

KOSTAS INTERVIEW PART 3 - MAKIN' IT TO NASHVILLE

00:00 Blackmon: So, before we move on from Vietnam, I just wanted to ask you, you told me, you know, you had to play different types of music for the, the grunts and different kinds of music for the officers. And were there... Yeah, were there any other kinds of musical happenings or anything that influenced you? Over there, musically.

00:30 Kostas: Uhm, there were uhm, there were two kinds of, or, yeah, two kinds of bands over there. Uhm. Playing music, and uh they were either Filipinos or Vietnamese playing in Vietnam, or Australians and American bands for over their playing.

01:02 Blackmon: Okay.

01:03 Kostas: And uh I think uh you know, they tried to cover as much of whatever they knew, you know, I couldn't imagine. Even though I did hear Vietnamese bands, uh they were, in essence trying to play American music with a Vietnamese accent. It was funny.

01:33 Blackmon/Kostas: [Both chuckling]

01:36 Kostas: It was funny.

01:39 Blackmon: What kind a, were they just trying to play the hits of the day?

01:43 Kostas: Yeah, yeah, and one of the hits that they were playing was uh that song You're My Venus. Oh, you're my da da and my desire. You know I heard it from the rock you know for. I mean, I'll never forget it. And uh the uhm bells over there. They, they would make the uhm amplifiers over there. You couldn't bring your own amplifier from here. So, everything sounded like Shit. You know uh.

02:28 Blackmon: They had Vietnamese amplifiers? wow.

02:31 Kostas: Yeah. And Filipino amplifiers. And you know, they didn't have we couldn't bring over Fender amps, or whatever else was around. Because if we do much and ohm And so anyway, that was the extent of it.

02:59 Blackmon: Did the Filipinos or Vietnamese get the feel of the music?

03:09 Kostas: Uhm, the uh Vietnamese were just doing what a, they were copying what they thought was the music without understanding the language. Or you know they just went on the feel of the thing. uh and didn't know what the hell they were saying. So it just sounded so funny. Because uh all they were trying to do. They uh, they were, they learned the song, but they didn't know what they were learning. You know the language they didn't know anything. So uh, you know and uh, they a, they were trying to be rock and roll artists or country artists or whatever

they were, you know uhm. The Filipinos were in trying to imitate you know, Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis Jr, that kind of thing.

04:26 Blackmon: Yeah, they like that they like kind of balladeers music there don't they.

04:31 Kostas: Yeah.

04:32 Blackmon: I've noticed that about, I have a friend from the Philippines and uh later that they seem to really go for that. So, what happens after Vietnam?

04:45 Kostas: Well, uh, after we came back, I quit the band. In fact, the entire band quit Birch. Because Birch was uh, I mean, the guy went over there and got filthy rich, you know. And he didn't pay us anything. So we all quit. And when we came back, and I just went back to Billings, my old man kind of abandoned my mom and I went back to Greece. In 67, he, you know, realized once he was over there, that there was nothing there for him, you know uhm. He thought that he would find everything, the way he left it back in 57, you know, but all his friends had, you know, children and families to deal with. And they all looked at him kind of funny. And we're saying, Well, where's your wife? And where's your son? You know, why just leave them and all that so he was like a man without a country so when he came back, he moved down to Denver and uhm, got his the same kind of job going down there that he had in Billings, but mom and I, we just hunkered down and you know, she was working at benders auction, and I was making a few bucks as a musician around Billings. About that time about 73, 74, I just started writing more of my own things, and doing a solo gig you know, got myself a little Fender PA system and, and an ovation guitar and started singing. Moody Blues songs, blah, blah, blah, and play in the pizza houses and things to that effect and, and oh making 150 bucks a week and surviving back then you can do it, you know. And then around 74 I started getting a little notoriety around the state. So I was branching out, leaving Billings to play and going up to Missoula and play in places like the top hat. And then,

07:48 Blackmon: Did you have in a band? Or was this all solo?

07:51 Kostas: It was solo in the beginning. So I mean, I would play in these little listening environments where and, and people went nuts, you know, so hell I started in Oak, Lake and 500 bucks a night or whatever, you know. And filling up these rooms and

08:20 Blackmon: So you kind of became a star in Montana.

08:23 Kostas: Yeah yeah yeah, that roger miller thing was happening, you know.

08:30 Blackmon: What do you mean by that the Roger Miller thing was happening?

08:34 Kostas: No, Kansas City Star.

08:41 Blackmon: So you did that? You did the solo thing around Montana and surrounding areas through the 70s.

08:52 Kostas: Yeah, mostly in the early 70s, up through about 74, 75. And then, around 75 I started playing with other people again, and forming my own bands. And my songwriting was getting stronger. People were coming to hear me for my stuff. And for from the bras perspective that I was a singer, songwriter. And, you know, I was doing whatever Paul Simon was doing except Paul Simon had a record deal and everybody knew him. And I was just unknown and just making everything that had to happen happen myself. I was my own booking agent. I was my own roadie. I was my own lawyer. I was my own Doctor, you know, stuff like that.

10:03 Blackmon: How how far out were you touring? How far out were you getting out with your band?

10:08 Kostas: Well, I would go from Billings where I, my mom and I were, at that time, I would go to Seattle, I would go to Denver, I would go to Missoula, grape falls, Helena, Bozeman Butte. I would go to those places, you know, mostly in that Northwest area.

10:38 Blackmon: Did you record any?

10:42 Kostas: I started recording in 76, 77 you know uhm. And in 77, or 78, I did an album in Denver with a guy named dick Darnell on a label out of Seattle called first American records. And but uhm it was just a small time ventured sure felt didn't make me any money, but got laid a few times.

11:26 Blackmon: Well, that's interesting. I see that there is a record called Glen Yarborough. Just a little love first American records. And it's got it's got you as compose you wrote for this person. Is that right on that label?

11:51 Kostas: Glen Yarborough was the guy that I met in Denver, in that he lived in Estes Park, I think and he was friends with Dick Darnell. And so we became acquainted. And he did about three or four of my songs two or three, I don't know. But he was primarily known as a folk singer in the early 60s. With the Highwaymen, I think he was a hootenanny guy, he baby the rain must fall was his big claim to fame. I mean, back in those days in the 60s when he had, you know, women loved him. He was short, kind of and portly, you know, but, you know, he had it going on then. He was driving the women crazy. All over.

12:58 Blackmon: Well, I see that you had a song you had a record called Kostas on first American.

13:04 Kostas: Yeah.

13:05 Blackmon: That was released in 1980. And it's under the genre heading of folk, world, country, which is pretty cool that it's those of you know, world music and folk and country all combined. That's pretty cool.

13:24 Kostas: Well, yeah, and it's the production on those songs. That was my very first, you know, aside from 66, when I went in the studio with Jan Romero, this was my first attempt at recording, and I hooked up with Dick Darnell. And he produced the thing and in my opinion, at this point in time, or even back when the record came out, it was produced in a way that really didn't reflect who I was, you know, he was, he was putting this ethereal jazz on and spin on what I was doing, you know, and that was exactly what In other words, he took control and tried to make and he did he made the music what he wanted as opposed to what it was just coming out of me. And I didn't know the difference. So I just went along with it. Once I realized, you know, it was just a learning experience basically, but the songs that were on that record were I can see where people would think that their world kind of music you know, their pretty uhm, uhm, the sounds we're just leaning in a totally different direction back there you know.

15:03 Blackmon: Well the time at different times. Would you say that you had not found your voice yet, you are still finding your voice as a writer.

15:13 Kostas: That's still looking for it.

15:16 Blackmon: But I'm just saying, You told me before about a writer's career as a circle, and you explain that we're going to talk about that later. But were you still figuring out who Kostas was? I mean, even?

