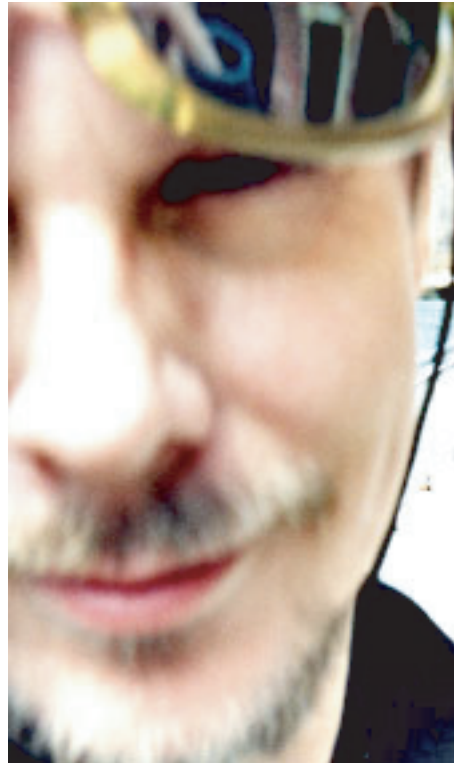
Teddy Kumpel: I'm a native Long Islander who's been living in NYC for 16 years. Mom's an accomplished pianist/organist. Dad's a loungey/Broadway home piano singer. I've been playing music ever since I can remember. I never considered doing anything else for a living.

I call the studio Burning Beagle Studios when someone needs a name, but it's my apartment in Brooklyn. Shhhh!

My guess is it's not much different from your average home studio except for the gear. I focus on vintage sounding recordings with my growing mic collection, old tube amps and an 8-track 1/2" tape machine. Most of my work is done in Pro Tools Mix Plus with this analog/vintage sensibility in mind. The rooms in this place are set up especially well for a studio and lots of work gets done here. I am the only employee. I do everything. The studio is not for hire unless I am hired. So it's not a normal 'for hire' pro studio, it just sounds like one because I know what those sound like because I've been in them a lot.

IS: What's your history in the music business?

TK: I've been producing music since I was five, bouncing between two tape decks, and



the technical side of recording has always fascinated me. I like to play with knobs, it's a healthy way to channel my control issues. I played every band instrument in grade school. I studied atonal ear training and jazz harmony when I was a teen from the amazing teacher, Rich Rabitan. University of Miami gave me a scholarship to study jazz guitar, composition and arranging. I guess it's fair to say that my whole identity as a person is based around music and it's core artistic values: Integrity. Honesty. Fun. Expression. Contrast.

IS: What kind of work does Burning Beagle take on? What's your mainstay?

TK: I am what's missing in the major label music biz, an artist developer. I gently invite an artist into safe territory so they can fully be themselves in their music. I write, perform and record my own songs as an artist too, so I know first hand how tough it can be to find a comfort zone in the studio. Now, after lots of practice, that comfort zone is where I live.

IS: Can you name some names of people who have experienced the comfort zone?

TK: This year has turned out to be the year of jazz mixing. After I mixed Michael Blake's *Blake Tartare* record some folks heard it and liked what I did. I love that. Then there were some excellent songwriters in for mixing or production or guitar playing, such as Essie Jain, Causeway, Leslie Mendelson, Michaela Morris, Lorraine Ferro and Geoff Sobel.

I also played on the films 'Anchorman' and 'Criminal' this year for Alex Wurman in LA. We work through the internet. I record my parts in my studio while he composes in LA. and then we upload and download, comment, redo etc. It's great to be able to work with people who don't live in NYC.

IS: Do you think you'll be doing more long-distance collaboration?

TK: That's actually what I'm looking at for the future. Internet collaboration may make up a bigger percentage of my business next year when my friend Gina Fant-Saez opens "eSession.com" for business. Check out her site (www.esession.com) to find out more. It allows musicians from anywhere in the world to collaborate. That is not a new idea but eSession is different because of the woman who runs it. Gina actually works in the music business as an artist, engineer and studio owner in Austin TX, so she knows what is needed to make this work (unlike the failed Rocket network). There will be a huge data base of over 50 pro musicians per instrument to start with and if it catches on it could be a really great resource. You know ... you're there in your hotel in Aspen and you're writing a song on your laptop. You hear Tony Levin in your head playing bass on it. You go on eSession.com and hire Tony to do the part (if he agrees, of course). How cool is that? It could be like the 70's in NYC all over again but you can be in your underwear!

IS: You mostly play guitar as a musician? Any other instruments?

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LIVE BEFORE DARK

Nikki & Dara

It's pretty unusual for indie musicians in NYC not to have a paying gig that keeps their landlord happy and their stomach from grumbling. Some have jobs in the music business itself, some pick up casual work all over the place, while others have day-time careers. Each month, we'll chat to an artist or act, and find out what they do for a day job, and how they juggle it with their quest for music stardom.

