



# ALDORA BRITAIN RECORDS

The Global Independent and Underground Music e-Zine  
Issue 126, Sunday 22nd October 2023  
"Tomorrow's Music Today"

## FEATURING THE SOUNDS OF...

Cholly, Errol Walsh, Eric Alden Smith, Lafayette  
Ben Charlatan, Wills and Wills, Reitxel O.,  
Cyado, Draudiga, Berry Donmark, and Mike  
Hewlett and the Racket

Compiled and written by Tom Hilton

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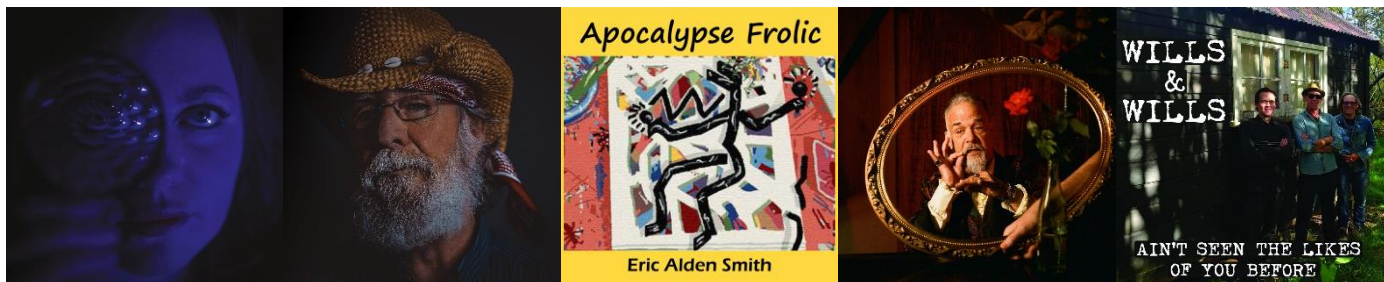


“We all deserve a chance to join in the dance...”

Jacob Tucker, Grey Star Ghost

# Highlight of The Day

This week's 'best of', the 'greatest hits' package. Our featured artists discuss origin stories, their influences, the sounds of tomorrow, and much, much more.



**Cholly, solo artist:** *"I tend to focus on feelings the most. I'm not very good at understanding how I feel about things and why ... Music is a good way for me to understand myself."*

**Errol Walsh, solo artist:** *"My idea of success is feeling happy with what I've done. Music has always been a labour of love for me. I never had any real exctations of commercial success."*

**Eric Alden Smith, solo artist:** *"Sometimes the music comes first, and then I work to come up with lyrics that fit the mood and structure of the chords or melody at hand. Other times I have some lyrics or lyric fragments that are in search of music."*

**Lafayette Ben Charlatan, solo artist:** *"I am a tunesmith. Topics and themes bubble up in the process of hammering out simple tunes with chords, melodies, and words."*

**Zephyr Wills, Wills and Wills:** *"When you don't have a million dollars for a million takes it keeps everything kind of raw. I like that in music recordings, it keeps it real."*

**Raquel Onzain, Reitxel O.:** *"Even though music has always been my passion, it was much later that I decided to compose music more seriously."*

**Nicolas Pons, Cyado:** *"I kind of hear an evolution in our sound. You know, with clean vocals, epic riffs, disgusting pig squeals... this record is pretty solid."*

**Reesa Wood, Draudiga:** *"Folks often say to me the music feels 'witchy', and that certainly resonates. I am really into folktales, folk music, and I believe the world is full of magic."*

**Berry Donmark, solo artist and The Other Hit:** *"I try to stand for the things I believe in, but I'm not what you would call an activist, and I never had much interest in writing politically charged material. But America, over the last several years, has pushed me there."*

**Mike Hewlett, Mike Hewlett and the Racket:** *"I like to think that ultimately our band ... [is] influenced by our surroundings and the music and musical history that we grew up around. Growing up in the Mississippi Delta ... yielded a lot of influence just by being there."*