15:29 Kostas: Yes, you basically. And the reason that was is because I didn't have anyone around me back there that Could create around me that which needed to be created in order to have a product, you know, that that had a sound around it, you know, like it other songwriters, singer-songwriters of that time period, had a label, they had management, they had musicians, they had money they had, they were part of That highest circle, that, that the world had, I was I had the talent back there. But I didn't have The machinery around me to promote myself in in a, in a creative way. When people did believe in me, you know, they, it was on a one-to-one basis in the clubs that I would play at the people listening would hear that there was something there, but it was in a very raw form. Because I was just beginning I was probably 25, 26 at the time you know uh, just coming out of all that stuff, you know, teenager and early 20s, that sort of world, I didn't have anything around me. I had to create my own machinery and keep it going myself, you know, you in this business, you have to have management, you have to have a great band and you have to have you know, good producer good studios, you have to have people around you who can create that raw material that is huge, into you know, something that the world will go out and buy into I didn't have any of that.

18:33 Blackmon: So during this time of the 70s into the early 80s Did you ever have a regular job or were you always doing Were you able to make it on music?

18:46 Kostas: I've been making it on music since 1967. Yeah.

18:53 Blackmon: That's so awesome. So what about so after this record, what's the the early to mid 80s? Like?

19:04 Kostas: Well, as you know, as you go through the years, you end up getting married and getting divorced. You end up you know, falling in love and all that stuff. It was it was hard. It was when I got into the 80s you know I was I got married in 78 or 77 somewhere in there and I was divorced by 79 or 80.

20:00 Blackmon: Ah, okay, I didn't I didn't know that we've never talked about that. was she? Was she from Billings?

20:06 Kostas: No, she was from Livingston. Yeah. And she's still my good friend today, you know?

20:16 Blackmon: That's cool.

20:17 Kostas: Yeah. And So I was just kind of in a funk because the effects of love are long-lasting.

20:35 Blackmon: Yeah they are.

20:36 Kostas: And they go with you, and they cloud your thinking, and they color your world. You know, that blue font colors your world, you look at the world through that lens. And that echo of love stays in you for a long, long time. And so, I mean, I was going through a lot, I lost my dad in 67. And mom and dad get, you know, they divorced. You know, I saw the heartbreak in my mom, you know, I was trying to take care of her through the 60s and 70s, to be a support to her, you know, and that's why one of the reasons why I stuck around Montana as opposed to leaving for LA. And because I was an only child, you know, she was, she relied on me on a daily basis, you know. So, in any case, it was all just kind of a difficult time. The, I mean, along with the good times, the veins of goodness that were in that thing that I was going through, there were also the blues that came along with it and so another thing that affected me in the 70s. And early 80s was an experience with acid LSD back in 68, or 69. That also left a scar inside of me because one acid trip I took you know, we were the first kids in the state back then to be getting stoned and to take and trips and shit like that, you know, you're 18, 19 years old. And you're experimenting with psychedelics, and you have no idea what you're going into. So if you take the wrong direction, and you have no one there to jog you back into the real world, you just keep drifting well. I found out later that I wasn't the only one that had bad acid trip, but mine left me scarred for a long time.

23:33 Blackmon: Like in what was it?

23:34 Kostas: Well, I thought I was dying of a heart attack. And so the fear of it fed my adrenaline, the adrenaline released itself through me and it just kept it was a vicious circle that fed on itself much like fire blowing, sucking air out of the atmosphere to make itself grow. You know, it took a long, long time to get over that. That hole that I fell into back in the 60s, but I have you know since then, I'm not doing acid, snorting coke and weed as still happens. You know, I'm just joking. But it was all part of the learning situation. A lot of times. I have this same saying is you don't know where you are till you've been there? You know and and, I was my own teacher. I didn't have anybody else around me that could, you know, talk you into seeing things. But in due time the world came through my friends, the world of my friends supported me and gave me the nourishment. My soul needed to just. And, you know, continuing through this journey that's all.

25:35 Blackmon: Well talking about support and you touched on your mom, you being all your mom had.

25:41 Kostas: Yeah.

25:43 Blackmon: Talk to me about her support and yalls relationship because one thing that I remember clearly about Kalliopi and all the time we spent together when I was with her without you. She was, you know, crazy, crazy proud of you. And, I mean, in a real genuine, it's hard to hard to put into words, her the pride she had any, you know. And talk to me about because y'all had a strong, strong bond, but I was just wondering if you would talk to me about how she supported you and yall's relationship and all that?

26:31 Kostas: Well I'm thinking that. In the case of my mom, She you know had, you know, how women are with her children. And fathers are the same way you know. They spent, spend their entire lives supporting, protecting, nurturing, and caring for their children. In the case of my mom, she only had me, she came from destitute country and in was born in the early 30s came, you know, born into a poor family, into a nation that had been ravaged by war after war, that had no future in it. Except you know, later, in the 50s, and the 60s, it started coming out and being able to support its population, meaning the whole nation. But uh so, she came from nothing. She cared and protected me as much as she can could in life. And the person she had to protect me from was my father, primarily. You know, kids are, are, they aren't born perfect, except that we love them perfectly. You know so uh, but the flowers in the seed, and so the parents are my mom, in this case, did everything she did in life, you know, to, to make life easier for me. So I appreciated her and still do in my memories of her. But she, she had a right to, to, to love and be proud of me, you know, because, you know, she. I was all she had, you know, she had no husband, she had one son. She lost her daughter when the baby was born back in 52. You know, her husband abandoned her and left her alone with debt and bills. And so my father and I talked about it before he died. And I know that in his heart, he regretted the things that he ended up doing but. Now, when I think about our parents, I have to see that just as I'm not perfect in this world, today you know, because, I'm the old one now, I'm the only one left you know, and our parents pass away, along, you know, our lives, they, when they leave, they leave us orphans you

know. So I know that my father's life, the world that he was born into the world that he had to go through, on his journey was, had to be heartbreaking for him as well. So I forgave my Dad, I've, you know, forgive pretty much everybody, and because that's the only way I can forgive myself for some of the things I've done. Because none of us, you know, knows what we're doing in this world. And we only can function in a loving way. Because of the love that is in the world, the love of the other humans around us, you know. So that is our guidance. And that love ultimately comes from God, you know, God must love mankind, as Randy Newman in his song. That's why I love man. Cuz he needs me so yeah.

31:49 Blackmon: Did she did she know that it was unusual, the path you had taken Kostas say, in the 70s and 80s.

31:57 Kostas: Well, she knew that I was a musician back from the very beginning, because, you know, she saw that evidence on a daily basis, she saw how much I was attracted to music every day, I grew up, you know, under her care, and my dad knew it too. The only thing is they never had, they didn't know that it existed, they didn't think that I was going to become, you know, something out of my music, something would come of it, you know. So when it did come, you know, it all of a sudden, was this little seed that was planted that, you know, for the longest time, didn't have a flower and one day, all of a sudden, there was a flower there and, and everybody who saw or heard that flower saw something that they may have enjoyed. And in any case, I'm just trying to be humble here about who I am but I also can see why my mom is proud, you know, and my dad was too. And all my relatives, you know, and all my friends feel the same way. You know, I get.

33:33 Blackmon: But your, your mom's pride was way deeper than success in the music business. I can say that. On a personal note. So was it the mid 80s when things started is that when you connected to Nashville?