For our first issue, we talk to Nikki and Dara Kaplan, Californian imports and twin sisters who live and play out regularly around the Big Apple.

Indie Sounds: What do you do for a day job? How long have you been doing it?

Nikki Kaplan: I work two jobs; I work as a

teaching artist for a youth theater company. I teach all aspects of theater and help direct young people in theatrical shows. I also work part time as a waitress to keep money coming in.

Dara Kaplan: I'm an Executive Assistant at Bank of America Securities, specializing in marketing. I've been at my current job since April of 2004.

IS: What other day jobs have you done while also doing music?

NK: Mostly as a waitress or bartender.

DK: I've worked in television and film production. I worked for two years at a start-up company doing customized TV advertising and I just recently entered the finance world in October 2003.

IS: How easy is it to combine your current day job and music? How sympathetic are your day job employers/co-workers to your music?

NK: Most of the time, restaurant jobs are popular for artists because their schedule can change every week so it's good for actors who have to audition during the day. For us, though, the "day jobs"/ "normal jobs" work just fine because we rehearse and perform at night. I actually have the toughest time making all the rehearsals with my "flexible" job.

DK: It's not too difficult having these two jobs. For one thing, the members in our band all have day jobs, too. I have been lucky to have very understanding employers who are supportive of my music. There have been times when I've had to leave work around 4pm to make a 7pm gig, but those are

pretty few and far between. Normally we play 9pm or 10pm slots where I really don't have to rush out of work to make my gig. However, I usually duck out at 5:30p on the dot! My past employers have also been pretty supportive as well. I think people really appreciate workers who have other passions besides their work. I believe that it's very important that everybody have something else in their life besides "the job." To me, that makes my life more colorful and more challenging.

IS: Do you view your day job as a career, or just a way to pay the bills so you can do music?

NK: My career aspirations follow my teaching artist career. I love the theater and I love working with kids. I love any type of art. It would be great to make a consistent living by being paid to be creative.

DK: My career is not quite a "career" yet. I hope to move up in the finance world one day. I love my music very much, but I also strive to become successful in the work force as well. In college, I never knew what I wanted to be when "I grew up," which is why I have worked in so many different fields. I hope to find a job that I love just as much as my music. I believe that day will come very soon.

IS: Are you looking to be able to make a living from music in the future?

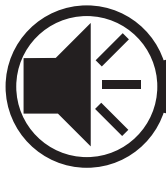
NK: That's very hard to do and I don't like to put that pressure on us. We go from project to project and base our success on what we've created, whether that's a show or a CD.

DK: I would never say no if the opportunity arose. I am most happy when I'm on stage, working on a song, rehearsing and recording. So, absolutely, I would take the change to make a living with my music if I could. However, I don't believe in putting all my eggs in one basket, knowing how competitive the music industry is, therefore I work as well.



Photo by Shannon Greer





Kenny's Castaways

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PF: Well, I'm a Steely Dan freak! So I always have a "Dan" CD in the changer. I'm a 70's guy, so I still listen to a lot of great music from that era. Lately, I've been enjoying the new one from Maroon 5.

IS: Apart from booking Kenny's, what else do you do for work?

PF: Booking pretty much has been it for me the last ten years. I did work for the New York Mets as a photographer for a few summers. I am still involved with Steely Dan when they do something, which isn't very often. I assist them on some of their projects and was photographer on their recent tours. However, I'm making Kenny's my main priority right now. I want to concentrate on consistently booking great bands here. To do that right takes a lot of time and hard work.

IS: Advice for bands to make it?

PF: I guess it's like anything else in life when you're trying to succeed, you have to work hard. If you believe in yourself and the rest of the band does as well, you're off to a good start. Build up your mailing list and get people out to your shows. When an A&R person sees that a band is consistently drawing great crowds gig after gig, good things may very well start to happen.

IS: If there was ONE thing you wished all bands would do to help you, what is it?

PF: Promote the shows!

IS: And one thing you wished bands would understand about what you do?

PF: I'm not Superman!



Burning Beagle Studios Teddy Kumpel

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TK: I'm an experienced singer and bass player too. I play teenage style drums and hunt and peck keyboards. I can play Mary had a little lamb on most band instruments.

IS: As a musician, who are some of the favorite people you have played with?

TK: I try not to name them, but let's see ... who felt authentically good to play with. Tony Scherr is definitely my all time favorite mac truck to be run over by. Apparently a lot of other people agree with me. We are spiritual brothers and came up together in NYC over our 15 year friendship. Then there's my extended local musical family, too numerous to mention.

IS: You released a debut CD Songs in Tomato Sauce, though you have a bundle of great songs that are not on it. Do you plan to release a follow up?

TK: Yes, the follow up is called Teddybut - The Man and it's due to be released sometime this year.

IS: Why do you call yourself "Teddybut" as your own act?

TK: Teddybut is a name I got from playing in my spoken word band, "The Ongoing Wow." The group is fronted by underground icon Timothy Speed Levitch. Everyone in the band had nicknames and Speed gave me mine because I always offer a friendly alternative idea if needed "That is a great idea, but, how about this too."

