

TROUBADOUR BLUES

A documentary by TOM WEBER

PROPOSAL FOR COMPLETION FUNDING

July, 2010

Follow the paths of modern-day troubadours as they travel the lost highways of America, singing songs of love, longing, hope and redemption.

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1283 Cedar Blvd., Pittsburgh, PA 15228

<http://www.troubadour-blues.com>

(412) 370-1736

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Troubadour Blues is a journey into the world of traveling singer-songwriters like Peter Case, Chris Smither, Mark Erelli, Dave Alvin, Mary Gauthier, Slaid Cleaves and many more. Filmmaker Tom Weber spent nearly 10 years gathering material for this feature-length documentary, which provides a revealing look at the heartbreaks and joys of these modern-day wandering minstrels.

The film, containing all original footage, has a total running time of 89 minutes and is complete except for final audio/video mastering. Release is contingent upon obtaining copyright clearance for the approximately 40 songs featured. The primary product is a deluxe DVD including a booklet suitable for autographing and a second disk of live performances and other extras.

This is a story that needs to be heard. In our media-saturated age of instant pop stardom, there is real danger that the tradition of the itinerant working musician is being diluted or lost. This is a concern expressed in the film by a number of artists. *Troubadour Blues* explores the hidden corners of our culture, where honest, authentic songs reflecting the human experience are still being made up and sung.

A strong core audience of fans, writers, radio DJs and concert presenters is already in place, and there is an established network of venues that support these performers. We plan to concentrate on these existing channels to promote the film's release, rather than expend resources on the oversaturated festival circuit. Also, there is a strong potential for international sales in the U.K., Ireland, Europe, Australia and Japan, where American singer-songwriters tour regularly, often filling larger venues than in the U.S.

The film already has a presence on social networking sites, and a grassroots marketing campaign building on this existing fan base is planned for the initial release. This includes a series of screenings at established music venues in key markets (Boston, Toronto, D.C., Austin, Nashville, L.A.) in conjunction with performances by artists featured in the film. Promotional screenings are also planned at the Folk Alliance and Americana Music Association conferences in 2011. These are intended to generate strong word-of-mouth publicity and attract coverage from music publications and blogs.

Approximately \$92,000 has been expended on the film thus far, and an additional \$38,700 is being sought for completion (including costs related to the grassroots promotional campaign). A complete financial breakdown follows this summary.

Completion funding is being sought through a mix of direct investment, whereby the investor(s) would receive executive producer credit and gain equity shares in the film, and fiscal sponsorship through a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, whereby the investor(s) would receive executive producer credit and a tax deduction, but no equity share. A fundraising campaign via Kickstarter and/or Indie Go Go is also planned.

DVD copies of the completed film (for evaluation, not for public exhibition) can be obtained by sending mailing address to: tom@troubadour-blues.com.

SUMMARY OF PRODUCTION AND POST-PRODUCTION EXPENDITURES TO DATE

ITEM	DESCRIPTION	Number	Units	Mult	Rate	Cost	TOTAL
Expenditures							
Investment of personal time	location shooting	200	hours	1	100.00	20,000.00	
	travel/setup time	800	hours	1	25.00	20,000.00	
	logging/duplicating	200	hours	1	25.00	5,000.00	
	editing	320	hours	1	50.00	16,000.00	
Out-of-pocket expenditures	home equity loan					19,420.00	
Art Institute of Pgh. in-kind	paid sabbatical					11,650.00	
Expenditures Total							92,070.00

ESTIMATED COSTS FOR COMPLETION (READY FOR DISTRIBUTION)

ITEM	DESCRIPTION	Number	Units	Mult	Rate	Cost	TOTAL
Post-Production Mastering							
Color Correction		20	hours	1	100.00	2,000.00	
Audio Mastering		30	hours	1	40.00	1,200.00	
DVD Authoring		1	flat	1	1,000.00	1,000.00	
Mastering Contingency						420.00	
Mastering Total							4,620.00
Music Licensing							
Sync Rights	title song	1	flat	1	3,000.00	3,000.00	
Publishing Clearances		1	allow	1	12,000.00	12,000.00	
Music Licensing Contingency						1,500.00	
Music Licensing Total							16,500.00
Legal and Insurance							
Legal fees		1	allow	1	3,000.00	3,000.00	
Errors & Omissions Insurance		1	allow	1	5,000.00	5,000.00	
Legal/Insurance Contingency						800.00	
Legal/Insurance Total							8,800.00
Promotion							
Promotional screenings*		1	allow	6	1,000.00	6,000.00	
Festival entry fees		1	allow	1	1,000.00	1,000.00	
Promotional DVD duplication	300 copies	1	allow	1	1,000.00	1,000.00	
Promotion Contingency						800.00	
Promotion Total							8,800.00
TOTAL COMPLETION COSTS							38,720.00

PROJECT SUMMARY/TREATMENT

Troubadour Blues is a sentimental journey into the world of traveling singer-songwriters like Peter Case, Chris Smither, Mark Erelli, Dave Alvin, Mary Gauthier, Slaid Cleaves, Garrison Starr, Ray Wylie Hubbard and many more. We see these artists in a variety of situations: impromptu performances, concert stages, formal and informal interviews and songwriting sessions.

