

## Cut By Cut

### Cut By Cut: About the Artists and the Songs

Our organization was founded partly to counter our community's image as being blindly supportive of the right-wing Republican agenda in America. Our songwriters, singers and musicians have rallied to support progressive causes throughout the past two years. And, as you will hear, they have been creating songs that give creative voice to a number of vital issues.

Our slogan is "Use Your Voice." Here are 16 of our artists who are doing exactly that.  
"Big Blue Ball of War" – Nanci Griffith

Country-folk star Nanci Griffith has been a passionate anti-war activist throughout her career. She campaigns regularly against landmines and was the first to popularize the international peace anthem "From a Distance." Her stately and eloquent "Big Blue Ball of War" is a plea that can be found on her 2005 CD *Hearts in Mind*. The song suggests that if women and mothers were in charge, war would cease to exist. Much of the album was inspired by Nanci's trip to Southeast Asia and by the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Songs such as the album's "A Simple Life," "Heart of Indochina" and "Old Hanoi" are other powerful statements. "Mountain of Sorrow" stems from 9/11. "Before" and "Love Conquers All" also make reference to our troubled times.

"Goodle U.S.A." – Darrell Scott

The mandolin chops and richly textured production of Darrell Scott's "Goodle U.S.A." underscore an emotional lyric that is pointedly anti-war. He walks it like he talks it – within days of the Iraq invasion, Darrell Scott and Tim O'Brien headlined Nashville's first protest concert. The song appears (as "We've Got Nothing But Love to Prove") on Faith Hill's CD *Fireflies*, although her version omits the "Joe McCarthy is our acting President" line. Darrell's version appears on his superb 2006 CD *The Invisible Man*.

When he sings of being "a dreamer, a common-man schemer," Darrell Scott is telling the truth. He is a son of the working class who has found enormous success in Nashville as the writer of such hits as "It's a Great Day to Be Alive" for Travis Tritt, "Born to Fly" for Sara Evans and "Heartbreak Town" and "Long Time Gone" for the Dixie Chicks. He was named the Nashville Songwriters Association's Songwriter of the Year in 2001 and ASCAP's Songwriter of the Year in 2002. The prodigiously gifted multi-instrumentalist is also a first-call session musician on Music Row.

"Gather the Family Round" – Ed Pettersen

As a producer Ed has worked with a wide variety of artists including:

Devendra Banhart, The Black Crowes, Michelle Shocked, The Mavericks, BR549, Anthony David, The Funk Brothers, Julie Lee, Otis Gibbs, Joanna Smith, Thad Cockrell, Joni Harms, Malcolm Holcombe and the Blind Boys of Alabama among others.

Ed is a charter member of Music Row Democrats and became politically active

At age 10. He hasn't missed obsessing over elections since. Power to the people.  
For Ed's personal journal and more info:

[www.myspace.com/edpettersen](http://www.myspace.com/edpettersen)

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&ldquo;Two Paper Town&rdquo; &ndash; Scott B. Bomar

Native Nashvillian Scott B. Bomar&rsquo;s Radio Drive album received ecstatic reviews when it was issued in 2005. &ldquo;This is a striking new voice,&rdquo; raved Music Row magazine. &ldquo;His Radio Drive CD knocked me right on my butt&hellip;.an extraordinary listening experience and a rallying cry for honesty, roots and meaning in music&hellip;[He&rsquo;s] the hillbilly Tom Petty.&rdquo; That record contained &ldquo;Two Paper Town,&rdquo; an anti-corporate mini-masterpiece of songwriting. &ldquo;Nobody wins when our choices are gone,&rdquo; Scott sings, bemoaning the death of small and local businesses.

Scott has won songwriting awards at Merlefest, the John Lennon Songwriting Contest and Jewel&rsquo;s Soul City Caf  song competition. He has composed music for television shows and has had his songs recorded by Brooks & Dunn and The Derailers, among others. He is a staff writer at Sony-ATV on Music Row. Radio Drive, his third album, also contains &ldquo;The Ghost of William Tines,&rdquo; the true story of a Tennessee death-row inmate who was executed in 1960. Scott holds a degree in Theology from Vanderbilt University.

&ldquo;I&rsquo;m Takin&rsquo; My Country Back&rdquo; &ndash; Honky Tonkers for Truth

This is practically a statement of purpose for the Music Row Democrats. It&rsquo;s a solid slab of authentic country music that hits on just about every issue &ndash; the budget, the war, exporting jobs, tax breaks for the rich and the failure to capture Bin Laden. Plus, it&rsquo;s patriotic. This was the first piece of music to be recorded that was inspired by the formation of the organization.

