

Q & A Session: 24-2009

WHO: Doug Andrew



Photo by Arseniy Vodopyanov

Q: The path that led to becoming a singer/songwriter: Is there any one in particular that inspired you to become a musician/performer?

A: It's a pretty twisted path that branches off in various directions. I have an older sister and when we were little kids she came home one day all excited about The Beatles being on the Ed Sullivan T.V. show. I watched and it was very exciting. Eventually, I got into Bob Dylan and through him I learned about people like Hank Williams, Woody Guthrie and Robert Johnson. Then punk rock hit in the late 70's and that opened a bunch of other doors. I also learned about Tom Waits, Steve Earle, jazz and various writers and poets. This is a real trip down Memory Lane. I had a very good group of friends that were very influential.

Q: Were you formally trained as a musician/vocalist, self-trained, combo of both?

A: Pretty much self-taught. I try to watch and ask questions. When I was a teenager I got a Bob Dylan songbook that had chord charts. I knew how the songs were supposed to sound so I learned to play open chords from the charts in that book. At one point I took a couple of guitar lessons from a guy at a music store but then he got in a car accident and that ended the lessons.

Q: The most influential artist(s)/bands for you would be? And why?

A: That's kind of a hard one because there are many for various reasons but I usually say Bob Dylan, Tom Waits and the Sex Pistols. They all pretty much did things their own way regardless of the business. Waits and Dylan are songwriters and performers that can often hit you very deeply and take things to some other place. And for me or my generation the Sex Pistols came along and pretty much saved rock'n'roll at a time when things were very bleak. Punk rock gave the music back to us. Without it I may never have been able to get up on a stage. Some people may not think that was necessarily a good thing.

Q: Your most memorable performance to date?

A: Well, here's a memorable night for all the wrong reasons. In the early '80s when I was in a band called Shanghai Dog we opened for Joan Jett and the Blackhearts at the Commodore. I'm not sure who made the rules but we weren't allowed to go anywhere backstage so the crew kindly set up a table with some chairs and beer for us offstage in the wings. After we played we were sitting in our designated spot drinking beer when the sound guys set up a mic and monitor right in front of us. Then the Blackhearts took the stage and this older guy, I think he was Joan's manager, walked up to the mic and started singing back-up vocals. He was really into it, closing his eyes, swaying around and singing his heart out. And we were the only people witnessing this performance. When Joan finished playing, the guy left the mic (he was allowed backstage) and while the crowd chanted, "Joan Jett, Joan Jett!" Ron Scott, one of our guitarists, walked up and moaned, "Booooooo" into the mic which came blasting through the mains out front.

Q: Do you have a "dream" performance? Is there any place in particular you'd really love to perform? An artist/band that you'd really love to perform with?

A: Not really. Just keep looking to the next gig. I'd like to tour farther and travel the world more. I already like the guys I play with.

Q: How about producers? Is there a producer(s) you'd love to work with on an album some day?

A: Tom Waits would probably be really interesting to work with. Pretty funny, I bet.

Q: Tell us a bit about "Circus In Flames" - how the band was formed, when, members, self-described sound, goals (new album sometime soon?)

A: I kind of quit playing in a band for a while after the 80's. Shanghai Dog was a very democratic process. We all tried to share in everything from songwriting to managing the band. When I eventually started The Circus In Flames in the mid 90's I wanted to just sing stuff I wrote and to get away from electric guitars. I've got nothing against them but I wanted to work with other instruments (electric guitar has now worked it's way into The Circus.) Then a friend of mine was having this huge St. Patrick's Day bash at his house and he asked me if I wanted to play. I told everybody in the band to just bring acoustic instruments to the party. We ended up with mandolin, accordion, tenor banjo, upright bass, drums and acoustic guitar and the songs just really seemed to work well that way. I called it "original sheet metal country." I've always wanted the band to be able to expand and contract according to the venues we play and who was available to play them. That doesn't always work as smoothly as it sounds. I've been very fortunate to have a lot of great musicians play in the band but the last while it's consisted of Brian Barr on mandolin and electric guitar, Ed Goodine on drums, Paul Blaney on upright bass with me on acoustic guitar and singing. Bernie Addington who was upright bassist on our first CD rejoined us on our last show and he's going to tour with us in the summer. We've also started to do some more recording.

Q: Sky's the limit, you can head on out and place your order - but you only get to pick one piece of equipment and/or instrument. Which would it be, and why?

A: I really like archtop acoustic guitars. They don't always sound pretty but I like their bark and their bite. I love my 1948 Epiphone Blackstone and I guess I wouldn't mind also having an old Gibson like an L-5 or L-7.