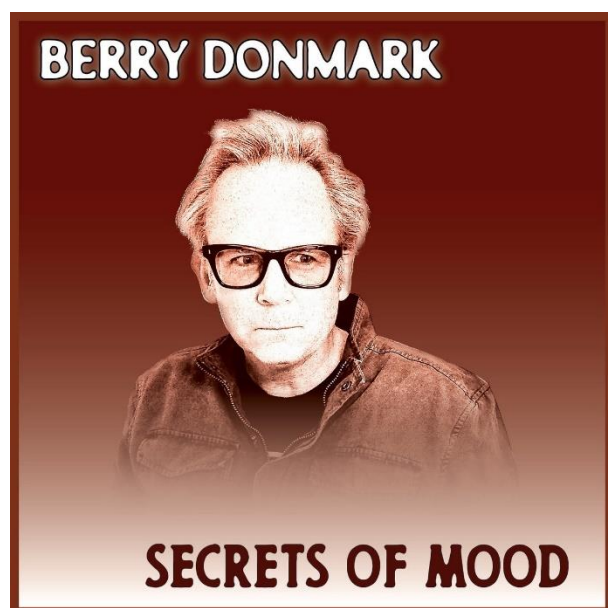


## Secrets of Mood

Regular readers will be fully aware of *Aldora Britain Records'* undying love of the fantastic Other Hit. Well, founding member Berry Donmark has now branched out on an impressive solo path. Here, this talented singer-songwriter can be heard exploring a different side of his artistic personality, taking influence from the genius of Leonard Cohen, Jackson Browne, Ron Sexsmith, and more. To date, this creative outlet has unveiled a series of quintessential Americana singles, namely 'Secrets of Mood', 'Rain Drenched Sparrow', and 'Praying Tonight', three tracks that have been collated on an *ABR* release, *Aldora Britain Records Presents Berry Donmark*. This record provides a glistening snapshot of an experienced writer coming into his own, being comfortable and exuding a confidence and relatability. A fantastic foray into stateside folk rock, for sure. Earlier this month, *ABR* tracked down the elusive Berry Donmark to reflect further on his life in music. We delve deeper on the early days of The Other Hit, his fantastic solo output to date, big influences and inspirations, and much, much more. That conversation is published here in full for the very first time.

*Berry Donmark has previously released his EP 'Aldora Britain Records Presents Berry Donmark' on Aldora Britain Records. Listen or download [HERE](#).*

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**Aldora Britain Records:** Hello Berry, how are you? I think it is about time that we welcomed you back to the *Aldora Britain Records* e-Zine. I always enjoy our chats. Let's do it again! As always, I would like to kick things off by stepping inside the time machine. Previously, you discussed John Lennon's *Imagine* LP being an important spark for you. Can you tell me about the first time you heard this album, and what impact would you say it had on you during those formative years?

**Berry Donmark:** Tom, always great to chat with you. Thanks for taking the time, and I'm enjoying seeing your family grow from across the Atlantic Ocean. I can tell you the exact day I heard the *Imagine* LP for the first time. It was Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> December 1971. I was nine years old, and I asked for it as a Christmas gift. The impact was huge, even lifechanging, in so many ways.

The 'Imagine' single was all over the radio, and even to my parents' ears it sounded like a harmless enough bit of pop music. And believe me, they screened the music they bought me when I was nine. As we all know, the song is deceptively pleasant in the sense that it has important and deep messages that appeal to a certain, sometimes subversive, sensibility. But more than that, the deep cuts on the album contained some really grinding, politically divisive stuff, like 'Gimme Some Truth'. I had never heard anything like it, and that would never have passed my parents' screening. The genie was out of the bottle. I was all over it.

As I told you before, I loved AM radio and pop music going back to the early 1970s, but this was a whole different portal I entered. I've stayed on that double track, the pleasant pop fan and the fan of hard-hitting and greasy music, my whole life since Christmas 1971. Also, I was aware of The Beatles, but not in a hands-on way. So, the other big impact was that Lennon was my entrée to the most important band in any genre ever. In my unbiased opinion.