Music Row Democrats draws its membership from throughout Nashville&rsquo;s creative community &ndash; record producers, publicists, managers, performers, video makers, label executives, song publishers, studio musicians and promoters are all in its ranks. One of the organization&rsquo;s strongest and most noteworthy aspects is the number of songwriters who are members. Songwriter David Kent was an early and enthusiastic booster. He is best known on Music Row as the co-writer of the No. 1 Blake Shelton hit &ldquo;Austin&rdquo; and of the top-10 hit by Rodney Atkins, &ldquo;Honesty.&rdquo; His work, as is illustrated here, is marked by inventive and creative lyrics and story lines.

&ldquo;Al Gore&rdquo; &ndash; Monkey Bowl

Nashville is well known as the capital of country music, as the headquarters of the Christian-music field, as the home of bluegrass music and as the center of the Americana music movement. But it also has a thriving pop/rock scene. The Music City recording unit Monkey Bowl shot to instant notoriety in 2004 with this delightfully catchy ditty. Songwriter Robert Ellis Orrall does, indeed, live on the same Nashville street as the former Vice President. In the song, he recalls being robbed and cheated and states that he&rsquo;s still angry about it. Popular-vote Presidential winner Al tells him to get over it.

Robert Ellis Orrall has had an interesting career. He was originally a pop artist (&ldquo;I Couldn&rsquo;t Say No&rdquo;), then became a country hit maker (&ldquo;Boom! it Was Over&rdquo;) and one half of Orrall & Wright (&ldquo;She Loves Me Like She Means It&rdquo;). Next, he morphed into a songwriter for others by penning Shenandoah&rsquo;s &ldquo;Next to You, Next to Me,&rdquo; Michael Peterson&rsquo;s &ldquo;From Here to Eternity,&rdquo; Reba McEntire&rsquo;s &ldquo;What If it&rsquo;s You,&rdquo; Clay Walker&rsquo;s &ldquo;What&rsquo;s it to You&rdquo; and Carlene Carter&rsquo;s &ldquo;The Sweetest Thing,&rdquo; among others. In recent years he has become a country record producer. Monkey Bowl returns him to the pop field.

&ldquo;We Can&rsquo;t Make it Here&rdquo; &ndash; James McMurtry

James McMurtry became the most nominated artist for Nashville&rsquo;s Americana Awards in 2006, largely because of the acclaim received for this stunning, wrenching indictment of twisted values and social decay. The factory shuts down, the veteran slumps in his wheelchair, drugs abound and the inner city rots, all in the midst of a darkly compelling and haunted sonic landscape of slashing guitars and a death-march beat. Entertainment Weekly hails &ldquo;We

Can't Make it Here" as "the protest song of the decade." The track appears on his 2005 CD *Childish Things*.

The song is so potent that it comes as a surprise that James has never been previously noted as a political composer. His six previous albums examine America's social fabric, but never delve into anything as starkly opinionated as "We Can't Make it Here," "Holiday" and "See the Elephant" are on *Childish Things*. "I've always been a little put off by activists," he says. "So you know it's a dire situation when I have to become an activist, myself." He offered the song as a free download during the 2004 Presidential campaign. "If it gets one more person to the polls, I'll consider it a success," he commented at the time. James McMurtry is the son of novelist/screenwriter Larry McMurtry, noted for such outstanding works as *Lonesome Dove*, *The Last Picture Show* and *Brokeback Mountain* (screenplay only).

"Republican Blues" — Tim O'Brien

Like the Christian-music field, bluegrass music is generally associated with conservatism. But this jaunty call to the polls proves that even bluegrass has its progressives. "Republican Blues" covers a lot of ground, from election fraud to domestic spying, from the Iraq war to Katrina. "Vote away those blues, Republican blues," the song concludes.

Its performer, West Virginia native Tim O'Brien, was a mainstay of the star bluegrass band Hot Rize before embarking on a series of solo albums. His solo work, duet albums with his sister Mollie and recordings with his O'Boys band now extends to 15 collections. Tim was the 1993 Male Vocalist of the Year of the International Bluegrass Music Association. His 2005 CD *Fiddler's Green* won a Grammy Award as the year's Best Traditional Folk Album. Among his songs recorded by others are "Walk the Way the Wind Blows" and "Untold Stories," both of which are sung by Kathy Mattea. Tim O'Brien created "Republican Blues," especially for Music Row Democrats.

"I Want to Know" — The Mavericks

The eponymous 2004 album by The Mavericks kicks off with "I Want to Know," a country rocker that brings to mind the classic, poetic, "questioning" protest songs of the '60s. As usual, Raul Malo's lead vocal is splendid. "I want to know why politicians lie," he sings, adding "I want to know when you have had enough."

