

The Kennedys Get Back Into The Big Apple Groove With Solo Projects That Push The Sides Of The Bell Curve

I first came across The Kennedys' music while I was still semi-living in England in the 90's. I was in a music store and there was this great song playing. I asked a staffer and he said "They're called The Kennedys. Never heard them before but they ain't bad, are they?" An understatement indeed. So I left the shop with *Life Is Large* and it entered high rotation in my CD collection.

Fast forward to 2002 and I'd just started Harris Radio, with The Kennedys on the first playlist. I remember inviting them to the launch party at Arlene's, though since they lived in Virginia, I didn't expect a reply. But one came, saying they'd just moved to NYC and they'd be there. It was great meeting them and I was definitely in awe of having people so "famous" come to my party! Now, after an interlude in Northampton, they're back in the city again. Just in time for *Indie Sounds* to catch up with them for this final print edition ...

Indie Sounds: So after several years of releasing albums as The Kennedys, you both have solo CDs released or in the works. What gives?

Pete Kennedy: Well, if you picture a bell curve with our duo music in the middle, there's those two extreme sides that fall outside of that sound. Maura's really into vocal arranging and current pop music, and I'm really into guitar as a distinct voice in itself, and roots and contemporary classical stuff. The blend that we have as a duo is created by tempering the extreme edges of those interests, and using the things that we have most in common. I think that's true of any band that stays together. So by doing

solo projects, we can focus on those things that fall a bit outside of our usual blend. Think of Charlie Watt's big band jazz albums, or George Harrison's *Wonderwall Music*.

IS: You are recently back living in New York City. What brought you back?

in Northampton, Mass. Everybody there is an exile from NYC, and we kept doing our Sirius Satellite radio show at Rockefeller Center, so the connection was never broken.

Now we're back for good ... just bought an apartment in the East Village!



Photo by Hub Wilson

Maura Kennedy: We had been living in Northern Virginia, and were looking for a place to live in Brooklyn on September 10th, 2001, and when 9/11 happened, we were more determined than ever to become part of this community, and we re-focused on Manhattan. We played at the Bottom Line for years, and that part of town, between the East and West Villages, really feels like home. We did leave for two years when we got priced out of our rental, and we settled temporarily

IS: Let's rewind a bit. How did you both get started in life, and get interested in and involved in music?

Pete: I just always loved music. There's an ancient Irish fiddle tune called *Peter Kennedy's Fancy*, so maybe it's genetic. When I was a kid, I loved rock 'n' roll, and also Beethoven and Tchaikovsky, and I was always quite sure that I would spend my life combining those things. It never occurred to



me to put on a suit and pursue some kind of financial security, so I've always just followed the muse. It worked out fine.

Maura: I'm from a large family. There's nine of us. All the kids are a year apart in age, some exactly a year apart, as in the case of me and my older brother, Vince. We did a lot of stuff together, all of us, as kids ... wrote and performed plays, we were a whole softball team, a gang, really. I had a great childhood.

When I first saw *The Partridge Family* and *The Monkees* reruns on TV, I was instantly jealous that these people who all lived together also sang together. No one else in my family was as interested in music as I was. I used to try and get my siblings to play a game I invented called "Guess the A-side," where I'd play side two of a single and they had to guess the hit. The more different they had to guess the hit. The more different the B-side, the better. My fave was the B-side of *They're Coming To Take Me Away*, because it was the same as the A-side, except played backwards. I loved this game, but couldn't get anyone to play it with me for more than one or two rounds.

I was a record geek from way back. Then when I was in college, I went to work at a used record store at Syracuse University campus. All the records were open, so I could play anything that caught my eye. I had a voracious appetite for new music, and newly discovered music, and that's remained with me to this day.

Now instead of browsing the used record store, I'm on iTunes and Pandora all day long. Lastly, I should say that when I was growing up in Syracuse, there was a terrific live music scene. The drinking age was still 18 then, so college kids could get into bars, and live bands flourished. A lot of talent came out of that scene, and for me the notable thing is that all my favorite bands did their own songs, so that was always the norm in my mind. If you wanted to be in a band, you not only had to play and sing, but write as well. And wear cool clothes.

IS: And it was music that brought you together? What's the story?

Pete: I was playing in Nanci Griffith's band, The Blue Moon Orchestra, and during a few days off, I went down to Austin, Texas and played a few solo gigs. I was jamming with a friend who kept telling me I had to meet this woman who was great, and liked the same music I did. That's essential, as you know. Sure enough, Maura came to my gig at The Continental Club, and we hit it off immediately. We wrote a song right away (*Day In and Day Out*), and I took off for a gig in Colorado. I'll let her finish the story.

Maura: After about ten days, Pete called me. By then he was in Telluride, Colorado, just finishing up the festival there and he had a few days off before he had to drive back to DC. I had a few rare days off myself, so we came up with a plan to meet in the middle, and fate would have it that the equidistant point between Austin and Telluride is Lubbock, TX, home of Buddy Holly, who's always been a favorite of mine. Pete loves Buddy too, so we decided that our first real date should be at Buddy Holly's grave. Of course, we sang *Not Fade Away* at his grave site.