**Aldora Britain Records:** And now, let's make a brief stop-off during the early days of The Other Hit. Man, thirty-five years of history! You kicked things off as a cover band. I imagine that the chemistry must have been electric. How did it feel when you first came together with the guys in the band? What were you aiming to bring to your musical output?



*“We were just learning what it means to be in a rock band at that point ... it takes a while just to learn what is even involved.”*

These days, I can definitely hear a certain tightness and connectivity. That must have sounded exceptional as a fresh, then-unknown quantity.

**Berry Donmark:** We had no aim when we started, ha! But the chemistry was there from day one. For me and for Carla Colburn, we were just learning what it means to be in a rock band at that point. We had both done a lot of music, but it was solo or other contexts. So, it takes a while just to learn what is even involved. Luckily, we played with other people who had been in bands, like Jim Tollefsrud, who came in not long after the very beginning. He was a pro.

So, to some extent, there was an aim in the earliest days. For all of us, it was just to have fun and pick good tunes. And for some of us, it was a real apprenticeship in being in a band. The tightness and chemistry came over time, and a gigantic part of that is our bass player, Linda Haus. She came along a few years later, and she had been in plenty of bands. I’m happy to play with any musician anytime, but if I never play with another bass player that would be okay. She is that good! But also, to me, she is kind of a conscience check. She’s cool. She has great taste. I don’t mess with that when I bring material to the table, even if it is a cover song. She doesn’t have to say anything because I’ve already considered that.

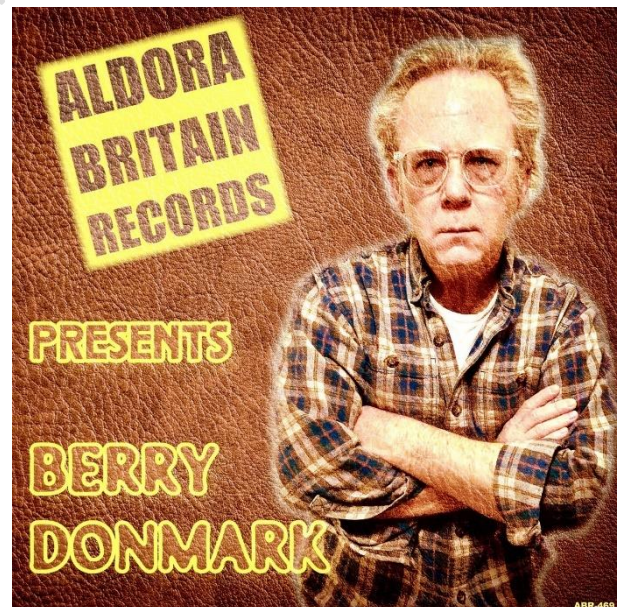
Two other mainstays in the band over the years are both singer-guitarists David Lauth and Randy Webb. They are both role models to me as musicians, and they couldn’t be more different in their approaches. I suppose if you built a singer-guitarist out of their spare parts, you’d come up with me. I’m somewhere in between those two. And Randy is my spirit animal. So yeah, the chemistry is important. Carla Colburn eventually became Carla Tollefsrud, so the chemistry even extended to an intra-band marriage.

**Aldora Britain Records:** These days, most recently, you are plying your trade as a solo artist. This year’s *Aldora Britain Records Presents Berry Donmark EP* is a killer set! Thank you as always for the music. Three absolute pearls from you, and something a little different from your work with The Other Hit. What are your memories from writing, recording and releasing these tunes, and is there anything that you would edit or change with the benefit of hindsight?

**Berry Donmark:** I have a very blurry memory about a lot of things I’ve written, but the three songs you included on the EP I remember vividly. And thank you for releasing those, Tom! Those three were very different in the writing method. There is inspiration and there is craft.

