

William Hart Strecker Is Breaking Through the Smoke and Clouds That Is ...

It was late in 2003. I was at Arlene's to see my friend Kate Fenner and was fortunate to be early enough to catch a great band led by the one, and only, William Hart Strecker. I immediately loved his gutsy rocking sound.

He dropped me an early copy of his CD *All This Dreaming* and I spun it on Harris Radio, without even knowing its name. Later, I'd check out Bill at The Cutting Room, and became a big fan.

Full disclosure: Bill was meant to be the first interviewee when *Indie Sounds* launched back in 2005. A friend of mine had interviewed him, and taken some photos, for what was planned to be the first issue. But said friend moved away, got married, had baby ... and the interview was lost.

Now, with Bill's third album just released, it seemed a good time to get the job done.

Indie Sounds: How and where did William Hart Strecker get going on this planet?

Bill Strecker: I was born in Bayshore, Long Island. And I grew up in Lake Ronkonkoma, also on the island. I was part of a family of nine ... mom and dad, and three brothers and three sisters.

IS: And how did you get seriously into performing music?

Bill: My brothers and sisters all played an instrument in the school band and I played the trombone. After three years of playing that instrument, I realized that I wasn't too good at it, so I tried out for the school chorus and it was like a fish to water. It felt very

natural to sing. I lucked out with a great vocal teacher who entered me in every vocal competition available and subsequently I won numerous awards for voice (including NY State Tenor, Eastern Seaboard Tenor, etc.), which led me to a full scholarship for voice to Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

moved again, to Captiva, Florida. Then after three years, I moved to England and played in London for about a year.

IS: You 'retired' in the 1980s ... what was that about?

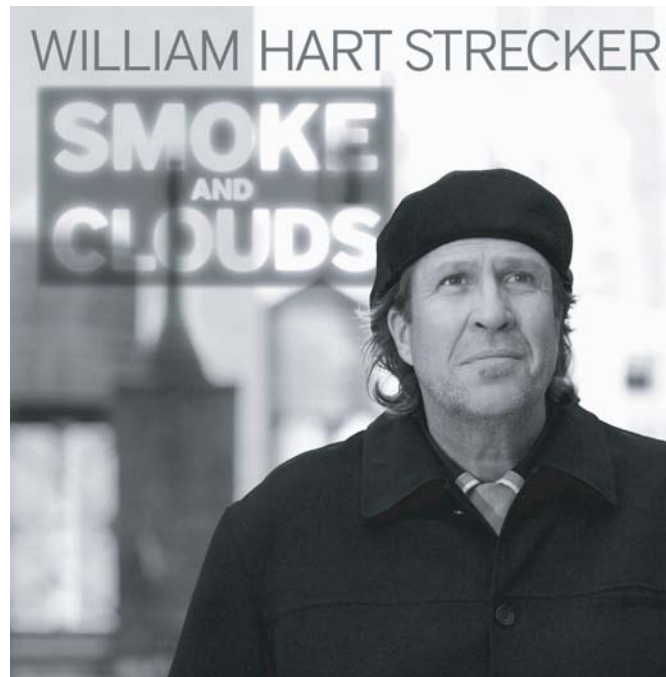


Photo by David Sokol

Bill: Well, I moved back to the USA and saw the music business changing and became tired of all the BS.

So I went to work for a large tri-state area landscape architecture contracting company and fell in love with garden design.

After several years learning the trade, I started my own company in 1989 and it has now become one of the leading landscape architect contracting firms in the tri-state area.

But all that time I was still writing songs and playing some solo shows.

IS: Then you embarked on Bill Strecker's music career, part 1.

IS: Then, in 1998, things *really* changed ...

Bill: Yep. I formed the band New Hope and landed a recording contract with Laurie Records (famous for Dion & The Belmonts) and toured the USA. I then moved from New York to Vermont and toured with a country rock swing band called Zanziber. And after Zanziber, I formed a great rhythm 'n blues band called The Bill Strecker Band and

Bill: True. In late October, 1998, I was in a near fatal automobile accident. It was a very humbling experience learning to walk and talk again. And I then realized that I was missing something very important in my life (my music).

