

JIM BUCHANAN  
AND HIS MUSIC

American Folk Music

By  
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It is not uncommon to find musicians on a local basis. But true entertainers must be witnessed in performance. About two years ago I attended The Catacombs, a small coffeehouse located near the campus. A man by the name of Jim Buchanan was playing that evening and it took only a few minutes to realize that I was indeed seeing a performer. Jim and I later became friends and when the opportunity arose I thought it a good chance to share his music with others.

Like many musicians, Jim comes from a musical family. Virtually all his family possessed some musical abilities. Jim remembers their playing but he was too young to learn from them. His first instruction came from a Japanese woman who he knew affectionately as Mother Dora. It seems that Dora and her husband were missionaries. They owned the house that the Buchanans lived in and were residents there also. Jim says Dora was his surrogate mother. She was a very disciplined woman and taught Jim this discipline as well. When other children were out playing, Mother Dora made Jim play piano. After her death, Jim's parents found another teacher but he claims he could not learn from anyone else. Jim had learned to play by ear and he could not, and still can't, read sheet music. Jim had picked up the ability at an early age to improvise music. To this day Jim plays his music by ear. He claims it too much work to learn music formally.

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Jim was born on January 9, 1944 in Glasgow, Kentucky. He was 16 when he first started playing guitar. Rock and Roll was popular at the time and he sights a friend of his, a rock and roll guitarist from Philadelphia, as being one of his first influences on the guitar. Jim likes most all forms of music and he is hard pressed to sight any distinct influences, although he claims Johnny Cash probably had some influence on his playing, and he claims to have a great deal of admiration for Woody Guthrie. Jim's music shows diverse influences, and combined together they make up Jim Buchanan music.

Jim has been exposed to many differing styles of music. As a small child his family played the music of Bill Monroe with Flatt and Scruggs, and the Skillet Lickers were also a favorite. He played rock music early on which he calims was identical to blues music, just played a little faster. His first exposure to authentic blues was around 1968, when he started playing with a blues guitarist. Later on he played with blues artist such as Elizabeth Cotton and The Reverend Purley Brown. In 1970, Jim met a man by the name of Jim Coryell, who turned out to be the brother of Jazz guitarist, Larry Coryell. Coryell was in Bowling Green for about a year. Jim Buchanan says he was an excellent guitarist and undoubtedly had influence on his own music. Jim's music shows these influences,

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and many others for that matter, but his music is considered by most people as being folk music. And if categories must be used, this is definitely where I would place it.

Jim's guitar playing is very expressive, a quality many competent musicians haven't acquired. There is a certain Johnny Cash influence, as he utilizes his bass notes very well. His lyrics depend on his own experiences. He writes about things close to home, incidently he has never lived more than a few miles away from his birthplace. He writes about events that occur in this area. Some of Jim's songs deal with things that were not recorded with any official news source. His songs deal with matters that effect people. Something that history fails to express. In a sense some of Jim's songs present a history not recorded in text, and live on through oral history.

Buchanan also has his humorous side. Not all of his songs deal with historical events. It seems one of his most popular songs is about a cat exploding in a microwave oven. For that song he won first prize, \$50. and a trophy at a local bluegrass contest. Jim claims his main goal on stage is to entertain. His songs deal with everyday life, and that is what he does best.

Jim Buchanan has enjoyed some success on a local basis, meaning many people have enjoyed his music. Financially speaking, his success is limited. Jim has done radio work with musicians such as Courtney Johnson, former banjoist for New Grass Revival.

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That fell through due to fact that the recording studio went broke. Another time, he and his brother did a few sessions with WKYU, a local station, but it seemed their music was "too black" as the station claimed to fit into the folk music format being aired. Yet Jim does not gauge his success from a commercial standpoint. He claims as long as people want to hear his music, he will keep playing, regardless of what his critics say.

Jim's abilities are best demonstrated during a live performance. He possesses a certain stage presence, a charisma, which is difficult to define or record. Although a recording does Jim little justice, it will have to do in this case. For the best way to judge Jim's music is to listen to it.

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