

Mp3 The Cyrus Clarke Band - California Stories



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Alt Country from the California heartland. Influenced by: Kate Wolf, Cowboy Junkies and Grateful Dead. 13 MP3 Songs FOLK: Modern Folk, COUNTRY: Country Rock Details: Acoustic music may slip in and out of fashion, but the passion and purity remain true. For Cyrus Clarke, who has been playing various strains of Americana for over twenty-five years, the acoustic sound has become his hallmark. A dedicated songsmith, Clarke has also written a satchel of tunes, many which have been recorded by artists such as Kate Wolf, the Acousticats, the Cache Valley Drifters, David West, and the Phil Salazar Band. Cyrus Clarke's story continues as he hones his craft and expands the songbook, singing and playing as he goes. Clarke is widely known as a founding member of Santa Barbara's own Cache Valley Drifters. In addition to his twelve year stint with the Drifters, he was a founding member of the Acousticats, a premier acoustic group of the early nineties. After years of playing the front man and writer in ensemble oriented bands, he has made the jump to his own outfit, producing a contemporary sound highlighted by a soulful blend of acoustic guitar, mandolin, and Telecaster twang. The Cyrus Clarke Band is initialed with a contemporary approach to an ever-changing suburban folk scene. Comprised of acoustic and electric guitars, mandolin, bass, and percussion, this ensemble provides a modern context for traditional form. CCB's latest Ranch Records release, California Stories, is a series of portraits in music depicting life in California, past and present. These songs bring a sense of place to Clarke's music, taking the back roads through contemporary, urban Americana music. The new disc contains 10 original songs as well as covers by Kate Wolf, the Grateful Dead, and Woody Guthrie. Guest artists include harmonica wizard Tom Ball, Bill Flores playing dobro and steel guitar, and cellist Bob Leipman. As time goes on, Clarke consciously uses song to flex his imagination and reflect experiences around him. A traveling minstrel and songman with a passion, Clarke hits his stride with grace and groove. BAND MEMBERS: Tom

Corbett-Mandolinist Tom Corbett's credentials read like a who's who of acousticana in Southern California. He has made serious waves in the pond as the mandolin man for the Acousticats as well as John McCuen's String Wizards. Tom Lackner-Drummer and percussionist Tom Lackner has performed and recorded with diverse artists such as Eddie Harris, Laurindo Almeida, Kate Wolf, Flora Purim, and Airt. Recent projects have produced generous collaborations with Toad the Wet Sprocketeer, Glenn Phillips and writer Josef Woodard. Gary Sangenitto-Bass player Sangenitto blames the Beatles for his interest in music. In 1964 Gary's grandmother took him to San Francisco for the fab four's first stateside concert and he's been a player ever since. Barney Tower-Telecaster man Barney Tower is master at the art of strum and twang. He is the latest installment in a long line of tele-kings originating from California.

REVIEWS: Dirty Linen June/July, 2000 Cyrus Clarke Band/California Stories by Michael Parrish

Throughout all of his work with the Cache Valley Drifters, the Acousticats, and his own band, guitarist/songwriter Cyrus Clarke has used his native state as a tableau against which to paint his country rock originals. The second Cyrus Clarke Band release, "California Stories", takes this on as an explicit theme, featuring eleven Cyrus Clarke originals set in the golden state, topped off with Woody Guthrie's "Deportee," Kate Wolf's "Safe At Anchor," and the Grateful Dead's "New Speedway Boogie." Clarke's California is populated by a motley crew of lovers, outlaws, and drifters and his expressive lyrics give them life, as does the country rock kick of his six-piece band. Santa Barbara Independent July 13, 2000