So I decided, with the support of my wife Peggy, to form a new band with new songs.



IS: So began music career, part 2. What were the first steps?

Bill: I called an old friend and band member, Drew Zingg, who had just finished playing with Steely Dan, and he helped put together the band. We rehearsed at least 20 to 30 times before playing my first show.

Drew knew the booker at Arlene's Grocery so that's where we played the first gig. We also played The Cutting Room and were well received at both venues.

IS: You've released three albums now. Tell us about them.

Bill: I just released my third album - *Smoke and Clouds* - and it's going to be played on over 500 radio stations from Jan 1st, 2008!

My first album, *Keep On Lovin*, is a re-mix of two sessions I recorded back in 1989-90 with a great group of musicians. It's a rock and roll album with a touch of the blues. My second album, *All This Dreaming* is the first time I wrote songs with Chris Eminizer, my saxophone player, and we recorded them right away with my new band over two weeks at Long View Farm Studios, in North Brookfield, Mass.

It was an incredible experience having the whole band living together, recording those songs without any outside distractions. My third and current album, *Smoke and Clouds*, is the closest I've ever come to getting a live performance on a recording.

IS: So, who was involved with *Smoke and Clouds*, and who plays with you live?

Bill: Chris Eminizer co-wrote all the songs with me and Ken Rich produced the album as well as my last one. It was recorded by Ken Rich and Peter Keppler at a studio with a great live room called Water Music Recorders in Hoboken, NJ and at Grand Street Recording in Williamsburg.

Then it was mixed at Excello Recording,

also in Williamsburg by Ken Rich and Hugh Pool. Finally, it was mastered by Ted Jensen at Sterling Sound in Manhattan.

The musicians in the band (see below) on this album are Drew Zingg on electric guitar and baritone guitar; John Putnum on pedal steel and electric and acoustic guitars; Chris Eminizer on saxophones, acoustic guitar, dobro, harmonica, flute and percussion; Andrew Sherman on piano, organ, Wurlitzer, Rhodes; Ken Rich on bass guitar, baritone guitar and percussion; Frank Vilardi on drums and percussion; Greg Wiz on drums and percussion; and me - William Hart Strecker - on acoustic guitar and vocals. All these guys are playing with me live.



Photo by Naila Busacca.

IS: Where do you like to play in NYC, and what clubs and performers do you go see?

Bill: I like playing at The Living Room, The Cutting Room and The Rockwood Music Hall in NYC. And my favorite performers are Hugh Pool, Julia Darling, Jodi Sheeler and Jon Darling with The Grey Race.

IS: So, what's next for WHS?

Bill: What's next for me is to keep writing with Chris (currently, we are writing together for Curb Records Publishing, in Nashville), to keep playing with the band in NY and NJ, and then hopefully a tour following this radio promotion of the album. And just keep on keepin' on!

Web: www.williamhartstrecker.com



IN THIS ISSUE

- 1 On The Cover:
William Hart Strecker
- 3 New Release Rap:
Mel Flannery Trucking Co.
White Flag
- 4 Indie Sounds Top 10 of 2007
- 5 The L Word Update
- 6 Scene and Heard
- 6 What's New on CD:
Tiffany Randol, Automatic Children, William Rottman
- 7 Fast Forward
- 8 Five Vital Questions:
Shanna Zell
- 8 Live in NYC:
Bettina Schelker

Indie Sounds NY serves the New York independent music scene. Each month, Indie Sounds seeks out the singer/songwriters, the bands, the places and the people who make up a unique and vibrant artistic community.

Indie Sounds NY is brought to you by Harris Radio, an internet radio station broadcasting 24/7 on www.harrisradio.com, playing great music from unsigned artists and independent labels. And Canadians. Harris Radio also operates www.gigapple.com.

