

No rush for overnight success

Darryl Lee Rush mixes live and studio on his new *Live From The River Road Icehouse* CD

By Tom Geddie

ONE DAY, DARRYL LEE RUSH AND HIS band played in a neighborhood bar in Lakewood; the next, they opened for Diamond Rio at the Nokia Theater. That's the kind of "overnight success" (of a sort) that some people still believe exists.

It's nonsense, of course. While the "overnight" concept may seem to happen, it's so rare that it almost doesn't exist. Rush, who still has his day job while playing a hundred or so regional shows a year, has been making music nearly all his life and didn't release his first album until he was 39.

Growing up in the farming-and-oil community of Markham in Matagorda County in South Central Texas, one of Rush's family values was music. The Czech-descended farmers on his mother's side of the family just about all played guitar or accordion or fiddle, it seems. Raised in the house next door to the one where his father was born, in sixth grade he began playing classical guitar with refitted steel strings and took lessons with a local bluegrass picker. Rush played in a high school cover band, and in another at Southwest Texas State (now known as Texas State) in San Marcos.

Moving to Dallas back in the 1990s, he started playing Wednesday nights at the now defunct Light N Easy on Greenville Avenue, then became, despite his roots-rock style, the Friday night happy hour opener for Big Al Dupree at the Balcony Club in Lakewood.

"It was more of a jazz club but they let me play," he said. "My music is pretty high energy and we started getting more popular and got a little too rowdy for the Balcony Club, so we had to move to Lakewood Bar and Grill on Friday nights."

Rush has been with drummer Andy Mayer and harmonica

player Don Gallia for 10–12 years now, "kinda honing our skills."

Shiner winner

HIS FIRST CD, 2005'S *LLANO Avenue*, produced by Gurf Morlix, came from winning a Shiner Bock contest with KHYI 95.3 FM The Range in the Dallas area and reached #33 on the Americana Music Association chart.

His new one, *Live From The River Road Icehouse*, also cracked the top 40. Surrounding nine live cuts are two studio cuts, "Lot" and the excellent, anthem-like "Shotgun Annie," that tell the story of a woman struggling with her lot in life, then observes in the slow, seething rock closer that the blood on the people's hands comes from building a nation that may not be living up to its Populist ideals.

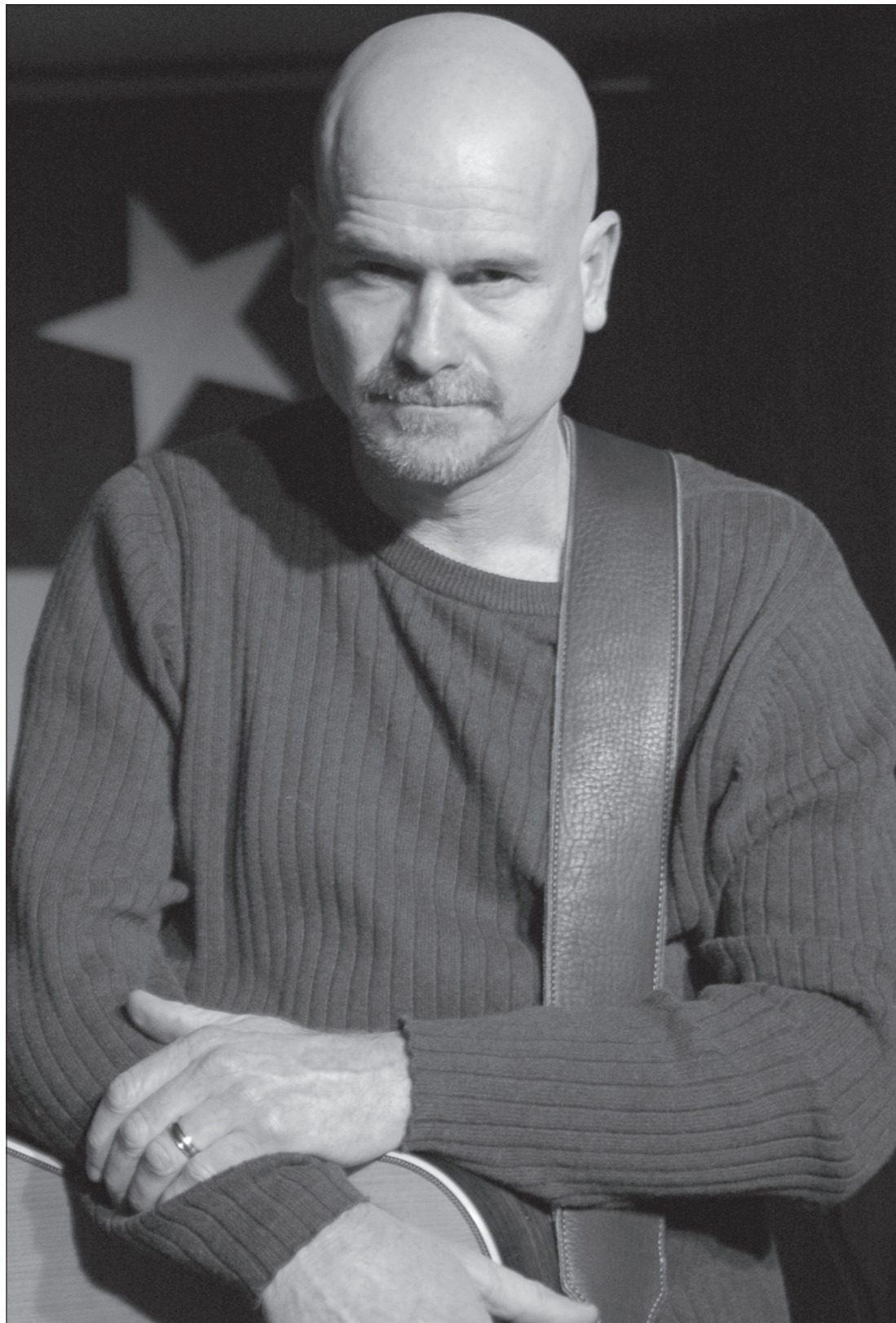
Then there's the crowd-pleasing "White Trash Paradise" about a man whose American dream is less than ambitious.