‘Praying Tonight’ is one of those songs that fell out of the sky almost fully formed. Total inspiration. ‘Rain Drenched Sparrow’ started off with inspiration, which came from my admiration for the singer-songwriter and folk music scenes in Canada. But a lot of the lyrics didn’t fall out of the sky. I did research. I wrote and rewrote. It was equal parts inspiration and craft. Whereas ‘Secrets of Mood’ was basically an exercise in the craft of songwriting. Those three songs kind of represent the spectrum of ways in which I write songs, but somehow, I think they hold together as a cohesive batch. Maybe not, ha!

It's funny you ask if there is anything I would edit or change. For the most part, I believe in the adage that you never actually finish a recording, you just abandon it and put it out. I try not to second guess it after that. Any further changes might have done more harm than good. But in the case of ‘Secrets of Mood’, I actually released it onto all of the streaming platforms and then decided there were some fundamental problems with parts of it. So, I went through the



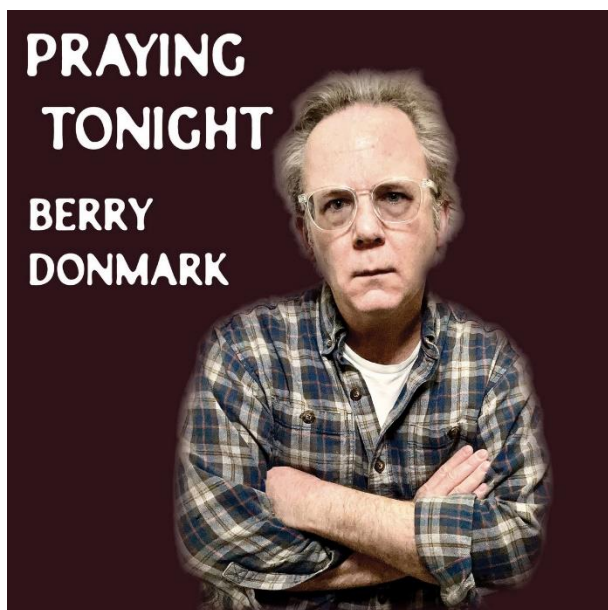
*“For the most part, I believe in the adage that you never actually finish a recording, you just abandon it and put it out.”*

somewhat tedious process of withdrawing it from the digital world. I changed things and released it again. So, it does happen, but I really try not to revisit. You get another shot when you play live.

**Aldora Britain Records:** As we have discussed previously, I think that John Lennon influence cropped up again in terms of the artwork. More broadly, I think these recordings have a slightly different edge and angle than that of The Other Hit. I am curious to find out where that comes from. How did you approach these solo tunes? Who were your big influences and inspirations during this part of your musical journey?

**Berry Donmark:** I think the Lennon influence and aesthetic turn up a lot for me. I didn't set out to get a photo that paralleled a famous Lennon photo, but when I looked at it, that parallel caught my eye and appealed to me. So, that's the photo I went with. As far as influences go, during the time I've been working on the solo tunes, it has been quite heavily weighted towards a certain kind of literary style songwriter. I went on a very deep dive into Leonard Cohen. Books, albums, concert films. Ron Sexsmith, also a Canadian, was another one. From the Southern US, I was listening to a lot of Mary Gauthier and Nanci Griffith. Jimmy Webb as well.

I'm not suggesting I remotely hit any of their strides, but those kinds of writers help you focus on word placement. They compel you to take what you are doing and challenge yourself to go one level deeper into the crevices or the atmosphere or whatever it is. To really question motivations, both your own motivations and those of the characters in the song. I think that is where the different edge you are hearing comes from. I hear it too, and those sound more like solo songs than band songs to me. Sometimes I'll write a lyric and think, 'That would make a good rock lyric...'. And then I put it aside, thinking, 'That's not what I'm doing right now!'. But I'll go back to it again.



**Aldora Britain Records:** As you know, I like to talk about the inception of my favourite songs. Why not? It is always fascinating to learn more about a genesis story behind a piece of art. Let's focus on 'Secrets of Mood' and 'Praying Tonight'. For each, what is the story behind the song, and can you remember the moment it came to be? Did anything in particular inspire them and what do they mean to you as the writer?