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**New Release Rap****Mel Flannery Trucking Co.
*White Flag*****Indie Sounds:** Why *White Flag*?

Mel Flannery: *White Flag* is a song about surrender. Specifically, about the conscious decision to opt out of looking for someone and to accept life as an eternal single. The song relays the story of a break-up that is the last straw for the subject, and so she makes the choice to abstain, and how she justifies that to herself. I guess it's the Pat Benetar in me trying to say that on the battlefield of love, it stings to wave a white flag.

IS: And where did your band name - Mel Flannery Trucking Co. - come from?

Mel: Oddly enough, there is a Mel Flannery Trucking Co. in Crandon, WI, where my parents grew up and my grandmother and some other relatives still live. The original Mel Flannery Trucking Co. is owned and operated by Melvin Flannery, Sr., who is a distant cousin of my father.

They've been super gracious and gave me permission to use the name and even let me take photos at their HQ climbing all over the trucks and stuff. I'm a complete ego maniac

(any band leader is), so I love to see my name plastered across a cement mixer or an 18 wheeler. Ultimately, I wanted to make it clear that it was my band but I didn't want to call it 'Mel Flannery Band' or whatever.

IS: Who performed on this album?

Mel: Lee Pardini plays piano and Rhodes, Tommy Crane on drums, Matt Aronoff on basses and myself on vocals.

IS: And who else was involved?

Mel: The glorious Michael Brorby of Acoustic Recordings in Brooklyn engineered and recorded it and the debonair Alessandro Miglio of Hobbit Audio mixed and mastered it. Photos are by the scintillating Katie Pease (whom I've known since the tender age of five) and the design/layout is by the tantalizing Juren David. Lee Pardini and I co-produced it.

IS: How does *White Flag* differ from your debut self-named album?

Mel: This new album I have no apologies about. I'm so very proud of it. Vocally, I'm in much better shape and the songwriting represents me and what I'm about and the kind of music I've always wanted to make much better. Also, I feel really good about recording it all in one day with live vocals and everything. I can't hang with everyone recording their parts to a click track and patching together 20 vocal tracks to get one that sounds good and using a pitch modifier and whatever. If that's what it takes you to get a good product, you probably should stay out of the studio.

Co-writing with Lee was a big change as well. I'd never co-written anything before because I'd always been too much of a control freak, but with Lee, it just worked.

Three of the tracks on my album, *White Flag*, *Anniversary Song* and *Fairy Tales*, were written by Lee and me at about 5:30 in the

morning and it took us about an hour and a half to write all three. It was the most amazing creative experience of my life. I never knew I could write a love song that didn't double as a torch song!

IS: File this CD under?

Mel: I've been calling it jazz influenced pop-rock. Different people like to call it different things and I'm fine with that. But please don't call it 'Intelli-pop' because then I'll have to punch you

IS: How are you promoting the CD?

Mel: Shows in NYC ... playing Rockwood Music Hall on December 20th at 7pm, and have things lined up with Caffé Vivaldi for January. I did a little touring this summer, played my hometown in Wisconsin and St. Louis and Nashville.

I made postcards that I hand out like religious tracts to anyone who will take them. I'm played on the radio in my hometown (and on Harris Radio) and I'm the 'cool down' song for some stripping class!

I'm on a zillion different websites but most notably, CD Baby, for both of my albums. Beyond that, it's been tricky. With the industry in such flux it's hard to know quite what to do. Setting up label showcases at this point seems to be senseless and more effort than it's worth. Of all the hats I wear as an independent musician, I think I wear the promo hat the worst.

IS: What's next for you?

Mel: Isn't that the question? Man, I have no idea ... something really big. I'm so very ready for it!

Web: www.melflannery.com

MySpace: melflannerytruckingco





Indie Sounds Top 10

Once again, it's time to look back at some of the best of what I found new and interesting (in some way) in the NYC music scene in the past year. As usual, there's a mass of talent to choose from, and I'm already compiling names for 2008. But for now, here's *the* list.

