



## Here's One for the Open Road

by Cristina Cordova :: posted on Jun. 09, 2008 - 1:54pm



[Jason Shannon](#) likes to think of his band as a car.

"A car Steve McQueen drove," he says. "An old '60s or '70s hot rod. Not a badass car. Just a car with good integrity. Something that's built to last, but not showing itself off. A Classic.

"Something like that," he laughs.

The car metaphor is appropriate. Shannon's song "Maybe Mexico" begs for an old jalopy and a stiff breeze. Ever the storyteller, his prose often seems stuck in that fork in the road between Lover's Lane and Heartbreak Hotel.

Shannon and his band are playing in Dinkytown's [Kitty Cat Klub](#), a surprisingly romantic and chic diversion in a college town that is aching for the latest drink special. The band, complete with a keyboardist and a horn section, is spilling off the tiny stage huddled in between the venue's swaths of exposed brick and collection of antique mirrors. It's the perfect setting for Shannon's love songs and tales of hope and hopelessness. Outside, the sky is gray with a brewing storm. Inside, it is equally as electric. The atmosphere sets nerves tingling with that introspective feeling everyone gets when looking at the world through a rain-streaked window, seeing only your reflection.

The band plays a mix of blues, rock, and folk with a bit of twang. And though he may have mixed feelings about applying the term "soul" to his sound, Shannon's crooning is full of emotion. A lot of these influences, he says, he gathered growing up.

"I grew up in Texas and Louisiana," he says. "So I think I was always around country music and blues music. But no one ever said, 'This is what we're listening to and this is what this is.' I think it's sort of a genealogy thing, where I had it in me somewhere, but I never consciously tried to have it in me."

His love of music he gained through childhood osmosis.

"My dad managed a cable company. We had MTV right when it came out," he says. "I grew up playing sports, but I loved MTV and I loved the videos and I loved the songs. I would watch it all the time. Robert Palmer. Duran Duran. Tom Petty. INXS. I would just watch it all day. My mom would say, 'What is your problem.'"

Shannon isn't new to the music scene. He spent time in a hard rock band and, as a solo artist, he considered a future in indie rock.

"I was kind of hoping I would adopt some of the values," he says of the genre, "but I can't. I gave up trying to do it. I guess it's not even values, but it's sort of like... you hope to fit in. I'm an adult, but it's an acceptance thing. I gave up trying to do it. And giving up has been really good for me creatively."

In a city that can feel clogged with bands latching onto musical trends of the moment, Shannon's classic Americana sounds fresh. His quality storytelling is even more refreshing. It's his words, Shannon says, that move him onstage.

"If I'm connecting with a particular lyric, I will feel the lyric," he says. "I try to pay attention to what I'm singing all the time. I'm paying attention to my voice. I never have to think about my guitar playing. So I'm listening to the band and I'm listening to what I'm singing. If the lyric has a certain emotion, I'll feel it and when I do feel it, it's inspiring."

Tonight Shannon shakes like his head is filled with phantoms, former romances and memories of escape. Missing is his near-trademark top hat, but its absence allows onlookers to more clearly see his face twist as he is connecting to that emotion. The sound bellows and his voice is thundering. Just like the clouds above.

*Photos by Denis Jeong. [View full slideshow.](#)*