33:53 Kostas: Well so remember I was in the 70s I started traveling around from buildings, sometimes I was in I had my own little groups. Sometimes I was doing solo sometimes I was doing both, you know, depending on what the gig could afford to pay Some on one particular occasion in the late 70s, I think I was playing with my band down in Jackson Hole at at the mains you move so thinking in Teton village and on Monday nights we would get together over the Snow King Inn at the Ramada, which was the hotel downtown there. And everybody had Monday nights off all the bars In town, took Monday nights for music. And so all the musicians would gather at an open mic at the Snow King Inn. And I think Claire Lynch was playing at the Ramada at that time with her band, the front porch String Band. And Claire was from Huntsville, she and her husband and the rest of the band players, bass player and a banjo player. And her husband played the mandolin. And she played guitar and sang and they had a wonderful little bluegrass band. Well, I'd never heard bluegrass music. Prior to that Monday night in my entire life. I heard country music, I heard folk music, I heard rock music you know. But I never heard authentic bluegrass. So I mean, I was just and she had such a wonderful, he still does a wonderful voice So we just she, you know, does what she heard out of me and I that night, we got up to a gem at the open mic, and I dug what I heard in her and her little group as well. So

after the bar shut down, we all ended up and one of the motel rooms playing music until three, four or five in the morning. And then that's when she and I exchanged our information after their gig was done in Jackson, they went back to Alabama. And I went back to Montana, but we kept in touch Claire and her group took with them. Three or four songs of mine she ended up was went to Roanoke Virginia and was recording an album that was being financed by three or four lawyers from the south there. I'm not sure where they were from. But so Claire asked me if I would come down to to Roanoke get the studio there and be a part of their recording. So I joined in with them. They flew me down I they did three or four of my songs on an album that they were working on over there.

37:56 Blackmon: So this would have been in 79. When you recorded When did you meet her 78 or 79?

38:00 Kostas: Yes, yeah. So after we met a month or two, after they flew me down to Roanoke, where I participated with them to record whatever songs I was on with them, the singing or playing a little guitar. And they recorded three or four of my songs on that particular album. Well, the album that they were working on, went nowhere, because the partnership that put the money up, dissolved, and they didn't have the money to keep going with the record. So they ended up with either it was a record but they didn't have the means by which to put it out, you know, locally wherever they were at. So, Claire, for the next 10 years saved from 79 through 89. She and I kept in touch. We were friends throughout that time period, and we would talk to each other a couple of times a year. kept in touch, and somewhere in 89 or so. I got a phone call from her in 88 or 89 she said in that wonderful laughing, gentle, sweet voice of hers that there was a fella named Tony brown in Nashville, and that he heard my songs that she had recorded back then and that he wanted to hear more of my songs and would like to communicate with me and would I object to any of that. [Add 39:56 to all times until further noted]

38:00 Kostas: So I told her, I was that I would send her a dime, that he, she was to give that dime to him. And that he could call me collect. Because by the time 88 or 89 came along, you know, I was you know looking at the prospect of a dead end life, you know, because I didn't have, you know, I never left for LA. Back in the 60s, I didn't know that Nashville existed as far as me going to Nashville to be a songwriter or anything else. That just wasn't part of my thinking. I mean, not until it came to me, did it become a reality that or a mirror, I could look into and see something back? An image there, you know, some kind of future some kind of place that would want me when she called and told me about Tony, I was all for it. So a couple of weeks go by and Tony brown calls me and introduces himself to me and and then he asked me if I wanted to come down to Nashville and and meet him and see what there was to do. Well, I think, initially, Tony Brown, by that time, was also aware of that album that I had recorded, because he was investigating me as much as he could to find out what there was out there of mine. And in the 80s, I had that one album out from first American records. Plus, I also had a number of songs that I went and recorded of mine locally, either in Denver or Seattle or Billings, in little studios, and I would I sent him all the stuff that I had before I went down there while we were still talking over the phone, long distance. So he became aware of what I was doing. And I think that for a while, I

think he wanted to see if I would be artist material for as well, because he was signing a lot of people. Well, I guess, after he flew me down there. I don't know what happened to the artist, you know situation, but I ended up getting a writing deal nonetheless.

43:10 Blackmon: Tony didn't have his hands in the pub deal in the writing pub deal?

43:16 Kostas: As far as I know, people have told me in the past while I was down in Nashville back in the 90s. That they thought that Tony was somehow or another involved in that situation. I don't think he was. Tony, was when I first got there. When I flew down to meet him initially, he and his wife Gina, she, they just got married, and they were living somewhere outside of Franklin. And I stayed with them for about a week at their house. And he went about introducing me to various different people, none of which I'd known prior to and none of which I can remember who I've met. I don't.

44:08 Blackmon: What year would that have been?

44:11 Kostas: It would have been in 88 or 89 the summer of. Yeah. And so I am down there with him. And he introduced me to one company it might have been Warner Chapel I don't know. And then after a day or two of what I thought I would be signing a deal with that company. There was some kind of a change of heart in Tony maybe he had a better offer for me from welk music. In any case. Next thing you know, I'm meeting was Dean kay from wealth music and Dean ran the publishing company for Lawrence Welk Dean is still alive and Dean writes the newsletter for music, songwriters, how connected to that. So you can see what he's all about. In any case, Dean signed me to well through and at that time Bob Kirsch was at the helm. The other people that were working at Welk, at that time were Doug Hersh.

45:48 Blackmon: Doug Howard?

45:49 Kostas: No Doug came soon after Daniel hills soon came soon after Billy Lynn was there. Doyle Brown was there. And nearly cat Nelly was there. She was. She did all the publishing and writing all the songs that were coming in on a daily basis. The people writing it well, we're Bob McDill. Who else, I mean, there was just a shitload of country and Western songwriters over there, and they all just kind of welcomed me into the fold. And I got to know them. I wrote with some of them. I wrote I I didn't know because once you're successful over there, once people see your, your stars, you know, crossing the night sky and lighting it up. They want to write with you, you know, and you don't, you can't write with everybody. So I wrote with the people that I became friends with that were friends in my circle of people and the people I first became associated with, in Nashville as my friends were Kathy Leuven, Pamela Hayes, Marty Stewart. Poohba Don Mealer, Bobby Boyd, Jodi Mavis. So I hung out with them. And they of course, wanted to write with me and I wrote with a bunch of them made a bunch of a lot of money.

48:04 Blackmon: I was gonna say you wrote a lot by yourself.

48:07 Kostas: And I wrote a lot by myself.

48:09 Blackmon: Which was unusual. That's not the norm in Nashville anymore. And I don't know how normal it even was then.

48:20 Kostas: That's why in 1990, I was Songwriter of the Year, you know, from NSAI. Well, you know, I just got this. And all of a sudden, you know, one day I'm with Ralph Murphy, and we're down at this little bar. And of course, back in those days, bars would change that same bar with change hands and become another bar, you know so, I was down there for a place called Jamaica's used to be well, before it was Jamaica's it was something else. And that's when I'm me and Ralph were in there. And we were the house bartenders that night. And I was I would be going to Nashville for about a month to two or three months at a time depending on what the season was. And I would stay at Shonies and I would write songs, keep my appointments. You know, they kept me busy over there at World Music. I was having lots of success with my tunes. And so it was in 89 or 90 then. That day that I was bartending with Ralph Murphy at this place down there, that I met a couple of gals that work for a publisher. And he introduced me Ralph did to these gals. We had, you know, we were all just talking and stuff. And the subject of me going back to Montana, came up. So it must have been in August or September. And I told him that I'd be heading back to Montana in the next couple of days. Because you know, it was the end of that trip. He said, You can't go. And I said why not? And they said, because you can't go. I didn't think anything more of it. I just thought that they were just talking crazy for some reason or another. Well, the next day, Bob Kirsch calls me in and says, Yes, we're gonna have to change your itinerary because you're gonna have to stay here. And I asked them why. And he says, Well, he says, because you're going to be Songwriter of the Year I guess. And I thought, Fuck, what does that mean? I mean, why me? I mean, I just got here. Nobody knows who I am. You know, I wasn't aware of how these things happened. Well, it was. It happened on the basis of the songs that I had written by myself, which were timbre I'm falling in love, the lonely side of love, which was also a big hit for Patty loveless, and the work that I did the songs that I wrote with Marty Stewart on his album. And so.