10. Out of Town Award: The Blood Lines

They only came to NYC once in 2007, but they certainly made a great impression. From Saskatoon in Saskatchewan (that's in Canada, by the way), come The Blood Lines. Comprising two sets of siblings, the indie rockers have toured Canada with The Dears, played in Beijing (that's in China, by the way) with Nine Inch Nails, and graced the stage of Piano's for about 45 minutes.

Along the way, they've garnered many accolades up North and a few awards too. At the time of writing this, keyboardist Maygen is on the shortlist to be named Sexiest Canadian Musician, so hopefully we'll be seeing more of them this year.
www.thebloodlines.com.

9. Googies Lounge

Wacky décor aside, the upstairs music space at The Living Room has become a favorite place for me to see good music. Very small, it reminds me of the original room now occupied by Epstein's on the corner of Stanton and Allen. And the white baby grand is a nice touch. The more adventurous (some might say enlightened?) booking policy has also opened the venue to some new talent, which is refreshing.

For sure, Googies has given a boost to the venue, which has seen its once hallowed crown slipping a bit of late, as its front bar has been overtaken by the "let's go out and get shitfaced" crowd, and its main music room has suffered from too much cover charge mayhem.

It helps, too, that the venue's night crew remain some of the nicest people around.
www.livingroomny.com/googies.html.

8. Jerry Cherry

You either 'get' Jerry Cherry or you don't. I have to admit, it took a little while for me. He's got his own style for sure, and an on-stage persona that reminds one of the days when bands were true performers. And his debut CD *Life Is Sweeter* proves he can put down some great songs.

There's something else too. I probably see Jerry around the scene, checking out other performers, more than I see anyone else. Whenever I bump into him, he'll have a flier for his next show to give me, a question about something he's thinking about, and usually a comment about the acts he's seeing.

He's trying for sure, and it's working.
www.jerrycherry.com.

7. Dan Torres

I am not sure whether this is another 'Out of Town' placing ... as Dan seems to be spending a lot of time in Oregon of late. Fortunately, he's making regular trips back to NYC ... playing back at the Rockwood and scoring some great opening slots at larger venues like the Highline and the Bowery.

Whether it's solo or with a band, Dan puts on a thoroughly engaging and enjoyable show, but never forgets the essentials - making sure the audience knows of his next gig, his website, to tip the bartenders ... it's simple stuff that 90 percent of performers forget. Nice to see someone with their shit together.
www.dantorresmusic.net.

6. Julian Velard

Julian was one of the acts that I've known of for a few years and kept meaning to check out, but that only happened a few months ago. My friend Carrie has had the hots for

him for ages and so I took her great taste (in music) onboard and checked him out. (Sorry, Julian, she isn't in the tribe!)

It's hard not to like Julian's songs or the swagger that he portrays both onstage and off. He's funny ... humorous, that is, and it's great to share a laugh with him. Now, it looks like his peoples across the pond will be getting to see that more, as he will be promoting his EMI release in the UK in 2008.
www.julianvelard.com.

5. Ann Courtney & The Late Bloomers

Their website greets with "Hello Gorgeous" and indeed this band looks just gorgeous on stage. Probably something to do with Ann and Lizzie and the style they bring, to add to the infectious music, a mix of pop and rock and country, and probably other genres too.

With a couple of EPs under their belt, 2008 will see the release of their debut full length album. It's all top secret right now, says Ann. ACLB is one of just a few bands that can bring out a decent crowd on both sides of the Brooklyn Bridge, so when the CD arrives, it should be making a splash.
www.aclbloom.com.

4. Bugs in the Dark

Sometimes, great things come in smaller packages. Once a four-piece that went by the name of Angelic Bombs, the band slimmed down to just three and adopted a heavier, rock punk line, but one that still sounds very tuneful. Art Rock is what they call it.

