

PENGUIN EGGS

Issue No. 21
Spring 2004

Kenny Butterill: The Road Less Travelled

Kenny Butterill set his own course through the modern minefield that passes for the music industry. While he has enjoyed success, he has also gained the respect of such peers as Willie P. Bennett and Ray Bonneville. Barry Hammond sets the stage.

Those who bemoan the state of the music industry, with its producers who bitch about declining record sales, while they stuff the airwaves with gangsta rap, manufactured by boy groups and pop tarts like Britney Spears and Christine Aguilera, should take heart from the story of Canada's own Kenny Butterill.

Born in Ajax, but raised in Ottawa, Butterill now lives in Northern California in the Santa Cruz Mountains. He's a gentle, country and blues songwriter-producer molded from the same elements as J.J. Cale who, in his own words, from *Just A Songwriter*: "don't fit the showbiz scene ... I don't deal well with the road (and) I'd die in the Nashville machine."

In fact, he doesn't do anything the major labels would like. He's not young and pretty; he doesn't pay the slightest attention to demographics or musical trends; he doesn't hang out with famous people hoping their fame will rub off on him; he doesn't live in a major music center; he doesn't chase deals; and he doesn't listen to "name" producers, who tell him how his music should sound.

Kenny Butterill just writes songs, hires the best musicians he can find and releases his records on his own label, NoBullSongs. Instead of dwelling in the limbo of obscurity, Butterill's approach has, in the space of two CDs - 2000's *No One You Know* and last year's *Just A Songwriter* -- inspired international radio airplay, a No. 1 in the European Charts with the single *How Far Can We Go?*, and major press attention.



The moral of the story, like William Goldman says of the movie business, in *Adventures In The Screen Trade*, is: "Nobody knows anything. Don't listen to experts."

Butterill says, "Before the release of my first CD, I was pitching my songs in Nashville and L.A. with limited success. The feedback I received then was that my music wouldn't work at radio. I used to have a box of hundreds of single-song cassettes that were pitched and rejected. Euphemistically, I called it the bucket of despair. It was frustrating, but I got to thinking if there was a way I could prove the accessibility of my material, then pitching would be easier. So, when some real good visibility happened for me on the Web in the late 1990's, we set out to find out for sure whether my music would work at radio, but on my own terms. And it did work! Both of my CDs have had lots of chart success, with just the music and no showbiz, an accomplishment I'm very proud of, since many experts said this approach wouldn't work. The lesson learned is that there is more than one way to do the music business in order to achieve one's goals."

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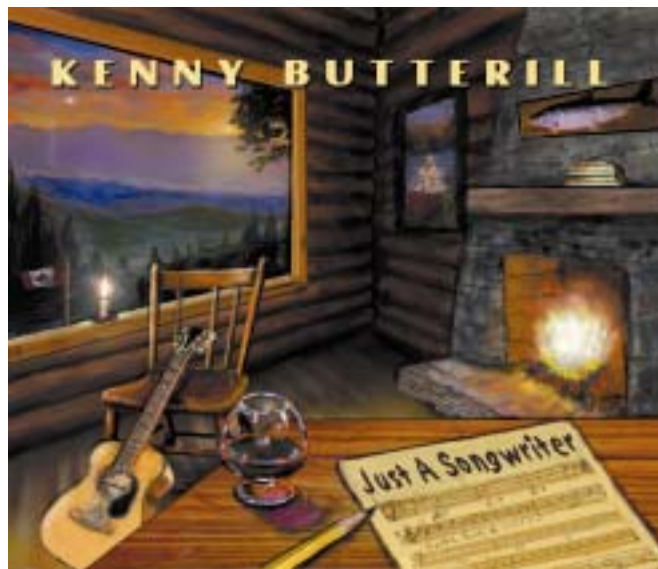
Kenny Butterill: The Road Less Travelled (cont'd)

He thinks the music industry in general, "could well be in the burgeoning stages of a revolution - a good thing. The past rules no longer apply in this age of iPods, iTunes, etc. ... the fans are demanding choice in what songs they buy, how and where they buy them and where they listen. These changes should auger well for the fans since the industry is being forced to focus more on quality."

The idea of quality is central to Butterill's approach. It's the same when it comes to recording musicians. "First and foremost," he says, "I'm a fan of their work. As a producer, I don't really care how famous a particular player is, or how successful, or whether they're in the charts - just that I really like their sound and that I think they would blend well with the 'feel' I'm going for on a particular tune. Making good, enduring art is first for me, and I'd say any success is a by-product of that." The respect seems reciprocal in that Butterill has attracted the likes of Willie P. Bennett, Norton Buffalo and Ray Bonneville, who add their unique musical prowess to the latest CD.

There is a level-headedness, a kind of centered, practical, calmness in Butterill's talk, which may be the result of his rural-based life-style, or of his interest in areas outside the music business. Thanks to Joseph Campbell, who "showed that folklore and myth can be important metaphors for understanding the modern world," he has a great interest in mythology. Eastern philosopher Alan Watts, who he says, "made eastern wisdom - e.g. Buddhism, accessible to those in the West," helped him to understand "what living fully and well can mean." The concepts of, "going into the forest where there is no previous path, of being a forest dweller - these concepts were important to me, both in terms of living my life and in how I decided to approach the music biz."

Butterill also makes red wine and the nearness of the California vineyards is "an added bonus" to living where he does. His life style is reflected in the cover art for *Just A Songwriter*, where the room he writes in and the various elements which are important to him are all depicted with a warmth and serenity that is echoed in his music.



For a guy who shoveled snow for pocket money, played hockey outdoors, pumped gas and serviced cars while going to Bell High School in Nepean, and got a business degree at the University of Ottawa, the music business was important, but maybe not so important that he'd give up his soul, his values, and his ideas about how to live his life.

I have great admiration for those that make the road their life, but also know from my music friends that it's a hard life, all consuming that doesn't always pay so well. What I've learned is to be true to myself, and that it's OK to choose to participate in the arts in the way you're most comfortable with and that is also personally fulfilling."

For Kenny Butterill, he can sit on his back porch, be connected with the music world online through his computer, and achieve success by being just a songwriter.

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No Bull Songs is seeking placement of Kenny Butterill's catalogue with Record Producers, Publishers, Bands/Artists, Film/TV Supervisors, Ad Agencies and others looking for smooth bluesy, folksy, alt-country material with chart proven appeal. *Most songs are also available as instrumental versions.* Some of the catalogue can be reviewed online at www.NoBullSongs.com. If there is someone you think we should get in touch with regarding Kenny Butterill's catalogue, please let us know at Catalog@NoBullSongs.com. Thanks !!

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