**Berry Donmark:** I do remember the moment 'Praying Tonight' came to be'. I'm a little fuzzier on 'Secrets of Mood', but I remember where the germ of the idea came from.

For 'Praying Tonight', I was laying in bed thinking about a friendship that had gone really haywire, and I was mad about it. Tabitha, my wife, talked to me about it and she encouraged me to have compassion for the other person. I'm not a religious person per se, but that chat made me think, 'I should pray for them...'. I started to go down that road, and then I thought, 'Damn it, this crap keeps repeating itself, forget the praying, I don't feel like praying tonight!'. So much for compassion... but there it was. I sat up in bed. 'I don't feel like praying tonight' sounded like a promising lyric. Writing the rest of it was easy.

That one means a lot to me. It came from such a specific place, and I really managed to express personal feelings. But at the same time, I feel like it's one of the more universally relatable songs I've written. That's kind of an ideal to me. Write your truth based on experience but keep it broad enough to capture other people's truth. I don't know if I got there, but it feels closer on that song than many I have written.

'Secrets of Mood' was on the other end of the spectrum, as I mentioned. I heard a song that employed a bit of a non-sequitur, but you could imagine what it meant. I don't remember what the lyric was, but something like 'the habits of

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poems’. Whatever it was, I liked it and realised I had not really used that device, at least for the title of a song. I thought I’d give it a try and somehow landed on ‘Secrets of Mood’. I pulled random inspirations, ranging from my wife to our puppy Figgy to Jimmy Webb’s lyrics and wrote the song. It took time. It was a writing exercise.

That is not my normal mode, so I took a very different approach to the recording as well. I’m really a guitar player, but I didn’t play any guitar on that track. It was all MIDI keyboards. I think it’s a bit of a weird track, but it was very satisfying to throw out all my habits and rules for writing and recording, and then make it to the finish line. You mentioned to me before that you like that song, Tom, and that means a lot to me. I barely know what to make of it myself.

**Aldora Britain Records:** I know that you formerly spent a lot of time in Michigan. Now, as many music fans are, I am really drawn to this place. There is such an iconic and timeless heritage going on there. What was the scene like when you were in Ann Arbor? How would you say it has changed over time? What were some of the challenges and obstacles that you faced as an independent, underground artist?



**Berry Donmark:** To me, Detroit is the greatest rock and roll city in the world. I didn’t grow up in Michigan and I only spent three years there, so I don’t feel biased in saying that. I can’t resist doing a list. Aretha Franklin, Bob Seger, MC5, Iggy Pop, Bettye LaVette, Mitch Ryder, Alice Cooper, The Spinners, Grand Funk, Glenn Frey. Let’s see, who am I missing? I know... the entire Motown roster! Good lord! It’s not even a fair fight, with all due respect to Liverpool, New York, Seattle, Austin, London, Nashville, Manchester, and other hotspots. I haven’t spent enough time in Michigan since those years to say how it has changed over time, but the important answer is that it has changed. That’s what keeps it relevant. I only listed the 1960s and 1970s. Michigan has remained cutting edge and constantly evolving. The heyday never ends. Aaliyah, Eminem, The White Stripes, Big Sean, Madonna, Sufjan Stevens, Royce da 5’9”, The Detroit Cobras. On and on it goes.

My contribution to the Michigan and Detroit legacy was exactly nothing. Zero. But the scene was great. The musicians in the bars were heavy hitters. You learned a lot by just hanging out. In addition to the incredible local talent, so many great touring artists played Ann Arbor. While I was there, I saw everyone from Black Uhuru to Doc Watson to Odetta to Elizabeth Cotten to Taj Mahal to Richard Thompson to Stevie Ray Vaughan. There’s a great club that is still running, I think, called The Ark. They brought in all the acoustic stuff. There was a nightclub where I saw the original lineup of The Replacements. Later that night, Bob Stinson was coming out of an alley, and I saw him from across the street and yelled, ‘Great show, Bob!’. He looked at me, gave me the finger, and kept walking. Perfect. Nobody can ever take that away from me.