Cyrus Clarke Band/California Stories PRINCE OF CALIFORNIA by Georg Yatchsin This being America, second best gets short shrift, and nowhere more so than here in California as Silicon Valley's procession of ones and zeroes embodies what seems to be the only possible destinies: Sutter's gold success or Marie Prevost (a fallen Hollywood starlet who became the doggie's dinner). The Cyrus Clarke Band tends to bust up that neat dichotomy in numerous ways. The subject matter of their latest CD, "California Stories" elevates those considered zeroes-desperadoes and deportees, wanderers and waitresses-into significant ones by simply relating their tales. Perhaps the disc's most telling lines are "Love don't ride in a Mercedes-Benz or a big, black Cadillac. It rides an El Camino with two kids in the back." Clarke's easy voice, a kind of cross between Lowell George's and Raul Malo's, leads the band down lonely sunset highways, looking for love in all the wrong places that can still end up right, like border radio suddenly breaking through the static. As one would expect from Clarke, A Santa Barbara stalwart and founding member of both the Cache Valley Drifters and the Acousticats, each song leaves plenty of room for the

band to do its stuff. In particular, the mandolin work of Tom Corbett stands out. Although his playing is too joyful to be called work and if claiming that it stands out sounds like he's showing off, well, that's wrong too. So the disc ends up a few grams short of Parsons. So Clarke fails to dethrone Dave Alvin as the King of California. There are thirty-five million stories after all, and ending up in the top five percent musically is nothing to sing the blues about. Or perhaps it is, if they are blues as Fresno true, Woody Guthrie loving, and life-pumped-into-old-genres new as these.

ARTICLES ABOUT THE BAND: Santa Barbara Independent Cyrus Clarke Plays American by Martha Sadler

When Cyrus Clarke first came to California, at the age of 19, he was playing nights at the Bluebird Cafe on Anapamu street. In the mornings he came back in to clean the place, overlapping the time that the day crew, including myself, was setting up for lunch. There was Cyrus, a talented musician, handsome and charismatic; there was me, an inefficient waitress, homely and sullen. In an attempt to help me smile while I worked, Cyrus once whispered to me that I should imagine that all the customers were naked. He went out of his way to be kind to me. In my book, friendliness toward the wretchedly unhip is always a mark of soul. That was almost 25 years ago. Since then, Cyrus has dedicated himself almost exclusively to writing songs and playing music, first with the Cache Valley Drifters (the band he originally formed in the 1970s, though he's no longer with them), and then with the Acousticats (the band that fiddler Phil Salazar formed in 1990). Clarke is not a big star; he's not very rich. Here in Santa Barbara, his beloved home base, he's living at the southwestern edge of a California music scene comprising what he says are "hundreds or thousands of musicians like me," who travel a circuit of music festivals and bars all the way to the Oregon and Nevada borders and spend practically no time trying to break into the Los Angeles industry scene. Though he would mind if one of his songs, or his band, were catapulted to fame and fortune, it's not what he lives for. He's glad that he can make a living and raise a family mostly playing music, and that his kind of music finally has a chart name: It's called Americana, a category that embraces everything from Willie Nelson to The Band. When I first met him, I thought he was a hick of some kind, maybe a guitar-playing truck driver, like Elvis. But it turns out his father was a music critic, and his mother was a singer, and Cyrus spent much of his childhood in Lawrence Welkstyle nightclubs in Boston and Florida. I mean, Danny Thomas is his godfather, even. He studied classical music for a couple of years in a Nashville college. Finally he and a friend got into a Volkswagen bug, with two guitars and a couple of amps, and headed out West. The West of freedom, adventure, and cowboy music. The West he had always longed for. Clarke loves a great melody, and he