52:02 Blackmon: So yeah, it calculates up when your a solo rider. Yeah, you have a lot more percentages, than somebody has co riders or three way riders. Yeah.

52:13 Kostas: Well, I didn't know anything to that effect. So I I had no idea. I mean, my God you got all these other great songwriters in this country and western town this kid just gets off the fucking plane. And all the sudden I'm songwriter of the year. Are you kidding me? Anyway.

52:38 Blackmon: So let, let me ask you this because it did seem to happen fast as far as the Nashville thing of course you were working on your craft for years and years before? What was it like like what was going through your mind as you're hanging with Tony and meeting these people and being in record companies or publishing companies? Like you never had before? What was all that like to you?

53:05 Kostas: It was like, being in Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory. You know, just kid's that never had could afford to buy a candy bar. Suddenly was eating, lots of candy. I was buying fucking guitars, I was riding around I was, you know, shit it just you know the Emperor's New Clothes, man I was strutting around, having fun, though. You know, I never tried to piss anybody offers anything, never put anybody down or tried to, you know, I was always aware of where I came from, and who I was but I thoroughly enjoyed.

53:52 Blackmon: Was it overwhelming at first? I mean, before you even got money, like just coming in here and having to negotiate a deal, and I'm sure you had to get a lawyer's and was all that just kind of a hard to believe and overwhelming.

54:07 Kostas: Yeah. And I didn't know. The game, everything that I had to do, I turned over to attorneys, you know, and they, they signed you up to the regular publishing deal. You know, for the publisher at me, Craig Hayes was my first journey. And the deal that I got from Welk in the beginning was they got everything in the publishing realm. I got a pretty good advance. You know, I think I was getting 2500 bucks a month. or something to that effect. I didn't know that I had to pay everything back. Plus You know, they get all the publishing during that time period. And they controlled everything. I mean, in spite of the one sided effect of signing up with a publisher back then, it was still a great journey. It was a great time. You know, because once the money starts coming in, and the lights come on, and you're on Ralph Emery and you go on there on the set, and you're wearing cut offs, and smoking a cigar and he's looking at you, like, you're fuckin Martian you know and Criff and Chase and all the rest of the Nashville, you know, shows that were on back there that, you know, you get to highlight. No, it was it was it was overwhelming. It was it freed me inside to where I actually was walking in the clouds you know. And that's not to say that I was being vain. No, I was charmed.

56:22 Blackmon: You were doing what you were meant to do.

56:25 Kostas: Man, I was enjoying life, you know. And the life that I never knew that I didn't know was there that that possibility to to ring that bell and get the cigar and all that shit and you know. There I was, I was doing you know, and I was getting awards from BMI and shit like that you know. And, and, and write-ups and blah, blah, blah. And it was pretty. Amazing. And, you know.

57:08 Blackmon: It's amazing to me to see how timber I'm falling in love was released at the end of May 1989. And you got here like in. Did you get here? In 88, I guess.

57:21 Kostas: It was just a couple of, it was not more than three or four months before it came out that I signed my deal.

57:32 Blackmon: Wow. That's unbelievable.

57:36 Kostas: No kidding. And I didn't go to Nashville. Nashville came to me.

57:44 Blackmon: Yeah. Did you realize that was rare at the time?

57:48 Kostas: No, I had no idea what that ride was all about. You know, I'd never been successful at anything. You know, I was always the ugly duckling, you know, and all of a sudden to be celebrated for what I always was in my life, you know, seemed unique to me, and still does actually.

58:25 Blackmon: So tell me things happened fast. And you've mentioned Marty. And the reason why I want to start with him is it seems to me that you guys were kindred spirits in your love of similar musical styles. And he was more from bluegrass to you, but in country music and rock and roll and also in the love of old things. As far as artifacts, I guess it'd be a way to put it or antiques. How did you and Marty meet?

59:08 Kostas: Well in about 88 or 89 when I got there. I was seeing Tony a lot every day you know that I went to work when I would go down to Nashville. I'd see him I'd stop in at the office. his secretary was Renee bell. And his office was across the street. I think. At that time MCA was just across the street from the Welk building. Not next door where it was for a long time. In any case, a lot of people were approaching Tony Brown. And because they wanted something from him that he could give them. One of the things that they wanted from Tony brown people, young artists, was a deal. Tony or Marty had just been dropped by Columbia, or CBS, I'm not sure which, who he was with. And at that time, we were all younger. This was 30 or 40 years ago going on 30. And Marty, saw in himself a future, he had married Cindy Cash, she was part of the Cash family. And he was, you know, but he wasn't well received. In his musical career, he hadn't had that breakthrough hit, or anything to that effect. But he wanted a new deal with somebody and his choice, or at least, the only choice that I was aware of that I knew about was he wanted to save or to go over to MCA with with being a part of Tony brown stable. So Tony says to Marty says already says, I want you to go up to Montana, and right with this guy, Kostas. Come back and show me what you guys have written and then we'll see what to do from there. He did that. Not only with Marty Stewart, but he did it with Raul. He did it with James house. Kevin Welch came up here a bunch of different guys came up here to write with me, and, and stuff to that effect, you know, but it worked in the case of some of them and it didn't work. In the case of others, you know, but the Mavericks and Marty Stewart and whoever else McBride and the ride. Terry McBride came up here and we wrote (starts singing) "I can't ski naws lovin you, going out of my head" (stopped singing) or my hand or whatever it was. So anyway, I ended up meeting Marty through Tony Brown. Marty came up here and hung out with me for about two weeks. We wrote a bunch of these songs. Don't leave her lonely too long and..

63:06 Blackmon: Half a heart.

63:11 Kostas: Yeah and those kinds of things and, and then we wrote, you know, probably somewhere around 20 or so songs. Some of them got recorded, one got picked up by Buck Owens on Bucks last capital album.

63:30 Blackmon: Really well, which one was that?

63:30 Kostas: It's called twice the speed of love.

63:33 Blackmon: How sweet is that? Man? I did not know that. That was a feel huh?

63:40 Kostas: Yeah yeah that was a Metal you can pin on your chest there. You know. The other song was a song that joy Lynn white did called True Confessions. And she was a spunky little girl man.

64:00 Blackmon: I really liked that record a lot actually.

64:02 Kostas: Yeah, she was a good little. She's just a wonderful singer. Good girl.

64:08 Blackmon: You had another one by her called its about me you wrote with John Pedis.

64:13 Kostas: Yeah, I guess I don't remember that one. But okay.

64:17 Blackmon: You know, another one you and Marty did was I want a woman I always like that. I was a kid listening to this stuff in Arkansas and in California. Before I came here, let me ask you this. You and Marty you and Morty connected Did you guys connect on all things as well as music like antiques and artifacts and whatnot? Was that both going on with both of you guys already back then?

