

David Wilcox: Interview

Toronto recording artist David Wilcox recently dropped by the Students' Union Building for an informal chat with the Gateway and CJSR Radio. Gateway reporter Tom Wilson spoke with him about his climb to success, his musical roots, and his albums, *Out of the Woods*, and *My Eyes Keep Me In Trouble*. Wilcox returns to Edmonton November 5 for an engagement at Dinwoodie.

Gateway: First of all, David, I'd like to welcome you to the University of Alberta.

Wilcox: Thank you, Tom.

Gateway: To start off, we'd like to know where you're from originally, and where you grew up.

Wilcox: I was born in Montreal and I grew up in Toronto.

Gateway: So, does that make you a Blue Jay fan or an Expos fan?

Wilcox: Wellll ... with baseball I switched teams, but it makes me a die-hard Montreal Canadiens fan.

Gateway: So, where is home for you these days?

Wilcox: In the east end of Toronto, in an area called The Beaches, which is very close to Lake Ontario. It's a real neat area—lots of artists and musicians.

Gateway: What prompted you to get into the music business?

Wilcox: Necessity (laughs). I had no skills that were any good to any one. I always wanted to go to University ... but my marks were rotten and I really wasn't that interested in school. Winston Churchill once said that most people like to learn but not in the formalized way that was being done then. So, I dropped out in grade twelve and got a job in a music store and I gave guitar lessons, very badly (laughs), for a while. Then I heard of a successful band that needed a guitar player, called up, and pleaded for an audition 'cause I needed some kind of income. And wow, I got the job and it paid really well. It was great—a good doorway into the music business.

Gateway: Was that the job with Ian and Sylvia Tyson band?

Wilcox: Yeah, *The Great Speckled Bird*, which was a fantastic gig for someone who's only done part time gigs before. It was a step into the big leagues, really, at that time.

Gateway: You also played with a few other big names, along the way.

Wilcox: Yeah, Anne Murray, Charlie Rich; I'm on "Whispering Rain" by Murray

McLauchlan; I did a film soundtrack with Paul Butterfield, and I also worked with Bobby Bare, Ray Price...

Gateway: Finally, you wanted to make some of your own music, and in 1980 you recorded *Out of the Woods*—but it wasn't released until 1982. How come?

Wilcox: Nobody thought it would sell and no one was willing to take a chance on it and I'm not the sort of person who can set up his own independent record company ... I don't have the skills to do it properly and to do it poorly would be suicide. So, we waited and finally we found someone who was willing to take the chance.

Gateway: That was Freedom Records.

Wilcox: Yes, it's a small Toronto label, with which we didn't have the best relationship, especially financially. It's called "the old rip off" (big laugh), but it's over now and the happiest thing is that I got signed by Capitol, and it's been great.

Gateway: Why is it the Blues for you, and what is it about that music that attracts you to it?

Wilcox: I guess I was always the type of person that went after what they liked, in their gut, but I don't consider what we do now blues. It's not fair to people who do blues, like Stevie Ray Vaughn and Thoroughgood. They play Blues, to me. I'd call my style a particular style of Rock and Roll.

Gateway: Did you have any guitar heroes while growing up?

Wilcox: Lots of them but the main one was a guy called Robert Johnson, a blues singer from the 1930's who influenced a lot of modern Rock and Roll. But after him, millions: B.B. King, James Burdon, Merle Travis ... now, I like Eddie Van Halen, Paco Delucia, I like Joan Armatrading's guitar playing.

Gateway: Is there one area of Canada that is most responsive to your music? Toronto maybe?

Wilcox: I would have to say that right now there are two: Toronto and the other one being Alberta, or maybe the first one is Alberta. People are really, really responsive here. I mean, they make you work (big laugh). They don't want you to stand around talking between the songs, but that's fine with me. We're here to sing and play ... so, I love it.

Gateway: Do you enjoy a boisterous crowd?

Wilcox: I definitely do. I much prefer to have people talking and meeting one



another. I don't want the audience to sit there like it's a cello recital; I like it when they get up and scream and yell and dance on the tables. I don't like it when they throw stuff (chuckle).

Gateway: Where, and under what circumstances was your latest album *My Eyes Keep Me In Trouble* recorded?

Wilcox: It was recorded in Ontario at Phase One studios and, what can I say, the vibes were really good, we threw a wild party, but a very private party. I hope the party made the album—that was the idea.

Gateway: Did you try to do anything differently on *My Eyes Keep Me In Trouble* as opposed to *Out of the Woods*?

Wilcox: We tried to get a fatter, richer sound. We learned a lot recording the first one ... it's an evolution or a progression to the second one. We wanted a fuller sound, especially chord-wise. We recorded for two weeks and then we mixed for a week. I like to have a good game plan so that we don't waste a lot of time figuring out what we want to do.

Gateway: Do you try out some new songs on the road before you go into the studio?

Wilcox: Dozens of times. A lot. Because it really affected the arrangement. You can feel the crowd losing interest or you can feel that they really pick up on some section. It's a good indicator of how the arrangement should flow.

Gateway: Who are the musicians with you on this album?

Wilcox: A drummer named Whitey Blen, who played with Lou Reed, Alice Cooper, the Pointer Sisters; he's the drummer in the movie *The Rose*. And, a bass player named Kit Johnson, who played with Chris Deburgh and Chris Ward. The drummer on tour this time is Glenn Martin and he's excellent—a real firebomb.

Gateway: Is your song "Downtown Came Uptown" autobiographical at all?

Wilcox: It's based, basically, on true experience, that song. Here I'm wearing sneakers again so I'm back Downtown (loud laugh). But a woman took me uptown, and I think lots of people have had that experience; you go out with someone from the opposite sex who may be a little more sophisticated than you are and they take you places you haven't really been before.

Gateway: A favorite song of mine on this album is "Mow 'Em Down." I don't like to compare you at all, but on this song I was reminded of Jimmy Hendrix.

Wilcox: Well, I wasn't trying to copy Hendrix, but I think he was one of the all time great heavy metal players and I just wanted a little touch of that because I love the sound he made.

Gateway: In a lot of your songs you sing about drugs, alcohol, and women. Do you think you're living a healthy life?

Wilcox: (Big, long laugh) Well it's not only like that. A lot of it is artistic licence. I don't know; if it's good to you, it's good for you is an old New Orleans health saying. What can I say, I'm here and I'm healthy.

Gateway: So, what are your plans for the next year or so?

Wilcox: Better playing, better singing, better songs, and hopefully get out to more people.

Gateway: Any plans to play to people outside of Canada?

Wilcox: I'd like to play everywhere, I mean I'd like to play on Neptune, if there are any Neptunians. I'm happy to see it growing year by year.

Gateway: Well, your frenzied pace will be continued at least until Oct. 31st, Hallowe'en night, and also the first day of November when you'll be appearing at the Prime Time, and then on November 5th when you'll be here at the Dinwoodie Lounge. So we'll all be looking forward to that show.

Wilcox: Me too.

Gateway: Thank you very much.

Wilcox: Thank you.

