

Bill Cooley

"In what is surely one of the longest and musically richest partnerships in Nashville, Bill Cooley has been playing guitar in Kathy Mattea's band for 20 years." So wrote the dean of Nashville's music critics, Robert K. Oermann, 7 years ago. As Kathy and Bill start their 27th year together, they are out on the road with the Acoustic Living Room Tour, just the two of them onstage, playing new songs they've worked up at their regular Thursday afternoon rehearsals, as well as her classic hits and requests.

Meanwhile, Bill has released his 4th CD, "In Search of Home." "It is a departure from my first three in that it's a solo guitar album," he says. "No rhythm section, no string section and no horn section. As I was writing and arranging these songs, every idea had to be considered not only for its musical worth but whether I could technically pull it off. But limitations set you free, as Stravinsky said, and it feels like I've found a new form of expression on an instrument I've been playing for over 50 years."

There are a couple exceptions on this CD. Bill's youngest son Aaron trades guitar licks with him on "Dad's Blues." Aaron is 33 and an up and coming musical force to be reckoned with. This track was recorded last minute and the spontaneous interplay between them makes for an exciting ride. And Kathy sings "That's What Makes You

Strong," a wonderful Jesse Winchester song, to close the album. Along with Kathy's stunning vocal, the track features producer Paul Martin on tasteful B3 and an overdubbed guitar solo by Bill as the tune fades out.

The album has received glowing reviews in the press, including Premier Guitar Magazine's Editor's List for Best Music of 2016. Minor7th.com's review said, "In Search of Home' is an assured, subtle collection of eleven originals and one cover that quietly dazzle in their pristine execution, crisp technique, and range of color. The versatile Cooley is adept at seemingly any style." And Nashville Musician Magazine calls "In Search of Home" "a dynamic blend of folk strumming, classical harmonies and bluesy licks. Cooley is able to incorporate these seeming opposites into a seamless whole."

Bill has had a 40 year career as a working professional. Originally from Santa Barbara, CA, he moved to Nashville in 1985. A dozen years later he was called "one of Nashville's most respected sidemen" by Guitar Player Magazine. He has toured and recorded with Merle Haggard, Reba McEntire, Alan Jackson and Hal Ketchum, in addition to Kathy. As a songwriter, he's had cuts by Kathy and Reba, among others. As an arranger, Bill has played an important role on Kathy's albums, including the last two, "Coal" and "Calling Me Home," where Kathy explored her Appalachian heritage. After two years of intense work, Kathy and Bill have just recorded her next album, with Tim O'Brien producing.

Their partnership continues. It is still musically rich, creative and stronger than ever, 27 years on.