64:53 Kostas: Yeah now, when Marty came up here to write with me that summer. We were going through all these albums. And I had this Rose Maddix in the Maddix Brothers album, and we were looking at it and talking about the music and all that shit. And they were all the band. They were all dressed up, and they all wore the same uniforms and everything. Well I think that told Marty he ought to go find these people and see what they got in their closets. Well, next thing you know, Marty, bought Hank William's collection Rose Maddix's his collection, add Rosemary Maddix's collection he gave me one of her dresses. I thanked him and tried it on. And of course it's too small but it was nice to him. It's true, though. Somewhere in this building. There's a dress of hers that he went on a rampage. He went down and get whatever clothes that he could and guitars and stuff. He was into buying swapping, mostly swapping. You know, he ended up he had a guitar that Joe? No. Merle. Who is that guitar player that wrote nine-pound hammer and?

66:51 Blackmon: Merle Travis?

66:52 Kostas: Yeah Travis What was his name?

66:55 Blackmon: Merle Travis?

66:57 Kostas: Merle Travis. Yeah.

66:58 Blackmon: Wow. he had that Bigsby That was a Bigsby guitar was it?

67:03 Kostas: I don't know if it was a it might have been a Bigsby guitar. But he traded Johnny Cash because he was a member of the family. He was married to Cindy Cash. So he and he was also in Cash's band for a long time. And prior to that he was with Earl Scruggs. And also I mean he was a child prodigy and got to know all those old-timers. Somehow or another he had this guitar that Johnny Cash wanted. So he traded the guitar that he had a Merle Travis's for Johnny Cash's d 45. That Hank Williams had that Audrey gave Hank? on his birthday, one of his last birthday. She bought a guitar for..

67:59 Blackmon: How did Johnny Get it? Do you know?

68:03 Kostas: It was given to him by Audrey after Hank died. So they traded. Of course, neither of them knew what they were doing. That guitar that, d 45. That of Hank's is probably worth half a million dollars by itself, you know.

68:41 Blackmon: Sure absolutely.

68:41 Kostas: And the Merle Travis guitar might be worth 75 85,000 I don't know. Maybe. I don't know exactly which guitar it was. But in any case, they traded and Marty was in the old guitars and man suits. And so he started buying collections of this stuff. And I think you know, part of me rubbed off on him part of him rubbed off on me you know, as far as we both had that bug of collecting you know. And So I can't say for sure. But, you know.

69:33 Blackmon: Did he already have the Clarence White guitar when you guys met?

69:39 Kostas: He got it soon after. I think he went. Because the one thing that did happen after he got his writing deal, or not his writing deal but his record deal with MCA After he came back from Montana back to Tennessee, he got his deal with Tony Brown. Tony produced one maybe two albums of Marty's on MCA Records and then.

70:14 Blackmon: Was Richard Bennet kind of overseeing it?

70:16 Kostas: Bennett?

70:17 Blackmon: Yeah. Richard Bennett.

70:18 Kostas: Yeah, I think he was involved too, as co-producers or something. And on the second album, Marty went and wrote with Paul Kennerly. And that that's when hillbilly rock and little things. Those were his biggest songs to date.

70:46 Blackmon: You always tell me you thought Marty had a good magic with Kennerly.

70:51 Kostas: With who?

70:52 Blackmon: You told you told me years ago, you thought Marty had a good magic with Kennerly?

70:59 Kostas: Oh, Absolutely, they connected in an on a in a wonderful way, I think. Yeah.

71:13 Blackmon: So then let me ask you just I just asked you about certain people. So the next guy I was thinking to ask you about was Dwight Yokam how you met him? Because that would have been early on too. And the reason why I know that is is that I remember being uh, gosh, I think I was 19 when "if there was a way" came out, and I remember getting that CD at like Walmart or something. And putting it on, you know, real in just really. As a fan at that age of Dwight. It seemed like things had stepped up a notch from his other records, when "if there was a way", I guess, I guess and but right before that was "buenas noches." And those two records seem to take on a higher level than the first two records. But how did you meet Dwight?

72:18 Kostas: Well, I think by the time 91, 92, 93 rolled around, I was pretty much on a major roll with what I was writing and it being picked up by all sorts of people. So I was I had this idea for turn it on, turn it up, turn me loose. And I one of the guys that was in our office that wanted to write with me, and I forget his name right now, but..

73:01 Blackmon: Waylon Patton?

73:01 Kostas: Waylon Yeah, yeah. So he wanted and it was our first time to get together and write and only time. So I said, Sure, let's write something and I. I always presented these fellows and gals with an idea that I had. And the idea I had turned it on, turn it up, turn me loose, you know, and I had the melody going, and we worked on it for maybe about two weeks, three weeks, we got it done, whatever it was. He was a good sounding board, you know, we have to think about words and stuff, you know, I like to write fast when I write, you know, but he slowed me down and and we got our song done. So then it got turned in. And either Billy Lin or Daniel Hill. They knew who was looking for songs and what they were looking for. So Pete Anderson was producing Dwight and they were out of LA. So, my team, Billy or Daniel ended up sending that song to Yokum. Through Pete. Peter told me later that he had gotten over 400 songs pitched to him. And out of those 400 songs, she chose my song and another song, somebody else's song. So anyway, They ended up going in the studio. And I think, to date my two favorites. Well, I can't say my two favorites of all. But if there was a top 10 or 20 List of very renderings of what an artist who took your song ended up doing with it, turn it on, turn it up, turn me loose was such a fucking brilliant production on the part of Pete Anderson. And, and Yokum I mean, it was just stellar in my mind, but they did. And then to come out with that video that he that he has of it. That's like a mini-movie. It's like, some bizarre little Twilight Zone. A half hour worth of

entertainment there. It was just cooler than shit. I just love it today. I can watch it over again, over and over again and just enjoy what Yokum did with that video,

76:22 Blackmon: Man and that happened earlier. Then you think that album was released in 1990? So that happened fast too. As you go?

76:29 Kostas: Yeah. Well, I can't keep track of when all that shit was happening. But..

76:37 Blackmon: Let me ask you this did you speak into the production? In that song really made an impression on me like literally, in fact Kostas the reason why that song that album sticks in my head so much besides the fact that I was already a Dwight Yokum fan. And I was already and I loved the music on that record. That was my first CD. I remember, I had to buy a little CD player to plug into my stereo. And it was so I can listen to if there was a way that album that came out in 1990. If you think CDs were kind of that was a new medium, you know. And I'd seen them but I hadn't bought any myself. I was still buying cassettes and vinyl in the late 80s. So my question to you is, did you have that kind of Johnny Cash groove in mind when you wrote in production type thing? When you wrote that?

77:40 Kostas: Well, I demoed it and send it to him. And they pretty much took whatever my production was, and then went in and enhanced it from there, you know? Yeah. So yeah.

77:55 Blackmon: Would that be a correct assessment that it was kind of like Johnny Cash on steroids? The, the, the backing of that song?

78:06 Kostas: Yeah, I would say Johnny Cash and, and somebody else to I wouldn't know who. But suffice it to say that it had a wonderful retro injection in it you know, as well as being current for events.

78:37 Blackmon: Yeah. It was modern too. So how did that lead? So he cut to turn it on? But you guys also co-wrote songs for that record? How did that all come about? Tell me about that.

78:53 Kostas: Well, I had gone after Pete produced and had a hit with turn it on, turn it up. Turn me loose. We became friends over the phone. And it was suggested by either my company or Peter, you know, but I got the invitation to come to LA and to write with them over there. And so I also did a tour, a musical tour out there with Liberty when I did that record, that songwriter series but I don't remember which came first.

79:48 Blackmon: This came first. The song the little bit record came a little later. and Did you first start out right With Pete and Dwight are just you and Dwight? [Add 79:52 until noted otherwise]

80:00 Kostas: Me and Dwight?

80:02 Blackmon: And and tell me about that because it's interesting to me because you were a Nashville outsider that was accepted by Nashville, but still kind of on the fringes of like your music was different from a lot of what was going on here.