The Mavericks were named Vocal Group of the Year by the Country Music Association in 1995 and 1996. The band's hits include "All You Ever Do Is Bring Me Down," "O What a Thrill," "There Goes My Heart" and "What a Crying Shame." Its performance of "Here Comes the Rain" earned it a Grammy Award in 1995.

"Yes Sir, No Sir" — Beth Nielsen Chapman

The contrast in this song is between its rhythmic groove and its troubling lyric of a dysfunctional society. Beth sings of a wide range of ills, from inner city poverty to a poisoned environment and global warming. Recorded especially for this project, "Yes Sir, No Sir" is a modern-day descendent of such 1970s hits as "What's Going On," "Mercy Mercy Me" and "Inner City Blues." Somewhere, Marvin Gaye is smiling.

Beth Nielsen Chapman is a Nashville-based pop-music singer-songwriter who has issued eight albums of her liquid vocals and lushly melodic compositions. Her A/C hits include "Walk My Way," "All I Have" and "Keep Coming Back to You." As a writer for others, she has provided hits to Willie Nelson ("Nothing I Can Do About it Now"), Alabama ("Here We Are"), Tanya Tucker ("Strong Enough to Bend"), Highway 101 ("All the Reasons Why"), Mary Chapin Carpenter ("Almost Home"), Trisha Yearwood ("Down on My Knees"), Lorrie Morgan ("Five Minutes"), Martina McBride ("Happy Girl") and Faith Hill ("This Kiss"), among others. Her "Sand and Water" received attention in 1997 when Elton John made it part of his concert repertoire.

&ldquo;Rich Young Ruler&rdquo; &ndash; Derek Webb

&ldquo;Rich Young Ruler&rdquo; is a melodic meditation on the unequal distribution of wealth, containing strong religious overtones. Evidently, the irony of a self-described Christian leading the nation who gives to the wealthy instead of the poor is not lost on singer-songwriter Derek Webb.

&ldquo;Friend or foe, love him or hate him, Derek Webb is the voice of a new direction,&rdquo; stated the cover story on him published by the youth-oriented Christian magazine Relevant. Derek rose to fame as a member of the highly successful contemporary Christian music group Caedmon&rsquo;s Call. &ldquo;Rich Young Ruler&rdquo; appears on his 2005 solo CD Mockingbird.

&ldquo;Thou Shalt Not Kill&rdquo; - Bobby Braddock

The Republican says he&rsquo;s against abortion. The Democrat replies that she is anti-war, against the death penalty and opposes poisoning the environment. God has the final word in this brilliantly constructed country song.

Bobby Braddock, who wrote &ldquo;Thou Shalt Not Kill&rdquo; expressly for this project, was the first Music Row Democrat to write a manifesto for the organization, which remains posted on its website. It reads, in part, &ldquo;Country music is the music of everyday people. Why would we NOT belong to the party that sympathizes with the underdog? Country music is the music about families and mommas and babies? Why would we NOT belong to the party that cares about health care for seniors and children? Why would people in the music of wide-open spaces and green, green grass NOT be in the party that wants to protect God&rsquo;s green earth from polluting, global-warming big shots that the Bush administration loves and defers to?&rdquo;

Always articulate and undeniably talented, Bobby is the writer behind such giant country hits as &ldquo;He Stopped Loving Her Today&rdquo; by George Jones, &ldquo;Something to Brag About&rdquo; by Willie Nelson and Mary Kay Place,&rdquo; &ldquo;D-I-V-O-R-C-E&rdquo; by Tammy Wynette, &ldquo;Time Marches On&rdquo; by Tracy Lawrence, &ldquo;I Wanna Talk About Me&rdquo; by Toby Keith and &ldquo;Golden Ring&rdquo; by George Jones and Tammy Wynette. &ldquo;Thou Shalt Not Kill&rdquo; is one more reason why Bobby Braddock is a member of the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame.

&ldquo;Just an Old Soldier&rdquo; &ndash; Sean Locke

&ldquo;Just an Old Soldier&rdquo; is a quiet reminder that war, any war, is hell. In this sad, moving and soft acoustic recording, Sean Locke&rsquo;s aged warrior sings, &ldquo;I hope these children never have to do the things I&rsquo;ve done.&rdquo;

Since arriving in Nashville, Kansas native Sean has had his songs sung by Pinmonkey, Gary Allan, Bruce Robison, Kieran Kane and others. As an artist, he has appeared on the soundtrack of the film The Messengers and is now recording his debut album. Kieran says, &ldquo;In a musical world of posture, smoke and mirrors, Sean is reality.&rdquo; &ldquo;Just an Old Soldier&rdquo; certainly proves that point.

