



## Interview with Jason Shannon, CD Release show this Friday @ Varsity Theater

January 8th, 2009 · [No Comments](#)

friday  
january 9<sup>th</sup>  
CD RELEASE

varsity  
theater

\$8 / adv. \$10 / door  
doors at 8 pm / 18+

jason shannon  
with The Wars of 1812 | Erik Koskinen | Molly Maher

www.jasonshannonmusic.com

Minneapolis songwriter [Jason Shannon](#) has a new self-titled album and big CD release show on Friday, January 9, 2009 at [Varsity Theater](#).

This week we had the chance to talk to Jason about the new disc, songwriting and the upcoming gig...

### **Tell me about your new self-titled album?**

I've been waiting to make this record since my old band broke up in 2003. From then until now, I purchased recording equipment, wrote song after

song after song, listened to a lot of music, stabilized my living situation, played a lot of coffee shops (testing the material), and got a new group of musicians together. Basically, I grew up a little and one of the resulting symptoms is this album.

The actual creation date of the songs is varied given how long I gave myself to gather a collection together. I had about 100+ songs I liked and I chose 30. Then we tracked 30 and from there I picked the ones I thought had a good vibe. Some of the songs were written five years ago and some were written about five days before the first session. We did all live takes and then overdubbed instruments as we went along.

I mixed the album with the studio owner, Matthew Zimmerman (Wild Sound Studio). And then I drove out with my friend and Eli and we mastered it at Sterling Sound in New York City with Greg Calbi, who has worked on a number of Dylan records and some of my other favorites.

As a particular point of interest, I intended on calling the album Red, White, Black & Blue (after a lyric in one of the songs). But it came to my attention that the album would be finished and pressed right around election time and that people would probably interpret the record as political in a general sense, which it isn't at all. Also, I scheduled a photo shoot that attempted to work with the themes of the aforementioned title name and it was disastrous. But the sole picture I liked from the shoot became the album cover. And to make things easier on me and the cohesiveness of the record, I self-titled it. Exhale.....

**Organ, strings, horns, guitar, electric piano — your album has rich instrumentation and spans some varied genres - what's your favorite kind of song to write and why?**

My favorite kind song to write is one that comes from nowhere, happens on accident, surprises me, speaks loudly in a voice that isn't my own, affects my system with spontaneous emotion, and writes itself fast with no regard to editing and arranging. The genre doesn't matter to me because I like all kinds of music. I use the genres as templates for ideas that are generated spontaneously. Not to make it sound easy, but none of the songs on the record were written in a conscious state. They were eventually recorded and arranged in more of a conscious state....but not written. There's no way, in my opinion of myself, I personally would have written a song called "Mister Miracle Mile." Basically, I just jam on the guitar and make sounds with my mouth. Somewhere along the way, I'll hook something in the moment.

A song is like a fish. You gotta reel that thing in, man!

**What was the recording process like?**

Basically, it was a lot of fun and really stressful. When I was doing the main sessions, I had the most fun I could have. I mean, damn, I'm making a record! It's a dream, you know? I kept thinking in between takes, "I'm doing what I really love to do." So it was a blast and it was hard to wipe the smile of my face. I had been waiting a long time.

What wasn't a blast (but also wasn't bad) was figuring out what to do for each song. This was definitely something I learned from making this one. I know now I'd like to do way more pre-production in terms of the arranging, tempos, vocal approach, etc. I've read that when Rick Rubin works with

bands, he doesn't have them go near the studio until they have the songs in their bones and tattooed on their skin. And then when they finally have them down, they go in, roll tape, and let the chips fall. I guess I learned in this process that I'm of that ilk with the added notion of doing a little overdub work and creative mixing post-tracking.

So I don't feel like I gave the best direction to the session players. I wasn't clueless but I was a little passive. I wanted to be surprised a little. But I think, in the end, it led me to realize that I have pretty solid initial vision that I should speak up about while still allowing the players to give their own input.

**I've often said what music is missing these days is a good sax solo. The first track on your new disc ("Mister Miracle Mile") has a great one. Who's on the horn?**

Eli Amerson. He played all the saxophones on the record. He's bad-ass on the sax. He has a solo on a demo of a song of mine that I honestly think is one of the best recorded solos I've ever heard. He was in my old band and was gonna be in this band but had other commitments.

I distinctly remember him recording that solo. He had about five takes of it and that was the second one. He'd do one and I'd say, "That was great, man. Do it again!" He would've done it live but he was playing keys too!

**It seems like you really enjoy telling stories in your songs — whether it's driving in the early morning, answering a phone call or waiting up late for a lover who doesn't come home. Are these stories steeped in your personal life? Where does your**

## **inspiration come from?**

I don't have any intentions when I set out to write except to be struck by something....a line, a melody, etc. Like I said earlier, none of the songs were born out of systematic work. The only thing that runs true with their inception is that I showed up to my guitar or piano and made sounds....mumbled really.....and those sounds led me to those words and melodies. That is how it happens for me. The inspiration behind it is still, after writing songs for ten years, very elusive and hard to understand. And I've learned that I don't need to understand it in order to have it. I have it and trust that I have it and that is enough for me to continue on.

In terms of how the inspiration takes shape.....well, I would say that depends on what I've spent a lot of time listening to mixed with my own personal creative nature. For instance, I listen to a lot of Dylan. A lot. More than anything else. And not just one part of his catalog. All of his catalog. And I love words. I love stories. I love them without knowing why. I just do. And so you probably hear the influence of that kind of storytelling in my writing. It's coherent and you can follow it and make up pictures in your mind as you go along. But I'm not copying. I'm just extending what innately inspires me. So in a sense, the stories that come out of me are probably personal mixed with a long line of archetypes that are inherent in the songwriting/storytelling tradition.

But I have had a broken heart and I do believe in divine love and I do think that reality is simpler than the stories we transpose on top of it. So that is some particular inspiration.

**Tell me about your CD Release show this week.**

January 9, 2009. Varsity Theater. I have a 7-piece band that is closing the night. We're gonna rock and put on a good show. We've been working our asses off to get tight. We've probably been working too hard!

Let me just say a little bit about the other bands: [Molly Maher](#) and [Erik Koskinen](#) are opening the night. They're gonna kind of share a set. They share band members but they are also distinct and individual songwriters. Molly has a great album, *Balms of Gilead*, with some great songs. I love her vibe and her voice and her style. And Erik, a songwriter, arranger, and producer, is working on his record right now. I think you'll be hearing more about him as time goes on. He's got some really great songs and I love hearing them every time. They both play at Nye's Polonaise Bar on Wednesdays.

[The Wars of 1812](#) are also playing. I'm sure a lot of you have heard about them. They've been getting some good press around town and have an album out called *Status Quo Ante Bellum*. They are a great band with a unique sound that I love. I love Peter Pisano's voice and I think everyone in the band is unique. And.....they're really nice, good people. So I'm pumped to hear them.