80:20 Kostas: Yeah.

80:20 Blackmon: And then Dwight was for sure an outsider. How was it with you guys first getting together? And and how did that all go down?

80:31 Kostas: Well whenever I hooked up with Yokum, we went up to his house. And that's where we wrote was out of his out of his house, for about a week, we did that. He took a liking to what I was doing and what I was all about. And, and I, you know, a lot of those songs, like, try not to look so pretty, and this time, and this heart of stone, and whatever else, a lot of those songs. ideas came out of him, he was he started writing them at some point and couldn't get past a certain place on him. And so, like on Try not to look so pretty. He had the verse melodies, and I came up with the chorus, you know. And there was this wonderful blending of what he was creating, and how I adapted to his process and, and kept up to that level, you know, and to get even higher. You know what I'm saying?

82:20 Blackmon: I do know what you're saying and the reason why I asked about how it went down is because I would think he would he did he never seems like one to trusted the system or trusted anybody of you know, the Nashville thing. Even even though you weren't, you came even though you were coming out of Montana, you came to him by way of a Nashville company, but talking about your thing and his thing and taking it to a higher level. To me the song nothing really shows that because it's got this dark, minor kind of moody verse and then this r&b type chorus that reminds me a lot of you a lot of your roots. Can you tell me about that song in particular?

83:07 Kostas: Well, the whole structure of the melody came out of me. That was and we get together and I told Dwight, I said, Now look, I've got this melody, but I just don't know how to open it with any thoughts any place to take. After I showed him the melody and everything then If you listen to the lyric, there isn't very much to it, you know it, it says something. And then he kind of does this recitation thing or whatever it's called through it. You can change your heart, I can change your mind. No, you know, he speaks it and then he sings it. And it stays the same. So there's like one verse and one chorus, and it lasts for three minutes or so. But it was really cool. I thought it was as far as country music went back soul music, which would have been like guys like Joe Tex, back in the early 70s. You know, where there was country soul, feelings and..

84:40 Blackmon: I heard, I heard Al Green in that course it might have been the production you know.

84:44 Kostas: Yeah, exactly. As well as Al green. You know, that. Yeah, it was just He surprised me with that, because I Thought. I left it. When I left LA. I left him with that song and whatever

we had worked on. In my mind, it was still something that needed to be worked on. Well, when he went into the studio and Pete produced the thing, they just took whatever we had written, and made it work in the confines of that song. And it worked just fine. It didn't become a hit song, Tony brown told me in one day, and he says, man says, I heard your new song with Yokum. He says it's a smash. Well, it was not a smash. country radio just didn't open up to it.

85:52 Blackmon: And you got you guys for definitely pushing the envelope compared to other artists and writers. And then I'll tell you another one that I just love. I love the groove on and the Buck Owens type singing over the top of it was this time. Tell me about that one.

86:13 Kostas: That was one of his ideas. And he was you know it was this melody and he wrote the verses up till you got to the chorus once again. And then he didn't have one. So the chorus is where I jumped in. And then whatever lines in the last verse, or throughout the song that I jumped in on is hard to remember what we did specifically, but I work primarily on the course and created that in this time.

86:49 Blackmon: Yeah, something else I noticed about this era of Dwight in his vocal turns, when Around this time, and then the album nothing was on. He really started getting into these kind of Elvis type kinda like 70s, early 70s Elvis type vocal turns, whereas before he was doing more of the hillbilly and Buck Bakersfield thing was Did you guys ever talk about any of those influences while you were working?

87:25 Kostas: No, but I find I'd thought about Yokum's evolution as well. And those songs that he did like little sister and suspicion did he do suspicion?

87:49 Blackmon: Suspicious minds?

87:51 Kostas: Suspicious minds? Yeah. And those songs, you know, he did go back to Elvis. And it worked. And it worked wonderfully, you know, once again. It was Yokum's thinking and Pete's production. And also the music cats that he had around him in his band. They were all savvy to what was going on. And it all worked brilliantly, you know.

88:32 Blackmon: And you know, really the one that he hit it out of the park of you know, hit it out of the park the most on to me probably the signature song or that era for him. He didn't write with you. That's Ain't that lonely yet? Like that's a timeless career trademark song. Yeah, can you can you tell that writing that and him getting that cut? Cause, that's a few years later from the that's in 93. So it's a few years later from the turn me, turn me, turn me loose album.

89:12 Kostas: Now during that time period when I wrote that song, I was writing a lot with James house. And the reason I wrote a lot with him is because I like James you know. He was a friend of mine. And but when we get together to write that song, James did not write hardly anything in that song it was pretty much what you heard came out of me. And but James was lucky enough to be in the room when that song came out. And I don't care if he likes it or not. That's just the way it is. That's what happened. Not just in that case, but in a lot of other songs

with some of these other folks that I wrote with, you know, I wrote with them because they were friends of mine. And on a day when that song was coming out, I was writing with them, so they got half of it, but I guarantee you the song came out of me.

90:26 Blackmon: Well that song is totally that song has your footprint all over it did I guess that's the way I can say it that if there ever was a type of a song, not only melodically and groove-wise but every time I hear the lyric once there was the spider in my bed that got caught up in her web, that is such a Kostas. Like, there's just no, I mean, that's you, as a writer, you know what I mean? Like, I I know that your your DNA, if that makes sense.

91:03 Kostas: Well yeah, I guess I know what you're saying. And it's hard to talk about these things without sounding or wanting. You know, I'm not trying to be vain in any way, shape, or form. But at the same time, I just want to, I don't want to all I want to do is to show the place the song came from, who it came from. And you're right, that like, like you said, and like, I said you know, that that was one of those things. And the same applies to Mandy Burnett, you know, and a song called rainy days. And another song that I wrote with Pamela Haisch, I wrote that one with Pamela. And I wrote that Dixie Chick song, you know, I can love you better. Well, Pamela was with me those days. Everybody wanted to write with me, because they knew that shit was coming out of me. And that's why they all hung around and wanted do the sessions with me. And so I just said, Sure, let's, let's get together. So I'll see you Monday. I'll see you Tuesday. Well, Monday, Tuesday. This song was born. Okay. It was born during a time when I was writing that day with this person or that person, but the songs were born in here in this heart. And those other people are glad for them because they got to buy a house.

92:58 Blackmon: What about the Mandy Barnet song that's all right? Who did you write that with?

93:05 Kostas: That's alright, that's alright.

93:08 Blackmon: Oh the night is tender and the night is strong.

93:12 Kostas: Yeah, let me think,

93:13 Blackmon: That alright with me Tony, Perez. That's who you wrote it with?

93:16 Kostas: Oh, my God, you talk about? Yeah. That guy was he was working at Welk too and he Kirsch wanted him to write with me. So Kirsch sent him up one winter. And I wrote two or three or four songs with him. That boy was the lamest songwriter I ever wrote with, but he got lucky. Because he was he got half of that song and maybe another song and I can't tell you what, the other seven was.

94:01 Blackmon: Well I asked about that's all it was me because that also has a it has your your stamp all over it too. You know, like, it's, it's very obvious.

94:13 Kostas: Well that's the whole thing about co-writing is that it dilutes who you are, because a lot of times it's good, but in the case of some people, it dilutes who you are as a writer too, because these songs were arranged to be written. I mean, they came out of an arrangement with somebody I never knew before. You know, in the case of Tony Perez you know, I just did it as a favor to Bob Kirch to have him come up and write with me in Montana but, and then he disappeared but in the process, you know, I'm sure that he got you know, he got half of the writers royalties anyway, whatever I don't care.

95:16 Blackmon: Well one thing I can say about and you said it that you and Yokum lifted each other you know as far as it's obvious that both sides were pulling their weight I think in that songwriting collab right there. Yeah.

