

Casey native making mark as folk singer

By DAWN JAMES - H&R Staff Writer

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With storytelling ingrained in his bones, it's no surprise that Casey native David Hanners, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, has found a niche in the folk singing world. After all, a story is a story.

Hanners, a reporter for the St. Paul Pioneer Press, is having success as a songwriter/singer in the folk music industry. His newest CD will be unveiled in a few months. "The Traveler's Burden" will include several songs based on historical events from the East Central Illinois area - with an added creative twist from the artist himself.

"On some of these historical tunes, I kind of take a reporter's approach in that I want to tell people's stories. So I have to get into their lives and their way of looking at things," Hanners said.

He does online research to collect historical details. "Then I try to figure out how to weave the human element and the historical detail into some sort of lyrical narrative.

"Songwriting is a lot like journalism in that regard; we're trying to tell a story and get people to care about what happened," he said. "And, like journalism, it is better to show readers what happened instead of telling them what happened."

Hanners has worked as a journalist for 31 years and won a Pulitzer Prize several years ago while working at a Dallas newspaper that covered a National Transportation Safety Board's investigation into an airplane crash.

He said his new CD's title track, "Traveler's Burden," is about "the I-70 killer, who was active in the '90s and was never caught, although authorities don't know why he stopped killing.

"I wanted to look at what goes through the mind of someone who does something so depraved."

Hanners said he found out one of his songs, "13-Year Cicadas," received an Honorable Mention nod in "American Songwriter" magazine's November-December lyric-writing competition. The song will now be included on the CD, he said.

Another song on the CD focuses on a historical event in Effingham and is titled "Ashes of St. Anthony's."

Hanners wrote that song for three reasons: First, he was intrigued with the story about the St. Anthony's Hospital fire of 1949 as a child after hearing his parents talk about it.

In addition, he said, he wanted to get the word "Falstaff" into a song, as that was the beer he can remember his father drinking. After he wrote the song, however, he admitted that his recollection may have been inaccurate, and in fact, it could have been "Falls City."

The third reason was simply that he wanted to create a song about Effingham.

"It seemed like a tragic event that should be remembered, and folk music is a good and classic way of doing that," he said.

"I feel strongly that songs of this type have to have a strong (and sincere) sense of 'place' and reality. And like newswriting, details add color. I could say he (the song's protagonist) worked at a plant, but it is generally better to say what plant."

His research indicated a post-war factory known as Norge was located on the south side of Effingham and employed a lot of people in the area, so this provided history to enhance the song.

Hanners said he wanted the song to end in a bar because the "neon-lit ambience is where I wanted the protagonist to be spending his time. I don't know what happens to him, but I don't think things end well for him," he said.

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The original version of this story can be found at this United States link:

https://herald-review.com/entertainment/local/casey-native-making-mark-as-folk-singer/article_a22d87e9-ed3b-5b76-b5e1-8565b06fec43.html