This is a story that needs to be heard. In our media-saturated age of *American Idol* and instant pop stardom, there is real danger that the tradition of the itinerant working musician -- the tradition of Woody Guthrie and Leadbelly -- is being diluted or lost. This is a concern expressed in the film by a number of artists. *Troubadour Blues* explores the hidden corners of our culture, where honest, authentic songs reflecting the human experience are still being made up and sung.

Producer/director Tom Weber spent nearly 10 years and traveled 100,000 miles gathering material for the 89-minute documentary, which provides a revealing look at the heartbreaks and joys of these modern-day wandering minstrels. Working for the most part as a one-man crew, Weber collected nearly 200 hours of footage and boiled it down to the finished film. Neither a concert movie nor a historical overview, the film represents a departure from the formulaic style of many music documentaries: talking heads and archival clips interspersed with voiceover narration. Instead, *Troubadour Blues* draws inspiration from naturalistic documentaries such as *Don't Look Back* and *Gimme Shelter*.

The artists portrayed in *Troubadour Blues* constitute a second wave of contemporary folksingers, inspired by the Sixties folk revival to seek out deeper roots but informed by the raw emotional force of rock & roll. This generation of troubadours serves as an important bridge between the American folk tradition and the Internet generation of today, younger players inspired by alt-country and *O Brother Where Art Thou*.

The central figure of the film is Peter Case, a widely respected singer-songwriter, author and producer. Case is a complex individual and gifted storyteller whose participation gives the film a strong narrative thrust.

Case grew up in Hamburg, N.Y., a small town on the outskirts of Buffalo, listening to an eclectic mix of Sixties folk, blues, soul and rock & roll. He first began playing alone and in bands as a teenager, dropped out of school at 17 and rode the train to San Francisco. There he survived for several years as a street musician before joining Jack Lee and Paul Collins in the Nerves, then moving to Los Angeles and founding the Plimsouls. Both of these bands are now regarded as influential pioneers of modern alternative rock.

Case has been recording and performing solo for more than 25 years, releasing a dozen albums on the Geffen, Vanguard and Yep Roc labels. He produced *Avalon Blues*, a CD tribute to Mississippi John Hurt that featured prominent artists like Lucinda Williams, Bruce Cockburn and Steve Earle and was nominated for a Grammy in 2002. *Let Us Now Praise Sleepy John*, his most recent CD, netted him a second Grammy nomination for best traditional folk album in 2007.

Case was very generous with his time, and we get to know him not only as a performer but also as a person. He takes us on a tour of his upstate New York hometown, providing a glimpse of the forces that molded his songwriting, and invites us into a songwriting workshop at McCabe's Guitar Shop in Santa Monica, where he interacts with other songwriters on his home turf.

Other highlights: Chris Smither evokes childhood memories of a singing New Orleans produce vendor in "No Love Today;" Mark Erelli talks about the origins of his song, "Troubadour Blues" and how Smither inspired him to first pick up a guitar; Mary Gauthier tells how she carried around the words "cigarette" and "kitchenette" in a notebook for years before checking into a dingy motel and finding a song in that rhyme; Tracy Grammer fondly recalls her partner, the late Dave Carter, who died shortly before filming began; Ray Wylie Hubbard explains how mistakes in the recording studio can lead to remarkable musical moments.

Filming was suspended for seven months in 2009 while Case recovered from emergency double-bypass heart surgery, which was ordered by doctors after routine tests revealed blockages in two major arteries. Like many musicians, Case was without health insurance, and benefit concerts were held to raise money for medical expenses. Case's illness provides a subtext for the film's emotionally charged final scene, his return to the stage in August 2009 at Fur Peace Ranch in southern Ohio.

The singer-songwriter scene is a fan-driven phenomenon that receives little support from mainstream media. *Troubadour Blues* is an attempt to expand the audience for these hard-traveling poets who connect with audiences throughout the world with their heartfelt songs and stories. There is a strong core audience for the film in North America and Europe, where the artists tour extensively, and several artists have agreed to participate in promotional events and to publicize the film on their websites.

ARTISTIC STATEMENT

When I set out somewhat naively to make a documentary about troubadours, I simply thought that it was a story that needed to be heard. Almost eight years later, my primary artistic goal remains the same: to tell that story to as wide an audience as possible. As Peter Case observes, your subject matter is built into your life and your job as an artist is to dig down inside yourself and find it.

Music has been a central part of my life since childhood. Although I grew up in a classically oriented household, the music that spoke to my heart as a child was more rough-hewn: Marty Robbins's gunfighter ballads, Johnny Cash's Indian laments, Hank Williams's lonesome blues. Later, I was blown away by the sheer energy of the Beatles, learned about the blues from the Rolling Stones and Yardbirds, immersed myself during my college years in traditional and contemporary folk music, then gravitated back toward rock & roll.