loves lyrics. And he believes a sense of place is what gives country western musicians like Buck Owens, in whose footsteps Clarke certainly follows, their special charm. He loves regional, traditional, ethnic music. "It just knocks me flat," he said. That does not mean he is content to wallow in nostalgia. It has been very important to him to create a contemporary sound. "I try to write a great melody that hasn't been written yet," he said. "It's very hard. All American music has basically the same structure, the same chord progressions." Clarke's biggest inspiration is probably Kate Wolf. "She was among the first California songwriters of this generation," he said. "She wrote, like, 50 incredible songs, about things that really happened in California to real people." Following the big nationalist surge brought on by World War II, in Clarke's view, "People are realizing that what's real is community." Clarke considers himself a folk musician, but as he points out, the real folk music in California is probably rock and roll. "Kids don't get together and sing 'Barbara Allen,'" he said. "They get together and do rock progressions." But to continue to be creative, he believes, even rock music needs to come from a sense of place. Sunrise on the Radio, the debut recording of his new band, the Cyrus Clarke Group, was released this month on Ranch Records, Clarke's own label, and all the songs but one are Clarke compositions. Clarke tried to form this band before, with the same instruments- three guitars and a mandolin-but never had quite the right musicians. Now, with drummer Tom Lackner, bassist Gary Sangenitto, mandolinist Tom Corbett, Barney Tower on Telecaster, Rosie Tower singing harmony, and Cyrus on acoustic guitar and singing the lead, Clarke believes he has the main ingredients for the contemporary sound he wants. As always, his lyrics are full of references to California mountains, deserts, and sea, as well as honky-tonks and highways. And Clarke's vocals always honor the beauty of the melody: His singing is disciplined and clear. My very favorite song on the new CD is called "The Shape I'm In." It's less plaintive than some of the others, but it seems to me to hit just as well where he's trying to aim. Romantic as a mariachi singer, voice quavering like a yodeling cowboy's, he sings that he'll give his true love diamonds from his heart rather than a mansion with a swimming pool. And you absolutely believe him. Besides his work creating regional music, Clarke teaches in the schools as part of the Artists-in-Residence program. Parents may have heard their children singing "Loose Tooth Blues," an original Clarke tune, or "One-Ton Tomatoes" to the tune of "Guantanamera." Santa Barbara News-Press Sunrise on the Radio by Steven Libowitz Interested in a family vacation where you can learn about California? You could bundle up the kids, load up the wagon, put the dog in the kennel and head out on the road. Or, you just pop "Sunrise on the Radio," the

new record from the Cyrus Clarke Band, into your CD player. Clarke has already made the journey. The result is the new CD, which serves as a personal musical travelogue of times passed and open spaces of California and the West, from Bakersfield to Taos, N.M. "I think I've been on every highway in the state at least five times," Clarke says, relaxing at the dining table at his home. "I feel attached to the West, like I'm somehow a part of it... There's a beauty in California that gets missed by the media. They talk about O.J., fires, earthquakes, floods, the beach and the mountains. But there's another side in the small towns and the lost highways." (Even when Clarke's not on the road, he's doing research into California history. The living room we're sitting in was once the ballroom of the venerable Chancellor house, built in 1916. It's the house with the face on the outside fireplace, at Mission and Anacapa streets.) Clarke- who considers himself a classic Californian "because I came from somewhere else" - grew up in a musical family that migrated from Boston to New York and Florida. His mother was a nightclub singer, his father a newspaper entertainment writer-editor who was such good friends with Danny Thomas that the entertainer became Clarke's godfather. After moving to Santa Barbara 25 years ago this month, Clarke, who plays guitar and sings, immediately formed the Cache Valley Drifters with guitarist David West, mandolinist Bill Griffin, and bassist Tom Lee, all of whom still live in town. The seminal group became an integral part of the progressive bluegrass movement in the West, touring the country's folk/bluegrass festivals, playing behind the late Kate Wolf and releasing three highly regarded albums on Flying Fish, then the nation's premier acoustic label, before drifting away in 1985. Clarke spent the next five years close to home, raising his two children and focusing on honing his songwriting craft. Then, with mandolinist Mike Mullins (whose older brother had once been a member of the Drifters), he created the Acousticats, an even more progressive bluegrass band that used a twin fiddle attack as its signature sound, tackling old time Appalachian songs along with the Allman Brothers' "In Memory of Elizabeth Reed." (The Drifters reunited five years ago, with the younger Mullins taking Clarke's old role; ex-Acousticat Phil Salazar replaced West in 1996). Despite wide praise, the Acousticats unraveled after the death of Bruce Kaplan, the president of Flying Fish, a strong supporter of the band and whose company distributed their first album. When other acoustic-music oriented labels passed on the group's second disc, "The Cat's Meow," the band decided to put it out themselves to universal accolades. But the step down was disappointing given the high expectations. We felt like we had given it our best shot, but it just wasn't moving ahead on a national level the way we wanted it to," Clarke says. "It was an enormous