As a live band, they are a great sight and sound, with the high energy dueling of Karen Rockower and Zach Glass on lead vocals and guitars, and Julia Lomax keeping it all together on drums. Not afraid to push it out, they've been touring all over the states this year, while still finding time to put it down at Piano's, Southpaw and Luna Lounge. Cancel everything and go see their next show.
www.bugsinthedark.com.



3. Erin Sax Seymour

I have Ishrat Ansari's Caffe Vivaldi to thank for introducing me to Erin Sax Seymour and her bluesy country rock music. Erin has wonderful songs, and a lovely trad country voice to deliver them. And her live shows at Vivaldi are parties not to miss.

Sadly for us, she's been away for much of the year, on tour across the states and in Europe. Her tails from the road, indeed from her life while making her debut CD *Good Girl*, make one realize just how determined one has to be to get past the inherent BS of making a life in music. She's been doing just that with lots of grace this year. Hopefully, Erin will get some country songs played backwards coming her way in 2008.

www.erinsaxseymour.com.

2. Rich Girls

Who would have thought that from the ashes of that country-tinged oddity Cyd Glore's New Masterpiece would come the glam-rock of Rich Girls. I guess anything is possible with some eye makeup and a feather boa.



Matt of Rich Girls. Photo by BJ Barratt.

Rich Girls includes three members from Cyd Glore - Matt Basile on bass, plus Mike Vitacco and Sean Kensing, both on guitar. Add to that the drumming of Jamie Alegre, and vocals from all of them, and what you have is quite simply a live phenomenon that is growing musically at an exponential rate. So we'll make them the top act for 2007. Maybe they'll put out some vinyl in 2008. www.myspace.com/richgirlsny.

1. The Community @ Rockwood Music Hall

I figured that if *Time* magazine could nominate 'You' as person of the year, then I could do similar with the top prize this year.

For me, the venue's back room opening was the catalyst for Rockwood Music Hall transforming from not only where the best NYC acts performed to the place that those same people now come and meet, drink, and chat about music, the city, the game, girls and boys. And the club's charming bartenders and wait staff provide not just the necessary refreshment, but lubricate the conversation too.

Wednesday's Late Night grew into an institution, providing a platform for those hangers to contribute and collaborate in an informal atmosphere. For those who come and put it on the line singing a cover, it's become a great way to make new fans and expand audiences.

While the mainstream music world is crapping itself over how to meet its digital future, what to do about MySpace, DRM and the monster it allowed Steve Jobs to create ... the fact is that indie music 2.0 is alive and *very* happening at 196 Allen Street. www.rockwoodmusichall.com.

See page 7 for a look back and update on past Top 10 acts.

The L Word Update

With Lauren Jonik

I'm grateful that I've had a chance to write about so many varied, talented artists in *The L Word* this past year. Let's check in with what they have in store for us in 2008 ...

Look for talented songstresses Brianna Sage and Lucy Woodward to continue to play both locally and in cities far and wide. Randall Shreve is hard at work on his follow up to *The Cure For Yesterday* and will have full band shows in NYC soon. Mieka Pauley recently celebrated the release of *Elijah Drop Your Gun*, and continues to tour extensively.

Jared Scharff has landed the prestigious gig as the new guitarist on *Saturday Night Live* and plays regularly around town with his band Jared Scharff and The Royals.

Moldover continues to take over the world of electronic music and has launched controllerism.com

Leila Broussard signed a publishing deal with Rondor Universal Music Group and is heading to the sunnier climate of Los Angeles.

Renee Cologne can be heard on any number of TV commercials and will dazzle the audience with her next show in support of *Rock and Roll Housewife* at the Cutting Room on January 17th.

And, last but not least, Jerry Cherry, though tempted, refrains from jumping on the tables at the Rockwood, while entertaining everyone at Late Night on Wednesday nights. Catch his next full band show at Snitch on December 20th, 10pm.

Most of all, Lauren is thankful to live in a city with such amazing, talented people and is looking forward to writing about more of them in 2008!