Writing is important to Rush, as is keeping the writing simple.

"I don't go for grandiose ideas. I try to write simple things. When you have something to say, lots of times it's very personal but you do your best as a writer to take what affects you personally and make it something everybody's thought about."

Influences

"WHEN I WAS GROWING UP, just a little kid, I'd visit my brother at college and he had that Harry Chapin album *Verities and Balderdash* that I listened to a lot — I've destroyed more records than I care to mention because I'd lift



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that needle and set it on the right song," he said.

"You don't hear Harry Chapin in my songs, but he said one time a song is like the sound your boot heels make when you walk down an alley. To me, that's a very simple thing that you write about, and that's very important. A lot of times, songwriters try to write something beyond their experience."

Honesty in the songs is important, too.

"A lot of my songs are high energy, especially in the live performances. Even on some of my

songs when they seem to have a major key and sound bright, if you listen to the lyrics they aren't so pretty. By pretty, I mean the subject matter. 'Lot' isn't typical subject matter; it's surprising radio started playing it so much."

Performing matters, too "getting up there and trying to leave it on the stage. Do your best every show. Play strong. Give the folks what they came for."

Rush said he feeds off the energy an audience gives back.

"I try to make that connection with the audience. I talk to the audience and try to bring the

audience into the performance. I try not to play to the audience; I try to play with them, which is important to me. I get a lot from the audience."

Day job & marriage

NOW MARRIED TO HIS WIFE Karin for a year or so, Rush works for a company that supplies raw materials to the semiconductor industry while playing pretty much every weekend in the region.

He wants to get back in the studio to record a backlog of songs for another CD to be re-

leased early next year, although that schedule may be a little hard to meet. He recorded the live CD almost a year and a half before it was released.

Winning the Shiner-KHYI competition was a big boost for Rush's career.

"The Shiner contract was a big deal," he said. "Shiner Records has been supportive, and Chris Thomas and everyone at Palo Duro has been very supportive." (Shiner is a Palo Duro imprint.)

"Shiner allowed me to touch and affect so many more people and that let these songs get out there," he said.

Rush is still learning about the intricacies of the music business. Growing up, he believed that great songs would find their own audience.

"Now I don't think that's how it works a lot of times. You do have to have good songs, but you need someone who's going to work them. There are a lot of good songs out there, and a lot of bad ones."

From his perspective as both a musician and a corporate employee, he often hears from "people outside the music business" about how glamorous it must be.

"They have wrong perceptions of people who play music," he said.

"Some guy playing bass or drums in a band isn't making enough money so he has to do something else — a job or odd jobs — and then drive seven hours to unload equipment and play and load equipment."

"That's a lot of work, and there are rehearsals, too. Musicians have a much better work ethic than other people give them credit for." ■

Darryl Lee Rush is scheduled to perform at *Love & War in Texas (Plano)*, April 18, and at the *Pilot Point Firemens' Festival*, April 19.

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