

~ TOM CORBETT ~

Summer 2010

Stories and snapshots. That's the essence of widely respected mandolinist/guitarist **Tom Corbett**'s new album *Tonight I Ride*: open-hearted stories and fond snapshots of characters and scenes from the American West — some real, some imagined, all sensitively rendered by Corbett's soulful fretwork and other sublimely musical players who number among the West Coast's finest acoustic artists, including bluegrass legends **Herb Pedersen** and **Bill Bryson**, Los Lobos percussionist **Victor Besetti**, guitar goddess **Nina Gerber**, renowned singer-songwriter **Claire Holley**, vocalist *extraordinaire* **Jonathan McEuen**, bassist **Randy Tico** and acoustic blues duo **Tom Ball & Kenny Sultan**.

Tonight I Ride is Corbett's third album (following 2001's *Upstairs at Charlie's* and 2004's *Cloudless Blue Sky*). It isn't a concept project, but it came together after Corbett realized he was writing a number of songs "with a Western bent to them."

"To me, that's where this record's coming from," he says. "Even though I was born in the Midwest, in Omaha, and grew up a college professor's son in Ohio, I love the stories of the West and that physical place of the West — not just California, but also Wyoming, Colorado, places like that. '17 Miles a Day' is about the pioneers. They had four months to come across the country, from the end of the April rains to the snows in September, so they had to travel 17 miles a day on average to get where they needed to go. Those that didn't," he adds with a chuckle, "became the Donner Party."

The melodic "Tonight I Ride" was birthed in Berlin, of all places, after an illuminating trip to the Checkpoint Charlie Museum, which showed how East Germans once tried to escape from behind the Berlin Wall. An acquaintance there talked about a German writer who wrote hugely popular books about the American West — which he'd never once visited. The combination of the museum's exhibits and the story of the German writer inspired Corbett to pen a key line: "*I may never have touched the ground of freedom but tonight I ride.*" The song started as an acoustic piece, until guitarist **David West** added Telecaster and drums. "That changed the whole feel of the tune," Corbett recalls, "and it ended up being the title cut."

Elsewhere, the sprightly cowboy-bluegrass romp "Here Comes the Border" segues into an accordion-driven cover of David Kirby and Glenn Martin's "Is Anybody Goin' to San Antone." Claire Holley's sweet soprano highlights the poignancy of "Still Hear Her Crying," while pianist/trumpeter **David Bourne** gives "Middle of Nowhere" a ragtimey saloon feel. "Welcome to Tom's Place" celebrates the simple pleasures of fishing and friendship with some gleeful picking by Corbett and a posse of fellow Toms: Ball (harmonica), Lackner (drums), Lee (bass), Rozum (electric mandolin) and Sauber (fiddle). Likewise, the carefree "Doce de Mayo," inspired by Corbett's birthday ("I think my birthday is a polka," he jokes), is a spirited jam with Los Lobos percussionist Victor Bessetti and Conjunto Los Pochos accordionist **Otono Lujan** and guitarron player **Lorenzo Martinez**.

The entire album is a crisply produced showcase for the witty and multitalented Corbett, who's been picking on bluegrass, newgrass and old-time tunes since picking up his father's Vega banjo-

mandolin at age 11. The 12 tracks collectively boast an impressive array of vintage mandolins, banjos, fiddles, bass and guitars, including a 1936 Martin sunburst 000-18 and a 1917 Gibson K-1 mandocello. One tune in particular also brings Corbett full circle with his past. "Ease on Down the River," previously heard on the 1994 album *The Cat's Meow* by the Acousticats, the critically acclaimed folk-bluegrass-swing ensemble he joined after relocating to California, reunites Corbett with a pair of longtime friends and musical heroes. "To redo 'Ease on Down the River,' with Herb Pedersen and Bill Bryson singing harmony, felt really good," he says. "I'm really happy with the whole album."

Tonight I Ride shows Corbett settled into a more peaceful phase of his life. It's another admirable achievement on his noteworthy resume. A consistently active member of L.A.'s acoustic music scene, Corbett has toured with folk duo **Robin and Linda Williams** and Nitty Gritty Dirt Band multi-instrumentalist **John McEuen**, recorded several tracks on Social Distortion frontman **Mike Ness**' rootsy solo album *Cheating at Solitaire*, and joined McEuen, **Jimmy Ibbotson**, **Jennifer Warnes** and **Laurie Lewis** in the award-winning 2002 DVD *Nitty Gritty Surround*. More recently he taught **Tom Selleck** how to play ukulele for a role, and provided music for the Ted Haggard-themed play *This Beautiful City* at Centre Theatre Group in Los Angeles. He just played a string of European dates and is currently booking dates for a U.S. tour.

To learn more about *Tonight I Ride* and Tom Corbett, please visit [HYPERLINK "http://www.tomcorbett.net" www.tomcorbett.net](http://www.tomcorbett.net).

###