I met Peter Case in 1998, bought all his records and started going to his shows whenever he came east. Although I had been a fan of the Plimsouls since the early 1980s, I realized as I got to know Peter that his music had a special resonance for me, in part because of our common experiences growing up in Rust Belt communities, in part because of our shared love of the folk blues. It seemed a logical next step to begin documenting his performances.

Through Peter I met Chris Smither. Through Chris I met Mark Erelli, whose song "Troubadour Blues" gave me a title. Artists introduced me to other artists, and I followed the trail as my work schedule permitted. I worked without a crew, the way that most of the artists in the film conduct their tours. My background in ethnography teaches me to be unobtrusive, to interfere as little as possible in the setting that I'm studying. This dictated shooting by available light, capturing performances from an ordinary seat, conducting interviews in comfortable settings.

The nature of the subject dictated the narrative style of the film. These are gifted storytellers, and the best thing a filmmaker can do is to stay out of their way. Along with formal interviews, I tried to capture the myriad interactions between performers and fans, set against a background of song. I want the audience to engage with these artists as I did, seeing them on a stage and then gradually getting to know them. This dictated that there be no scripted voiceovers, no omniscient narrator telling the film audience what to think. Likewise, I used no archival footage; everything you see is original.

The digital revolution has liberated filmmaking by eliminating the need for big budgets, expensive equipment and large, intrusive crews. As Francis Ford Coppola observed, technology has taken the professionalism out of movie making, freeing filmmakers to tell smaller and more personal stories. *Troubadour Blues* is one of those stories.

KEY ELEMENTS OF MARKETING PLAN

- The core audience for the film is an audience interested primarily in music, not so much in new film releases, and the expense of making multiple film prints for theatrical release is not justified. Instead, the marketing effort will begin at the grassroots level with a series of promotional screenings at established music venues in key markets (Boston, Toronto, D.C., Nashville, Austin, Los Angeles, etc.). Ideally, a number of artists featured in the film will perform at each screening, generating both word-of-mouth publicity and coverage by music writers. A basic edition of the DVD containing only the main film will be produced for sale at these screenings, and for promotional mailing.
- The primary product will be a deluxe DVD that includes the complete film as well as more than two hours of extras: deleted scenes, extensive live performances, extended interviews, and a full-length high-definition version of Peter Case's comeback performance at Fur Peach Ranch. A 32-page booklet will contain artist biographies, photos, and space for autographs -- encouraging purchasers to take the booklet to shows and have it signed by the artists. Both the deluxe and basic DVDs will also be produced in PAL format to facilitate sales in the U.K., Ireland, Europe and Australia, where many artists tour extensively.
- Screenings and personal appearances by the filmmaker, and possibly artists from the film, will be scheduled during 2011 at high-profile events such as the Folk Alliance International conference (Memphis, February), South By Southwest (Austin, March), the Americana Music Association conference (Nashville, October) and the five Folk Alliance regional conferences (November).
- Featured artists will be encouraged to help market the DVD through direct sales, word of mouth and links on their own websites. Incentives will be provided for artists to carry the DVD along with their own product on concert merchandise tables. In addition, a discount will be made available for merchandise and downloads purchased through links from artist websites.
- * The initial marketing effort will be intensively promoted via the film's own website/blog, <http://www.troubadour-blues.com>, with all items cross-posted to the film's Facebook page. The site, which went online in January 2010, features interactive artist biographies, links to artists' websites, sample clips, frequent updates on the documentary and news related to the singer-songwriter community. A promotional trailer is currently being generated for the front page of the site, which also includes an interactive shopping cart equipped for sale of both physical goods and downloads.
- Large-scale retail sales through Amazon, Barnes & Noble, etc., will require partnership with a distribution company and/or fulfillment service. The DVD will also be made available through independent distribution sites such as Filmbaby.

The film will be marketed to Netflix for both streaming and conventional DVD distribution.

- Festival and theatrical screenings will be scheduled after the initial release, based on interest. Both festival and theatrical screenings have value primarily as venues for promotion and sale of DVDs. There is a possibility of barter syndication on cable channels such as VH-1 Classic, CMT, and/or Ovation TV, in partnership with a distributor or fulfillment broker.
- The film has an identifiable and enthusiastic core audience that will applaud its initial release, and a cast of supportive artists who will help promote it. With a compelling narrative and a memorable cast of master storytellers, *Troubadour Blues* will help expand the fan base for this uniquely American art form. The film has an almost unlimited shelf life, as new generations of listeners are attracted by the mystique of live performance to seek out deeper musical roots.

BIOGRAPHY

Tom Weber is an Instructor in Video/Digital Media Production at the Art Institute of Pittsburgh. A published writer and documentary filmmaker, he has a Ph.D. in Mass Communication from Bowling Green State University as well as degrees from Indiana University – Bloomington and Harvard University. He has previously taught communication and journalism at Thiel College, Edinboro University of Pennsylvania and Gannon University. Weber is co-author of *Reggae Island: Jamaican Music in the Digital Age*, a book published in 1998 by Da Capo Press. He is currently working on a documentary about contemporary American folk music, *Troubadour Blues*, and collaborating on concert videos with several nationally known performers. An avid guitarist and keyboard player, Weber lives in suburban Pittsburgh.