See, Tom, you got me all worked up talking about the Michigan music scene. For my part, I was trying to be a folkie, doing all acoustic original songs, only gigging occasionally. While I didn’t make a ripple, it was another education. I wrote my first real songs during that time. Ann Arbor is where I learned how to get on a stage, and I also learned when to get off.

**Aldora Britain Records:** A broad question to finish. We have been through such a unique time in history over the last few years. Both politically and within society, and that is before you throw in the pandemic. How have the last several



*“I try to stand for the things I believe in, but I’m not what you would call an activist, and I never had much interest in writing politically charged material. But America, over the last several years, has pushed me there.”*

years impacted on you personally and as an artist? How do you think this time has changed the music industry, both for the good and the bad? I am curious to hear your insights!

**Berry Donmark:** Oh, wow. That’s complicated. I’ll start with its impact on me as a writer. I try to stand for the things I believe in, but I’m not what you would call an activist, and I never had much interest in writing politically charged material. But America, over the last several years, has pushed me there. I’m not a take-to-the-streets protestor type, but the murder of George Floyd less than five miles from where I live got me out into the street. The 6<sup>th</sup> of January 2021 attack on the US Capitol felt like a breaking point to me. It was the day when I finally wondered if we would ever turn back to sanity as a country. Many would say I was late to that revelation. The song ‘Flag of Convenience’ on The Other Hit’s *Diego* album is entirely about January 6<sup>th</sup>, although it’s not referenced explicitly. That was another grim day. I’ll stay hopeful, because what else can you do? On the personal level, I’m not all that comfortable even getting into it, but if I’m writing songs about it, you know it’s affected me personally.

As far as how the last few years have changed the music industry, I think it’s clear that technology and social media have had a much bigger impact than the political climate or social change. Sometimes it seems like everyone who owned a Mac computer and a guitar during the pandemic made an album. If they could scrape together \$50, they could have it distribute all over the world. I was one of those people. I’m not sure if it’s a good thing or bad thing, ha! But there is a lot of good to be taken from it if you look in the right places. It has connected a lot of people.

I was recently in Nashville for AmericanaFest and I saw ABR artist Mike Hewlett and the Racket perform, and got to say hello. I also spent time with the great Harry Wilkinson, a Nashville drummer who has played on huge hit recordings, who also played on songs of mine released by *Aldora Britain Records*. The only reason I connected with Harry in the first place was because of you, Tom. You encouraged me to put out more material on ABR. Now Harry and I are great friends and in regular contact. None of that happens without the community that can be created through technology and the love of music.





Tom, I hope that you have some idea how much it means to the people in the community you've created. Through you and *ABR*, I've connected with a lot of likeminded souls, discovered a lot of great independent music, and made friends I cherish like Harry and you. It makes a difference. I said, 'I'll stay hopeful...'. This is one of the places that hope comes from.

## *Quickfire Round*

**AB Records:** Favourite artist? **Berry:** I answered these when you were nice enough to feature The Other Hit. Since I am incapable of choosing one favourite, I'll give you answers that are different, but also accurate. So, favourite artist on any given day could very well be Jackson Browne. Everything about the way his art is prepared and presented works for me. Even his wardrobe. Read on.

**AB Records:** Favourite album? **Berry:** I haven't even referenced The Rolling Stones, whom I love. They were another one of my earliest favourites. So, if I had to pick just one of their albums, let's go with *Sticky Fingers*.

**AB Records:** First gig as an audience member? **Berry:** This one is factual, and since I reported that it was Jefferson Starship with Balin, Slick, and Kantner, I'll tell you the second gig as an audience member. It stays on that Rolling Stones theme. 1978, *Some Girls* tour. I still remember the date, July 10<sup>th</sup>.

