

Americana



My daughter Abi lives in Nashville, and recently she was at the Americana Awards Ceremony and told me that Don Henley was performing, also Ry Cooder, Los Lobos, Rosanne Cash, Lucinda Williams and Buffy St Marie - and I thought that sounded a really interesting evening's music!

I've often found it difficult to know how to define my own music, style-wise, mainly because it's a mixture of influences. So if someone says, "What music do you play?" I find it a bit tricky if I approach it stylistically. I could say "roots music", which often brings a blank look, or I could say, "influenced by country rock gospel folk blues," but is this helpful? I don't think so, so I define it sometimes more by the lyrics, by story telling, protest, gospel. Could I say instead, "Actually, I'm a bit Americana"?!

The Americana Music Association defines Americana as "contemporary music that incorporates elements of various American roots music styles, including country, roots-rock, folk, blue grass, r & b and blues resulting in a distinctly roots-oriented sound that lives in a world apart from the pure forms upon which it may draw. While acoustic instruments are often present and vital, Americana also often uses a full electric band."

One of the reasons the term has been adopted is because country music, especially in its recent incarnation, has been so desperate to be commercial that many musicians from Nashville and from this style of music no longer want to use that definition.

Don Henley has the No.1 country album as I write this and he said recently, "I don't recognize country music anymore - the bar is not very high right now. I'm not naming any names. I'm just saying the bar isn't very high right now. [There is] a lot of bad songwriting going on, really sloppy stuff. Not that country music is supposed to be an intellectual exercise, but it could be better than it is. It could have more meat to it than it has currently got."



Don Henley

There's a freedom about the Americana definition, because many artists don't sit clearly just in one style; even Johnny Cash, though considered by many to be the heart of country music - but was what he was doing with Rick Ruben country music or would it be more comfortable with the description Americana? The Americana label seems liberating, especially at a time when commercialisation of a given style can be making it less and less remarkable.

Interesting that Ry Cooder was there at the Americana awards - he is currently playing banjo in a bluegrass band with Ricky Skaggs and Sharon White. This is a musician who has influenced me though all the years since I used to go and see him annually at the Hammersmith Odeon - he was always developing, always influenced by so many different types of music. Through the years he has come up with interesting productions like "The Buena Vista Social Club" or Mavis Staples' Gospel album "We'll Never Turn Back." These are the kind of artists to keep an eye on.



Now here's a problem. Can Americana be used to describe the music of an artist who doesn't come from America? Say for instance an artist born in Watford? - I'm not sure - I'll take advice on this! But I think it's an important question. I like the roots label and that's often been understood quite widely - sometimes meaning acoustic and gritty - would Americana be better?

Maybe this all reminds us that we have to be careful with labels, especially a label like "country" that can put some people off in its current incarnation. Personally I will keep an eye on Americana - it seems to me to be where most of the music that interests me is situated - maybe add a little gospel and a little bit of world music!

One of the key things the **Garth Hewitt Foundation** has been doing is trying to make sure that my earlier albums are available, and now we are doing this steadily through **GingerDog Records** -



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we are somewhere in the region of 20 albums re-released now, so only another 20 or so to go! I'm personally finding it intriguing, because it makes me put an album on and listen to it afresh, and many of these albums I haven't listened to for years.

As we release albums online they are also available to buy as CDs from GingerDog Records, and we will also periodically select one of them to be available as CD on tour with me. The first album to be treated in this way is "Scars" so I have been listening to that again in the car and I've been surprised - some tracks I remember very vividly and certain tracks and certain styles of music I had forgotten were on Scars. (Scars is definitely Americana!!)

Strange Weapons

One song that I am revisiting at the moment is "Strange Weapons" - I've started trying it out on tour again and telling a bit of a story about it, but in fact it will be the title of my next tour. The long running "Something for the Soul" Tour which I have very much enjoyed draws to a close at the end of November. Then there are two or three Christmas gigs and a pause in touring.

The new Strange Weapons Tour will start in April and is a revisiting of songs from the journey through the years. At the moment we are in the process of selecting which the songs will be, and it brings them alive for me as I think what prompted me to write them.

I don't know what the Strange Weapons Tour will exactly look like yet but I know it will contain some songs from Scars including "In A Polish Winter", probably "Jesus of the Scars", and who knows, maybe even "When Johnny Cash Sang Man in Black".

Prayer for Peace

As I write, the situation is getting worse in Palestine and Israel. Over 1900 Palestinians have been injured and 33 have been killed, and this is by Israeli soldiers repeatedly opening fire on crowds in the Gaza strip and the West Bank. You will also have heard that Palestinians have stabbed or attempted to stab various Israelis (7 killed in this way at the moment and others injured) - how should we pray and what should we do with Palestine once again "on the brink" - that's how the human rights organisation Al Haq has described the current situation.

Jailed Palestinian leader Marwan Barghouti is seen as the future leader for the Palestinians, and he pleads from prison for the dealing of the root causes, namely the denial of Palestinian freedom. 'The oppression', he points out, "has now lasted for nearly seventy years" - he pleads again for peace in accordance with International Law and UN resolutions. He says, "I have spent 20 years of my life in Israeli jails... and these years have made me even more certain of this unalterable truth: the last day of occupation will be the first day of peace."

O God we pray for the deeply wounded

Middle East

We pray for liberation

We pray that the siege of Gaza will end

That the occupation of Palestine will end

So there can be peace and security for both
Israelis and Palestinians

So that both communities can move forward
together

In a new relationship and towards a new future



We also pray for Syria

Another country bitterly wounded

And we pray that the terrible conflict will cease

That the rebuilding, after so much destruction, may start

And we pray for refugees,

Fleeing from war and fleeing from poverty

That they will find a place to be

'Till peace comes

And they can return to their land

In the name of Jesus the liberator, healer and peacemaker from Nazareth

Amen

A red, handwritten signature of Garth Hewitt in a cursive script, enclosed within a light yellow rectangular border.

Strange Weapons Tour

If you'd be interested in having Garth come to give a concert in your church or local venue [contact us here](#) - we aim to make hosting Garth as simple and straightforward as possible, and by inviting him you help bring themes of truth and justice to the forefront of your community, and also materially help people around the world who receive support through Amos Trust projects.

The [Garth Hewitt Foundation](#) was set up to help make Garth's lifetime of resources currently available, and to support him in further writing and recording. [You can support his work here.](#)

Most of Garth's earlier albums are now available for download or as CD on the [GingerDog Records website here](#)



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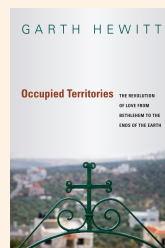
GingerDog Records



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