Scene and Heard

The New Late Night

Anyone who was at the Rockwood's Late Night recently will know by now that it has introduced a new format.

Instead of covering a year from the *Billboard* 100, which has been the focus since the night's inception, the new format will cover a classic album. Elvis Costello's *Armed Forces* kicked off the new format.

Here is quick q&a with co-host Matt Basile taken from the night's MySpace page (www.myspace.com/latenightrmh) ...

Q: Why the change?

A: We've done all the years at least once. Many of the best years have been covered twice. I think we did 1983 three times.

Q: With just one album, there are not that many songs to choose from ... how will we avoid repeats in a given night?

A: Good point! Personally, I've never minded repeats as long as people are doing an interesting interpretation of the song.

Part of the idea behind Late Night has always

been to "make the song your own."

We'll do our best to choose albums that have songs that are open to interpretation and will additionally include any and all B-Sides or outtakes as options.

Q: Will you take album requests?

A: Yes and no. Yes, we will accept suggestions. No, we will not promise to use your suggestion.

Q: Will you ever go back to doing the *Billboard* lists by year, 'cuz I really thought that was a lot of fun?

A: I don't know.

So there you have it. For myself, some Stones, Fleetwood Mac and Bowie please.

Dumbo Music ... a little acoustic scene is developing on Wednesday and Saturday nights at 68 Jay Street Bar in Dumbo. Wednesday's from 8pm, Saturday's at 10pm. The bar is two blocks from the F train York Street Brooklyn stop.

Hit or miss? What do The Prigs, Kelsey and Wynn Walent have in common?

They have all been recently picked for Kendall's Hit List, which appears every Wednesday on www.indiesoundsny.com.

Bands and venues: Tell us your news ... changes in lineup, new albums, sound upgrades, new open mics, new bartenders. Email us at pete@indiesoundsny.com.

If it's worthy, we'll give you a shout out in these pages or via the continuously updated blog at www.indiesoundsny.com.

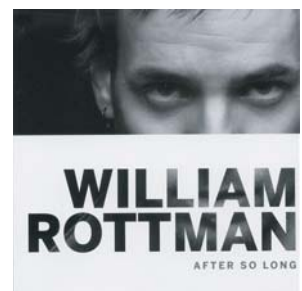
WHAT'S NEW ON CD



Tiffany Randol
Kiss Me Kiss Me
www.tiffanyrandol.com



Automatic Children
It's Not Me, It's You
www.automaticchildren.com



William Rottman
After So Long
www.williamrottman.com

Next Month in Indie Sounds NY

On the Cover:

SONICA

Look out for the February issue at all good NYC music venues.

Or download it at:

www.indiesoundsny.com





Fast Forward Roundup

Fast Forward this month is devoted to a retro of some of those acts that made the Top 10 in the last couple of years. Mostly it's been good news ...

In 2006, **In Flight Radio** made the #9 spot, a reflection on how new they were to me at that time. That's just the way the timing went. If they were in this year's list, they'd be a top 3 for sure.

Of late, they've been playing a bundle of new songs live, and laying them down over at Monkey Boy Studios for a new album due out early in 2008. www.inflightradio.net.

The top band from last year were **Breaking Laces**. The three piece band with the five piece sound are continuing to make progress, recently winning the prestigious Starbucks Musicmakers competition. As a result, they are off to the Kauai Music Festival in Hawaii in the summer. www.breakinglaces.com.

For 2005, the top act was **NLX**. Pictured below, she's been touring her native Canada a fair bit this year, opening in some pretty big venues for the likes of David Usher and Matthew Good.



Now, she's back in NYC and working on her next album, and on a little side project called **SONICA** - more on that in next month's issue. www.nlxmusic.com.

Another top act in 2005 was **Ryan Star**. Following his TV stardom on *Rockstar: Supernova*, he's been busy recording his next album, due for release on Atlantic Records in the new year. www.rstar.net.