95:33 Kostas: I think so too.

95:35 Blackmon: And I also think, whereas let me just say that I love Marty Stewart as an artist and as a person, but I don't put him in the same ballpark as you or Yokum as a songwriter that's just my personal taste. But and also I don't put Raul in that same category. But I will say that you and in the styles on one song, in particular, seem to really I mean, like you guys just knocked it out of the park with what a crying shame like that, like I hear both influences. And I think I do anyway hear both of you in there. Can you talk about yall's relationship and that particular song?

96:25 Kostas: Well, once again, Tony Brown was instrumental in that collaboration. And Tony was thinking of signing rock and roll and his band we're out of Miami. So he introduced me to Raul in Nashville one summer back at that same time period, and he told Raul to come up here and write with me. So Raul came up and flew up here for a couple of weeks. And for that time period I wrote a dozen songs with him. I don't know what we wrote but crying shame was one of them. Here comes the rain is another one. Yeah, and so anyway, I I loved Raul and I think he's a great singer, but he's not a great songwriter, the melodies and most of the words to most of the songs we wrote I think you know, at this point, it ain't gonna matter but there was a good collaboration let's just leave it at that.

98:09 Blackmon: Yeah and you know different relationships bring different things to songs and days you know what I mean, like the with the thing with the thing about you mentioned turn it on with Yokum had this retro cool thing but yet was still modern. And I think the same thing with what a crying shame you've got this kinda Orbinesk kind of soaring chorus and then this kinda Jeff Lin kind of track, you know, and but it was very modern. And there it had a lot going on to it, I think.

98:53 Kostas: Well, I do too. And I think that in a way back in the 90s, what I brought to the table to Nashville was the retro, musical sense that had been forgotten. And most everybody in Nashville was writing these three chord songs like, you know, the same three chords, e A, and B,

E, A, and B, you know, kind of almost you know it there had to be more to music than E, A, and B. You know, I think so much of what I loved in music that I consumed through my hearing the songs and the Songwriters. And the artists in the 50s, in the 60s and in the 70s. You know, I brought that with me, because to me, it was vibrant, it was alive. And it made sense, you know, melodically. So I was I've always enjoyed rock and roll, you know, and I've always enjoyed people like, Steely Dan, or the Doobie Brothers or the Birds or Buffalo Springfield, those people are important to me. And Paul Simon, Randy Newman, Joni Mitchell, Bob Dylan, you know, I don't care. They're all essential. and country music and country artists back then, as well as today. They seem to limit themselves to such a small part of what is out there. Such a minuscule part. They have no imagination. And, you know, when I do hear a great song, that, you know, which you've written a number of great songs. You know, I, I admire that. I think the world needs to expand. It's the world of Nashville needs to expand its frontiers and quit limiting itself to this same diatribe bullshit that was prevalent in the 90s. And has worsened in the 2000s, you know.

102:02 Blackmon: Yeah, yeah. I think that might be popular music as a whole. Actually. technology might have a lot to do with it. Let me ask you this, though, talking about pulling from your roots. I have a fond memory of I was back home in Arkansas and about 19 years old driving a truck delivering lumber. And if I got to use the pickup instead of a flatbed pickup had an am radio. And I never will forget the first time I heard Timbre coming through that a ham radio. And man, it really spoke to me because I grew up with my mom's records as a kid. And so as a kid, I had 45's of people like Buddy Holly and the Beach Boys and you know, these different Johnny Cash or Jan and Dean and not Herman's Hermits all over the place, you know, the Beatles, all this stuff. But when I heard Timber, something resonated in me that and you know, I'm 19 I'm a kid. But something about timbers groove said to me, Budd, Holly, and I don't know why. I'm just curious. Was that just the way it kind of went down? Was there any influence there?

103:36 Kostas: Absolutely. The influence not just Buddy, but the Everly Brothers. And it all goes back. Timbre could have been a song that Boudeleaux and Felice wrote the affinity between me and what's his name? One of their sons that ran BMI.

104:03 Blackmon: Dale Brian?

104:05 Kostas: Dale we never get to see him that night. But he knew back in the old days back in the 90s. He and I became great friends because I told him flat out right I says your mom and dad were major influences on you know who I am. And so, and he saw that too, and he he understood that's why we're great friends today. So that particular song does have an essence to it that would go back to a Buddy Holly. Everly Brothers kind of feel and also Felice in Boudeleaux.

104:54 Blackmon: Yeah. Let me ask you this like, because it's so interesting, you have all these influences and they turn up in your songs. And we've talked about how we've talked about some of these cooler influences like Buddy Holly or the Everly's or Johnny Cash or we spoke of Orbison. But then it's almost like a hard left turn to Lord have mercy on the working man, which is this awesome. working man's country? You know, it's, it's, I don't want to use the word square

because it's not square. But it's not. It's not the ultra cool of those others. It's more working class. Maybe that's way I can say it. How did that song come about Kostas?

105:52 Kostas: Well, along with every other color in the rainbow, there was one that encompassed Hank Snow and Tennessee Ernie Ford. Merle Travis. Not Tennessee, Ernie Ford, but I already mentioned his name, but he was essential. There's two cats out there. Who did the blue yodel number of whatever? Yeah, Rogers. Jimmy Rogers.

106:38 Blackmon: Yeah I hear that influence.

106:40 Kostas: And also who got Jimmy Rogers his guitar when he died? His wife gave it to Ernie Tubs.

106:48 Blackmon: Yeah, yeah.

106:49 Kostas: And so all those people there would have done a song like, Lord have mercy on the working man, as well as Merle Haggard.

107:01 Blackmon: That's what I always thought it was a haggard-type song. But I seen where I mean, haggard got part of his thing from Jimmy Rogers. that makes total Sense Yeah, it's just how different it is from those others we've talked about, you know.

107:19 Kostas: Well, once again, what that is, is country blues, and country blues is what the black man was doing on the other side of the tracks the country blues was done by the white man. On the other side of the tracks, they were both dirt poor. And that song is all about being dirt poor. And, and being the camel that everybody else is riding on. So, I just, I came from a working man's experience in my life. My father, my stepfather. You know, my mother, all of my family, your family, everybody. We came from that side of reality. And so setting that feeling in those thoughts in a country blues format, and that simplicity, and bringing it back to that time period. Made it new all over again. You know.

108:56 Blackmon: Do you have Do you have any memories of writing that tune? You wrote that one by yourself? Yeah.

109:01 Kostas: Well, that's just what I did. I wrote it here in Montana. And I wrote it. I thought to myself one day, I need to write a song about the working man and that's where it came from. You know, guys that come home. You know, smelling like sweat and dust. And are hungry and need a shower and multiplied times, six days a week, every week of their lives.

109:48 Blackmon: That was to was one that I was, you know, young and Still in Arkansas, but I of course driving a truck would would relate to it but I love the line while the rich man's busy dancing. Why's the rich man busy dancing while the poor man pays the rent bed?

Not for some reason when I was a kid, I always thought it was wise The fat man busy dancing while the poor man's pays the bed.

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Kostas: Well the thin man. That's what one of the lines in one of the verses was, but I think Travis just kept it. rich and poor, but when I do it is what was the fat man busy dancing while the poor man or while the thin man pays the band.

Blackmon: Maybe I'm just remembering wrong, I heard you play it that way. Maybe then.

Kostas: My favorite line in that song is Lord, they're billing me for killing me.