&ldquo;Conservative Christian Right-Wing Republican Straight White American Male&rdquo; &ndash; Todd Snider

Droll, drawing Todd Snider is always an in-your-face artist, but perhaps never more so than on this litany of things that incite the radical right. The satiric, hilarious lyrics cite gays, environmentalists, dopers, peaceniks and hippies, for starters.

The song appears on Todd&rsquo;s 2004 album East Nashville Skyline, a collection guaranteed to entertain. For more insight into this fascinating singer-songwriter&rsquo;s social-political views, listen to &ldquo;Ballad of the Kingsmen&rdquo; on that collection. The &ldquo;alternative-country&rdquo; Nashvillian also offers wry observations on substance abuse in &ldquo;Age Like Wine&rdquo; and &ldquo;Alcohol and Pills.&rdquo; Todd arrived in Nashville by

way of Portland, OR; Santa Rosa, CA; Austin, TX; Houston, TX; Atlanta, GA and Memphis, TN. All eight of his albums to date are brilliant, but *Happy to Be Here* (2000), *New Connection* (2002) and *East Nashville Skyline* (2005) are particularly recommended.

“Left Wing, Right Wing” – Dan Tyler

This little ditty offers the proposition that it takes two wings to fly like an eagle, a left one and a right one. Furthermore, it takes two hands to climb. And finally, it takes two sides of your brain to think – if you have only one, you go insane. There you have it.

Dan Tyler, formerly a practicing attorney in his native Mississippi, has been a successful Nashville songwriter for nearly 30 years. His hits include “Bobbie Sue” by The Oak Ridge Boys, “Hearts on Fire” by Eddie Rabbitt, “Twenty Years Ago” by Kenny Rogers, “The Whole World’s in Love When You’re Lonely” by B.J. Thomas, “Somebody’s Doin’ Me Right” by Keith Whitley, “The Light in Your Eyes” by LeAnn Rimes, “Modern Day Romance” by The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band and “Baby’s Got a New Baby” by SKO. His songs have been sung by The Fabulous Thunderbirds, Johnny Taylor, Dr. Hook, Bobby Blue Bland, Candi Staton and The Limelighters. He is also a novelist, having published his book *Music City Confidential* in 1996. In addition, Dan has issued two pop CDs of his tunes.

“You Let the Fox Run the Henhouse” – Shawn Camp

Shawn Camp is a triple threat on Music Row, as a brilliant instrumentalist, a dynamic songwriter and a dandy vocalist. “You Let the Fox Run the Henhouse” showcases him having some bluegrass-y fun with the Administration. The fox, of course, has “a Bushy tail.” The track was recorded especially for this album.

Shawn is the author of two chart-topping country hits, “Two Pina Coladas” by Garth Brooks and “How Long Gone” by Brooks & Dunn. His songs have also been recorded by Ricky Skaggs, Del McCoury and Ralph Stanley, among others. His songwriting collaborators include such Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame members as Guy Clark and John Prine. This track was penned by John Scott Sherrill, who was Shawn’s collaborator on the Brooks & Dunn smash. As a sideman, Shawn has backed everyone from Trisha Yearwood and Alan Jackson to The Osborne Brothers and The Yonder Mountain String Band. To date, he has released four acclaimed CDs of his own music.

“Before it’s Gone” – Matt King

This driving, highly listenable track is propelled by Matt King’s passionate tenor vocal. Matt makes contemporary country music with a definite “edge,” and this is a prime example of that. Not only is it a great sonic experience, “Before it’s Gone” boasts a lyric that touches on a number of social issues. He observes that “the poor go to prison and the rich ones walk.” He notes that “the poor who fight the rich man’s war. Freedom is out there, and I’m gonna find it before it’s gone,” he sings.

Matt is a blue-collar North Carolina native who packed up everything he owned and moved to Music City shortly after his high-school graduation. He’s been chasing his music dream ever since, and is regarded as one of the country community’s most restlessly creative spirits. His two Atlantic Records albums of 1997 and 1999 were critically acclaimed and yielded five charted singles, including “A Woman’s Tears.” Since those days, he has become a fiercely independent voice and now has four self-produced albums worth of his increasingly edgy, rootsy songs.

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These 16 artists are just a few of the Music Row Democrats who know how to “Use Your Voice.” Hundreds of others from our community have made music with social progress in mind. But they are the tip of a huge and largely silent iceberg, thanks in part to the “demonization” of Democrats by the radical right.

“Sadly, most of us so-called artists are afraid to use our voices, afraid to take a stand for fear of committing career suicide,” wrote James McMurtry in an editorial in Billboard magazine in 2006. “We have to get over that fear, because in succumbing to it we become invisible, and invisibility, for an artist, is true career death. We cannot please everybody, and we should not bother trying. It is not our job to be loved. It is our job to be remembered.”

It is not hopeless. It is not too late. Use your voice.

Robert K. Oermann

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