Danielle Gasparro made #3 last time, and she's had a busy few months, hanging with Chris Difford from Squeeze in Italy, playing gigs in the UK, and lately planning a new live and interactive show for 2008. Should be fun. www.daniellegasparro.com.



Emily Zuzik placed #5 in 2006, and seems to have spent much of this year performing at Wednesday Late Nights, or co-writing and performing on both sides of the pond with Mr. Marwood, Benji Rogers. She's also been seen playing out with Pi on both coasts and fronting cover band AKI is the Glue (as in the photo above). www.emilyzuzik.com.

Speaking of **Marwood**, I am convinced that Benji has cloned himself. He told the world he had moved back to the UK this year, and yet I keep bumping into him in NYC. And his website has him on tour just about everywhere, all the time!

Before he repatriated himself, he did record a pretty wonderful *Live at Rockwood* album, which is worth checking out, not least for the audience interaction. No doubt, he'll be back there soon. www.marwoodmusic.com.

Speaking of live Rockwood albums, another of those came this year from the amazing jazz pianist Dred Scott, who was another top act back in 2005.

According to the liner notes, I helped name one of the songs he plays, the very tuneful *Sans Francisco*. Dred continues to perform at the club every Tuesday at midnight. www.dredscott.com.

Sorry to report that **Mickey's Blue Room**, and its associated open mic, bit the dust some time ago. But **Sean Smith** and **Jeremiah Birnbaum** play on, the latter mainly with his band, The Ramblers.

Across the road, though, **Banjo Jim's** continues to put on great music in a relaxed environment, under the direction of Lisa and Richard. www.banjojims.com.

And Mickey's favorite **Nell Bryden** (#8 in 2005) has been touring all over Europe, and released *Second Time Around* along the way. www.nellbryden.com.

Life has been a little bit slow of late for **The Undisputed Heavyweights** - at least as far as the #6 band from last year is concerned.

Frontman **Casey Shea** has been in the UK along with his Sundown project, which also includes Wes Hutchinson and Andy Stocks. The music on their MySpace page is pretty incredible.

www.betterthanelvis.com

www.caseyshea.com

www.myspace.com/sundownmusic.com

Meanwhile, guitarist **Jeff Jacobson** has been out and about promoting his solo self-titled CD. www.jeffjacobson.com.

Finally, expect albums (or at least an EP) in 2008 from: Guyora Kats, Susan Enan, Liz Clark, Gelsey Bell and Jason Darling.



**Backline****Five Vital Questions For ...
Shanna Zell**

Indie Sounds: If you were a hooker, what would be your name?

Shanna Zell: Leigh Bushwick.

IS: Who would you choose to get stuck on a desert island with?

Shanna: For entertainment: the cast of *Family Guy* so they could repeatedly reenact my favorite episodes. For music: David Bowie and a reincarnated Nina Simone. For

protecting me from the wild Manbearpig: Pete Harris. For all other "desert island needs" then Ryan Gosling and Johnny Depp.

IS: If you could give someone an old fashioned slap across the face, who would you like to strike?

Shanna: Other than George W? Britney Spears. What a little tart. And let's slap Tom Cruise, too, while we're at it.

IS: Your favorite method of relaxation?

Shanna: Let's just say I don't want to hurt my chances of being able to run for President one day ...

IS: iTunes or Starbucks?

Shanna: iTunes provides me with joy for hours on end, so definitely iTunes. Plus they have Tetris for your iPod and that's way cool.

Web: www.shannazell.com

MySpace: shannazell

Questions: Mistress Tessa Perry,
www.tessaperry.com

**LIVE IN NYC**
From www.gigapple.com

Who: Bettina Schelker

Where and When: The Baggot Inn on Saturday, December 29th @ 7pm and Rockwood Music Hall on Sunday, December 30th @ 6pm.

What: Current Swiss boxing champ, political activist, label founder, school founder, musician ... and much more!

Web: www.foundagirl.com

MySpace: bettinaschelker

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