

TELLING STORIES THROUGH SONG

David Hanners And The Folk Music Comeback

By Bazaar Staff 31/05/2017

Folk music is an underrated genre in this region, and few people can pull it off. In fact, it's known to be one of the least favored musical genres in Kuwait, and with good reason – we haven't been exposed to it properly, other than the mainstream selections in the early '90s that would play on our local radio stations in the morning. David Hanners, however, is the very person to redefine and reintroduce the fallen, and often-misunderstood genre to our humble ears. With a penchant for storytelling, an ethos that thrives on authenticity, and a lifelong love for folk music, he skillfully strums his guitar to tell tales of what once was in a way that will make you want to listen.

Moving to Kuwait three years ago from the United States, the award-winning writer brought with him a storytelling expertise that was gained by a history of moving to different cities throughout his life. From hometown Casey, Illinois, to university years spent across the Wabash River in Terre Haute, Indiana, to professional years all over Texas, Saint Paul, Minneapolis, and Kuwait, David has seen and heard many stories over the years as an endorsed journalist, songwriter and overall spectator. "When I was working as a news reporter for various publications in the United States, I had to travel a lot – and as a journalist, it was always my duty to get the story out there with accuracy." And with that level of experience, and a Pulitzer Prize under his belt, being a "fly on the wall" poses as the ideal prerequisite for his ability to recreate events – this explains why most of his songs are based on his retelling of real stories he's been exposed to, and has exposed throughout his life. "To me, a big passion for songwriting is in the words," David says matter-of-factly as he plays a few chords on his Gibson J-35, delivering a solid, rustic sound that embraces the Americana genre his image and lyrics portray. "Given my professional and personal background, a lot of my songs wind up being a documentation of the disintegration of parts of the American dream."

And his music does hit close to home, as is illustrated through his previously released albums. His latest album in particular, *There Are No Secrets in This Town*, arrives as a product of his days shifting from a reporting to a recording career to pursue music as more than just a hobby. The album is centered on the reimagining of happenings in his University town, Terre Haute. But they aren't necessarily tales of nostalgia that tell actual tales of the Indiana State University alum's life. "I've always written about an America in disarray [through journalism], but my songs were mostly about random events in people's lives", he explains, and tells us of how this album was created based on a piece of oral history he had stumbled upon, featuring an interview with a woman who ran a tavern in Terre Haute from Prohibition to the 1970s. In the interview, she highlighted all the interesting characters she'd met and stories she'd witnessed throughout the years. "The characters she spoke about are ones I felt I knew: sad-sack men, veterans on barstools telling war stories, and men and women with secrets to keep." He says as he goes on to tell us of each track in detail: "Red I. Miller Shoes", inspired by the woman's fascination with one of her employees' shoes – a trendy brand she was fond of during that decade. And another fascinating tale, "The Day James Jones

Came to Town”, which illustrates well-known writer James Jones’ frequent visits out of a writer’s colony to Terre Haute, and his touching platonic friendship formed with the tavern-owner over the years. As David continued to list his tracks and explain with fervor what the back-story of each song written was, we see a gleam in his eye that displayed such longing and excitement to recreate fascinating happenings of the past.

With a firm grip on his passion for storytelling coupled with his everlasting intention to stay authentic in his music, David’s relocation to Kuwait comes with the intent to expand this talent in different ways that will reach and inspire fellow songwriters. “A big objective of mine in Kuwait is to encourage songwriting craft through storytelling. I’d like to be a part of creating an initiative here, or at least partaking in it regularly, where songwriters can congregate to discuss their work and get feedback.” Because to David, who has years of education through experience in songwriting, his playing a role in the progress the community is making with musical expression is vital, and as an avid musician himself, he only wants to help their interest grow. “My experience has taught me that 80% of good songwriting is editing. There’s a lot of talent here, and there are a lot of people looking to harness that talent and develop it. You can only go at it alone for so long.”

But stepping aside from what David wants to do for the musical community to what Kuwait as a musical entity can do for him, we press for details. “If living in Kuwait has allowed me to do anything, it has made me step back and look at the bigger picture. Sometimes, you just have to go somewhere else to learn about where you came from.” His last album was released in 2014, and tells tales of a town that’s dear to his heart. He is known for retelling stories through music, similar to the likes of iconic influencers such as Woody Guthrie and Tom Waits. What about the next album? What can local narratives hailing from the region do for his creative conscience? “I’d love to record my next album here! The songs I’ve written for my next record still tell those individual and personal stories, but they are connected in a way that the songs on my previous albums weren’t. I just need to find more musicians!” he laughs. “Anyone know of a good fiddle player?”

David’s music is available for free download at www.davidhanners.com, and www.reverbnation.com/davidhanners. David plays lots of gigs and shows at various venues in Kuwait. Just don’t ask him to play “Hotel California.”

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

<https://bazaar.town/telling-stories-through-song/>