Blackmon: You know, another line in there, though, that reminds me of you is Hey, St. Peter looked down for a minute and see this little man around the ground. That sounds like Kostas talking, which I try to encourage my students and kids to write lyrics how they would talk, you know, and speak. So then, I also want to ask you just on these different musical styles, I kind of put life number nine and I can love you better than that in a similar vein. Can you talk about those songs a little bit and their influences?

Kostas: Life number nine that's the other song I wrote with that. Blackmon: Tony Perez?

Kostas: Yeah Oh my God. Well, having grown up consuming records, subconsciously I think we learn the anatomy of a hit song. And at least some of us do. And you're one of those kinds of people so life number nine there's a [Vocalizing] Who did that?

Blackmon: Martina McBride?

Kostas: Yeah, Yes, she did. In any case you take snippets of things that you remember having heard other people putting that [vocalizing] kind of feel to it, or they do know and you bring it back and it connects to the song. And and it just made makes everything sparkle. As to there's an element of groove to those two songs as well as the melody that keep it flowing. That may get interesting to the listener and makes them want to go on buy the fucking record. And that's what you want music to do you want it to if it's gonna be a group song and make the thing group.

Blackmon: Well it sounds like those the influences musically are more from your late 60s, early 70s. Rock influences Would you agree?

Kostas: Yeah, exactly. That's what I'm saying. I use the things that I learned in my musical vocabulary. I've always done that. People have said, you know, there's something about your style of writing and listening to it and I say I'm I'm I've almost heard that song before somewhere. But it doesn't really sound like any of the other songs. Yet it reflects something that connects to another thing of the past. You know what I'm saying?

Blackmon: That's a big compliment. I think.

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Kostas: Yeah well, as long as you don't blatantly rip somebody off, but to be able to regurgitate the past and put it into something that is viable down. I think using the past in that way is a tool.

Blackmon: Yeah, absolutely. So a couple more folks, I want to talk about one real quick, you know, a record I got turned on to you, I don't think until I got to town. Just because it wasn't, it wasn't one of the big ones out there that I would have picked up on. Until I got around some people in the know. But the Kelly Willis album, that had is such a great record it had baby take a piece of my heart. You. You wrote with her? Can you talk? She's a great singer. Can you talk about your time with her writing with her and that song?

Kostas: Sure. I wrote three songs with her. And maybe, maybe four, I don't know. But in the case of I think I wrote with her in Austin, and then also in Nashville. I was in love with that little girl. You know, she didn't know it.

Blackmon: I can see why.

Kostas: So I, I brought out some wonderful ideas, and invited her to be a part of them. And that's about all I can tell you. And Tony Brown did the rest of it, along with her you know.

Blackmon: Yeah, well, then the other person I wanted to talk about, which was an influence on you. And then you guys had great success together with Harlan Howard. How did you guys meet? Tell me about yall's relationship.

Kostas: All right, well, by the time I got to Nashville in 88, or 89, whatever it was, and soon after, I had my first number one song, and there was a BMI party for my song timbre at BMI. So, there I was, you know, just amazed that they're having a party for me at BMI you know and, and, and all these Country and Western dignitaries were showing up to shake my hand and have their picture taken with me. May Axton was another one that was there at that party. And I should have written with her too, but I didn't. But Harlan was there and he said, You know, he was happy to meet me Well, I knew who Harlan was because I've known Harland since 1959 and 60

you know from all the songs of his that were on the jukebox is back. And throughout all the 60s from that time period forward, so I knew who he was. And it was a thrill to meet him because he was one of my heroes. And he's still alive. And he came over to see me and to be at my party. So you know I asked him if he'd like to write with me sometime and he said, yeah. So that's how we got together to start writing. But here's what happens. The old songwriters, which I am currently one of now, I wasn't when I first started but I am now when the know when you live in Nashville like Harlan did, and Hank Cochran and Mel Tillis and whoever else from the old school those old cats as they get older, they connect themselves to younger writers. And that's how they prolong their careers. Well that's what Harlan was doing. He was networking. Of course, you may have liked the song but he was also networking back there too. To still be viable in his life and it works. The old guy meet the young guys that are up and coming. And the young guys don't understand that the dynamics between their careers in this old guys are different. And one is waxing, one is waning you know. But at the moment that you meet, you don't consider that you don't see that, you just see your hero standing in front of you. So you reach out and make the connection. And then that connection turns into you know blossom in various different songs that were written. So with Harland everything that we did, I enjoyed doing, you know, because he was a kindred spirit in my mind.

38:00 Blackmon: The, you know it's interesting I think that's, that's different now though whereas say you and I came up in different eras but it was the same for me when I met you I was you know nervous as I could be the first time you and I got together and I was thrilled to, to get to you know and I didn't know anything about you and. But to get to be just to you know sit down with you was just so exciting. And then to have connection like when we would ride around and go estate sailing or you know to pick Sophia up at school or whatever we were doing you know it was a lot of fun those similar connections. But what I'm saying is I don't think now there is as much of respect from younger writers for the people that have come before them or even an understanding of the music or the craft those people have done you know like. And I think it's because we've had American Idol now for 12, 13 years or 15 years. It seems, it seems to be a different dynamic in that world. I'm not quite sure if I'm expressing that right.

38:00 Kostas: No you did. I think you know, I think what the world today is missing is mentorship, and it's almost as if the style that is currently in effect doesn't recognize anything of the past. All that it knows is itself, and by doing just that it limits itself to, you know nothing. If you want to know what nothing sounds like turn on your radio. If you want to know what nothing looks like turn on your TV you know.

38:00 Blackmon: Yeah, yes it's a different world. It's interesting to me that before Haggard died I read an interview where he was complaining about the lack of melody in songs today, this was a couple of years and that. But I would even say it's not just melody but I think the use of the English language is very limited to like I almost, not that our myself or any of the music I love was ever, you know Shakespeare or rocket science, but I just think that it's the songs have been limited to where's the party and. I don't know its just a, it seems that we're in a, and you know a lot of those kids know that Kostas. They you know and they they don't and that's why a lot of

them I think they have a thing going on outside of radio that we don't even know about because they don't get anything they. You know and I'm not necessarily talking about country music here but alike some of the kids that dig deeper their just finding their own music on the internet you know. Which doesn't pay the bills for songwriters but anyway. I want to absorb all this and come to ask you some big-picture questions if that's okay. This has been great to hear all of this man.

38:00 Kostas: Well Odie, there are two people in the room talking and that's you and me. We're talking about this wonderful thing that we've experienced in our lives, and it's important. It's important, not that I'm important, or your important, but that the music is important. And because it's important and because we are part of it then that gives our lives some relevance you know and I'm so glad that you've wanted to hear my story. I couldn't have enjoyed telling it to anybody more than I have visiting with you about it. That's all, because your vision and your understanding of things is able to understand my experience. It just uh, its that connection that makes us friends and kindred spirit and brothers, you know.

38:00 Blackmon: Yup, well it's been a joy for me, and do you want me to send you a copy of this Kostas?

38:00 Kostas: When the time comes yeah.

38:00 Blackmon: Okay cool well I'm going to take some time and think about this cause really what I'll after getting to this point I want to talk about the cycle you've talked about in songwriting and I just want to carry on through the 2000's and, and then talk about young people thought, your thoughts about things you want to share, thing you would want to share you know what I mean.

38:00 Kostas: Mhm, yeah, let's talk some more about it. Let's, let's see what there is left to say about it and, and hopefully. I know in your hands it'll be a tool that you can point to, to the kids that your reaching out to this year and every other year that your going to be teaching you know. So and I think like I said I think that before we disappear off the face of this earth, let the echo of our words be set in motion so that perhaps when we're gone you know. Some seed will land in some piece of fertile thought that came from some old man and uh find new life you know what I'm saying.

38:00 Blackmon: I do.