I don't know why I named my band that, it was on a whim. It's kind of silly, I know. If I had to rationalize it I would say Teddybut songs are a somewhat juxtaposition between humor and healing. So in my songs, I am saying 'but' to myself a lot and the name seemed to fit. Plus, it's easy to remember.

IS: With your studio hat on, what advice would you give to musicians who might want to come into a studio to record or mix? What's the biggest mistake they make that costs them lots of \$?

TK: What I learned from doing hundreds of sessions as a guitarist is: It's not about you, it's about the song. Learn to make things easy and don't freak out if you can't play something. Just do your best always and like it. That's all you can do anyway.

As a studio client I learned: Trust the people you hire or don't work with them. Don't second guess yourself, always go for getting the idea in your head down on tape in the moment. That's what studios are for. If others are in the way of that, go somewhere else as soon as possible.

IS: What's your opinion of the NYC music scene? Do you go out much to venues?

TK: I love the NYC music scene. It's alive and kicking. I go out as much as possible. There so many different styles of music that I like and so many different clubs that I couldn't list them all. I especially like the Living Room for vibe and diversity in bookings. I'm pretty easy to please as far as venues. Nothing's really missing in NYC. I love this place.



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I'M IN THE BAND

Bassist Around Town Rob Jost

Each month, In the Band will feature a local musician who's usual band role is not a leading one, but a vital one of support. To kick off the column, we talk to Rob Jost, a ubiquitous character on the local scene.

Indie Sounds: Easy ones to start with. Where were you born? How long have you been in NYC?

Rob Jost: I was born in Ann Arbor, Michigan and moved to New York in the fall of 1995.

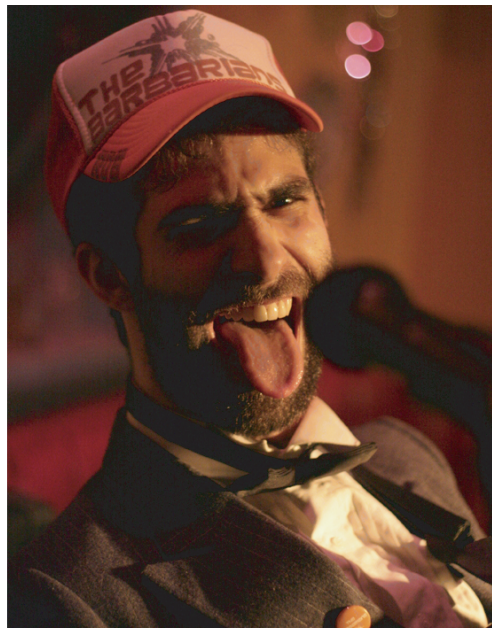
IS: Which bands do you currently play out with? And what do you play with them?

RJ: I am the bass player in Ursa Minor and also the Barbarians. Those have been my two main projects for the past two years or so. Recently, I have been playing frequently for Tony Scherr's band and subbing for Crescent and Frost's bass player Jason Mercer.

IS: Do you play any other instruments?

RJ: This is interesting. I work two days each week at a music school called the Early Ear where I give music classes to toddlers and their moms. For this job, I had to learn to play every single instrument fairly well, including the oboe, trumpet, accordion, harp, harmonica, tuba, etc.

IS: Who else have you played with in the past?



RJ: All through high school and college, I played with a 10 piece ska band called Skavoovie and the Epitones.

IS: What is your favorite instrument to play?

RJ: Recently I've been unwinding with the nylon string guitar.

IS: Do you also do any solo projects?

RJ: My friends have all peer-pressured me into writing songs, and so now I've got two albums almost done. One is a typical "prottools in my bedroom" set of sad break-up songs. The other is a reggae album that Rob and Michelle (of Ursa Minor) recorded live with me. We recorded to tape at my friend Geoff Mann's studio.

IS: What's your favorite NYC venue to play at?

RJ: Well, I love the ancient warhorse of a Peavey bass amp at the C-note. That alone might do it for me, but it has so much more to do with who I'm playing alongside.



WHERE TO FIND INDIE SOUNDS, NY

Acme Underground
www.acmeunderground.com

Laila Lounge
www.lailalounge.com

Rockwood Music Hall
www.rockwoodmusichall.com

The Living Room
www.livingroomny.com

Arlene's Grocery
www.arlene-grocery.com

Micky's Blue Room
www.mickysblueroom.com

Southpaw
www.spsounds.com

The Mercury Lounge
www.mercuryloungenyc.com

Caffe Vivaldi
www.caffevivaldi.com

Parkside Lounge
www.parksidelounge.com

The Bitter End
www.bitterend.com

The Sidewalk Cafe
www.antifolk.net

Kenny's Castaways
www.kennycastaways.net

Pete's Candy Store
www.petescandystore.com

The C-Note
www.thecnote.com

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