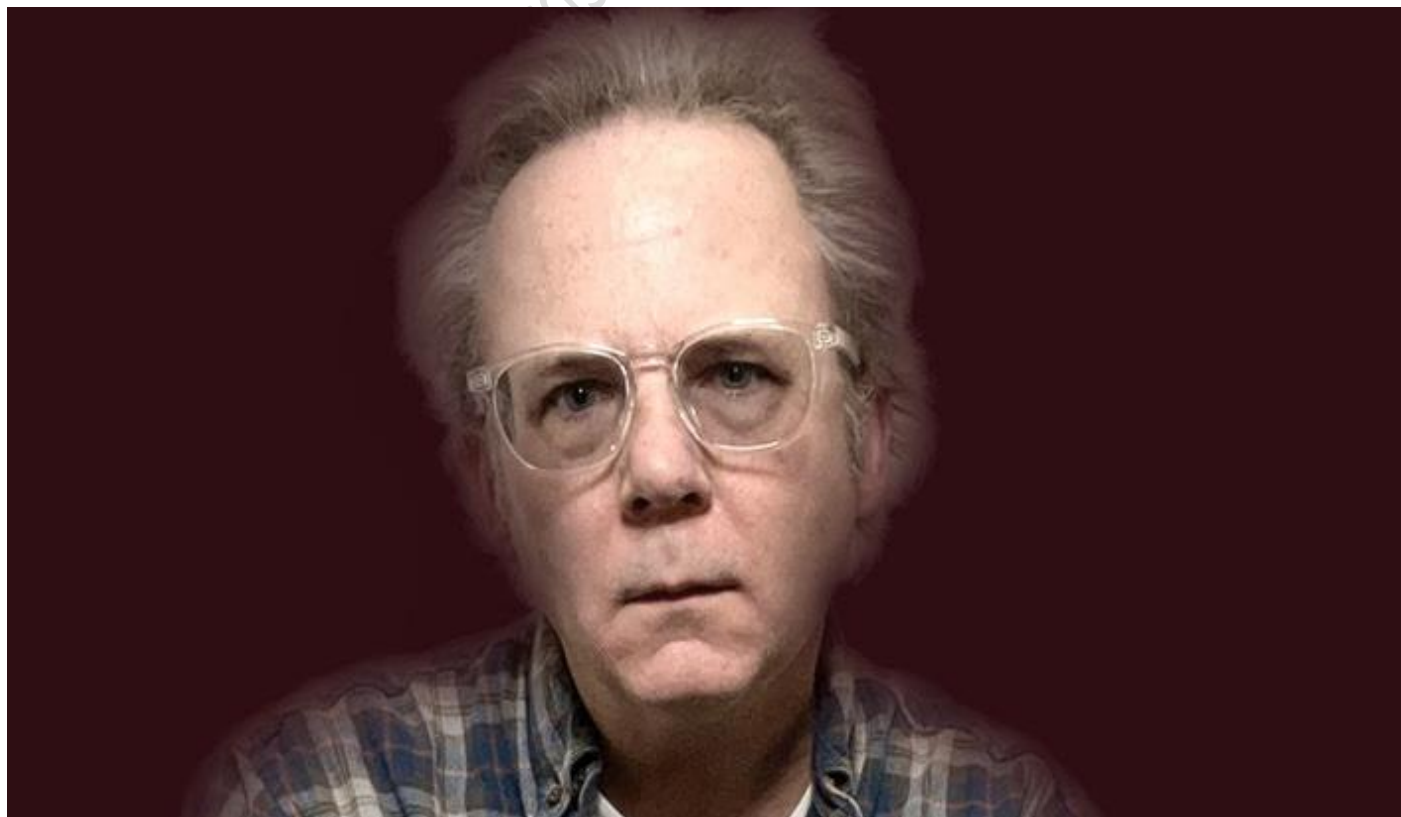
**AB Records:** Loudest gig as an audience member? **Berry:** What was that, Tom? Oh, loudest gig? Maybe The Clash at the St. Paul Civic Center in 1982.