amount of work, which I realized I would rather have put into my own project." So Clarke returned to his solo career. He started teaching music in public schools through the Children's Creative Project, played countless solo gigs throughout the tri-county area and, most assuredly, traveled for inspiration. Song-writing jaunts took him to all over the West, from Petaluma to Flagstaff, Ariz., where, sitting in his car on the side of the road, or holed up in a hotel room, Clarke wrote most of the songs that appear on the new record. The locations are noted on the album sleeve right next to the lyrics. "I derive a great deal from both the scenery and the history," Clarke says. "Any work of art has to have a sense of place, and actually going to visit them is an important part of the process for me. Take Taos, which has an incredible library. I just go there, sit among the books, soak up the atmosphere and write. The muse always comes. When I'm looking to write a song, I always find what I'm looking for." To flesh out the songs, Clarke put together a band comprised of old colleagues and other veteran local players with whom he has long wanted to work. Mandolinist Tom Corbett was an Acousticat. Mark Morell, who contributed his dobro and bottleneck guitar parts via satellite from Nashville, has known Clarke since fifth grade. Bassist Gary Sangenitto and drummer Tom Lackner are Santa Barbara stalwarts. But the band's defining sound comes courtesy of electric guitarist Barney Tower, leader of the Twangin' Iguanas, who lends his trademark Telecaster sound to the project. It's the first time Clarke has worked with a plugged-in band, complete with a drummer. "This is something I've always wanted to do, even back in the Drifters days," Clarke says, his excitement evident as he leans forward in his chair. "My writing doesn't fit neatly within the confines of a bluegrass group. I needed to pay attention to where it was going, which dictated a more contemporary sound. The mandolin in the rhythm section and a twangin' Telecaster are real indigenous California sounds." The group more that does justice to Clarke's material, which, true to his sensibilities, traverses a path between Wolf's sweet melodies, plaintively optimistic lyrics and gentle rhythms (represented by "Red Tail Hawk" and the title song, which is about and dedicated to Wolf) and the more hard-driven', twanging, honky-tonk country associated with Merle Haggard, another of Clarke's heroes (evident in "Honky Tonk Moon.") In the middle ground are love songs ("The Shape I'm In," "Love Is Sure"), an epic ballad called "Stand and Deliver" that addresses the range wars in New Mexico as a metaphor for internal struggles gripping much of the world today, and the waltz, "Another Pretty Day (In Cow Country)," which sounds like a classic oaf of Bakersfield in the '40's. (It was written, says Clarke, on a "perfect windblown crisp California day on a little road between Salinas and San Juan Bautista.") "This

is the project I've been waiting all my life for," Clarke says. "I'm trying to carry on Kate's tradition, which was all about stimulating the cultural identity through music. I believe very strongly in the California connection and I've noticed in my travels that people all across the state want to feel that identity." Meanwhile, Haggard, says Clarke, is the "undisputed King of California song." The new sound is an attempt to move beyond the limiting scope of a bluegrass band, even a progressive one. "I'm trying to glean what's going on in California here and now, rather than trying to replicate some style that originated decades ago in Tennessee." Clarke is releasing "Sunrise on the Radio" on his own Ranch Records, which put out the 'Cats second album, part of an attempt to establish a beachhead as a viable independent as a viable independent acoustic label in Santa Barbara. He hasn't ruled out a return to an outside label, perhaps heavyweight indies Rounder or Sugar Hill, both based on the East Coast, or blues/roots-oriented High Tone, with offices in Northern California. "But for now," he says, "having my own label means I can own my material. And I've staked my claim out here in the West."

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