**AB Records:** Style icon? **Berry:** I loved that mid to late 1970s long hair, blue jeans, button down shirt, dark suit and vest look. I'll go back to Jackson Browne for that, with an honourable mention to Bob Seger. They were not the only ones!

**AB Records:** Favourite film? **Berry:** *The Last Waltz* or *Goodfellas*. I guess it's Scorsese either way you look at it.

**AB Records:** Favourite TV show? **Berry:** *The Partridge Family*. Forever.

**AB Records:** Favourite underground artist? **Berry:** Well, I guess The Partridge Family won't work for this one. I just saw a Wyoming acoustic artist called Jalan Crossland in concert. He blew my mind. He is today's pick. Brilliant.



All views, comments and opinions expressed within are those of the artists and organisations represented. Aldora Britain Records does not necessarily endorse all of these viewpoints.

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# Rewind...

## [A B Records Issue 125 \(October 2023\)](#)

Featuring Dana Gehrman, Pocket Lint, Booster Fawn, Rien Faire, Pete Cullen, Jeff Rymes, Camilla Hole Trio, Armchair Oracles, Theo Massop, and Joe Kenney.

## [A B Records Issue 124 \(October 2023\)](#)

Featuring The Tumbles, Kerry Pastine and the Crime Scene, Kerri Simpson, Steve Stoeckel, H27, Tim Case, Cameron London, JT Word, The Awesome Crew, and Driving School.

## [AB Records Issue 123 \(October 2023\)](#)

Featuring The A.M.s, The Torrents of Spring, HOOK, A.p. Harbor, Secret Agent, Thom as Fred, Jenny Spear, The Cimarron Kings, Buffalo Rose, and Mike Langley.

## [A B Records Issue 122 \(October 2023\)](#)

Featuring LJ Parks, Geiger von Muller, Lookin' for Trouble, J.M. Baule, St. Polaroid, Robert Hill and Joanne Lediger, Ackerman, Symmetry, Norman Lamont, and Dear Robin.

## [A B Records Issue 121 \(October 2023\)](#)

Featuring Green Diesel, Crawfish Wallet Cellos Project, The Geminis, Monsieur Herr, A Man Called Son, Hell Nation Army, Tenderhooks, The Most, Neat Mentals, and Groovy Uncle.

## [A B Records Issue 120 \(September 2023\)](#)

Featuring Shoeshiners, Krzysiek Poniewaz, Graham Hamilton, The Last of the Troubadours, Astrolab, True Lies, The Bobby Lees, Rectangle Creep, John McDonald, and Maze.

## [A B Records Issue 119 \(September 2023\)](#)

Featuring Airspace, Sabertooth Swing, Old Bob Gunpowder, Combo Qazam, Ourida, Michele D'Amour and the Love Dealers, The Beatpack, Stone Thieves, Bram, and The Bateleurs.

## [A B Records Issue 118 \(September 2023\)](#)

Featuring Crystal Monkey Project, The Naked Lunch, theCatherines, Susanna Warren, CRISM, Sibyl Vane, Mackenzie Shivers, Junior Bones, Frank Dube, and The Morning Line.

## [A B Records Issue 117 \(September 2023\)](#)

Featuring Crash World, Stella Anning, Disgraceland, Paul Arow, Anonymous Willpower, Patrick Bourdon, Superthousand, Feu Follet, Jeb Loy Nichols, and The Argonauts.

## [A B Records Issue 116 \(September 2023\)](#)

Featuring Charlie Marshall, Black Lung, Ghostwriter, Ambarian, Dave Withers, The Reduced Emissions, Martin McGroarty, Leon Rubenhold, Wayne Gillespie and Famous Blue Raincoat with Rob Grosser, and Andy Watts.

## [A B Records Issue 115 \(September 2023\)](#)

Featuring Extermination Day, Darron J Connett, Spirit Detective, Crystal Jacqueline, Craig Rich, Dizzy and Fay, Ellis, Sabertooth Swing, Dr Monika Demmler, and Frank Frikker.