IS: When did you start performing together as a musical act?

Pete: Iris Dement was touring with Nanci, singing background vocals and opening shows, and when she left the tour, Nanci tagged Maura to take her place as guest harmony singer in the band. Just before we left for the tour, Nanci told us that we would be her opening act, alternating that slot with another Blue Moon Orchestra guitarist and fellow New Yorker Frank Christian.

We spent that summer in England, Scotland and Ireland, doing gigs with Nanci at the Royal Albert Hall and other venues, and spending lots of time writing the songs that make up our first album, *River of Fallen Stars*.

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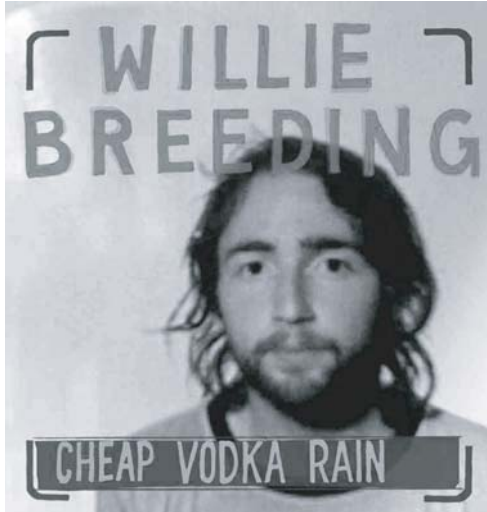
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New Release Rap

Willie Breeding
Cheap Vodka Rain

Indie Sounds: *Cheap Vodka Rain* ... that's the title. So what's the story?

Willie Breeding: It's like when rappers pour champagne on women in designer bikinis in music videos, only now with the economy like it is, it's cheap vodka. I had to have a talk with Jay Z about it because the *Big Pimpin* video was so innovative in that regard, and he just told me that I had to do what I had to do to get the party started, and I thought, "Well, if that ain't the god damn truth ... Even Fergie knows that ..."

IS: Who performed on the album?

Willie: I was very lucky in that I got to make the exact record I wanted to make. That's what you get to do when you finance things yourself, and as far as I can see, it's the only advantage to financing music yourself. I wanted to do this with my close friends, and people that I actually hang out, and drink with, and whatnot. It just seemed like the nature of the songs called for that.

So I had Thomas Bryan Eaton, who played peddle steel and mandolin, Christine Smith

played piano, Eric Vitale on electric guitar, George Souleidis on bass, Dave Peterson from Philadelphia played drums, That was the band on the floor when we cut the record. With Dave Bielanko (of Marah) standing on a chair and sort of guiding the proceedings. He also played electric guitar on a song called *Bruises* and him and Thomas have a pretty amazing moment there towards the end of the song, a very big step towards getting the party started for sure. Liz Clark and Helen Gassenheimer sang some harmonies. My sister came and sang the bulk of the harmonies, and she's just insane. I don't know that I know anybody who sings better than her. I banged on the acoustic guitar. I tried to channel Kid Rock but you know, unplugged.

IS: And who else was involved in the production of the album?

Willie: The album was sort of helped along by Dave Bielanko, as far as things like what songs we ended up using, and how we ended up recording them. Christine Smith, who played the piano and did some singing, added a lot. The record was recorded live in the studio over two days, so there wasn't really much "production" going on. Dave, Christine and Kirk Henderson were all unbelievably helpful to me in all aspects of the recording.

We recorded it at Excello Studios in Williamsburg with Hugh Pool and Nathan Rosborough, then we did a couple of overdubs with Kirk at his place. Once those sessions were done, I took them down to Kentucky (where I'm from) where they were mixed by Duane Lundy. Khara Ledonne did the cover art.

IS: Can you describe the album's sound?

Willie: For the most part I just wanted the album to sound live, have the songs speak for themselves and not over think anything. You can't always record like that, but it was the only way I could imagine this one going. Sometimes I think, "What if DMX's comeback album was produced by the Jonas Brothers?" That's where my sound comes from.

IS: How does the album differ from your EP *Grey Skies*?

Willie: I don't really think of the EP as an actual thing that exists. I mean, I know it does, and we re-recorded two songs from it with the band for the album, but I made that before I played with a band, and quite frankly, I can't play the guitar worth a shit so the last thing I should be doing is making records where I'm the only musician playing!

And there's two truly terrible songs on the EP. There might be on the album too, but they all mean enough to me that I can be proud of them. Plus, *Cheap Vodka Rain* is really such a strong political statement. If you get in the right frame of mind you realize that Thomas's peddle steel playing is really a metaphor for how to guide this country back into the right direction. Sometimes I think that it might distract from the songs but then I realize that what Thomas is trying to say is bigger than me. Bigger than any one person really.

IS: Are you producing physical CDs or is this digital only?

Willie: No CDs for now. Maybe short runs for touring and stuff, but probably just gonna wait and do it on vinyl later.

IS: Is there a CD release party set?

Willie: Thanks for asking. It's at The Living Room on February 22nd at 9pm.

IS: How are you going to be promoting the album, getting it out there?

Willie: Touring, MTV, *The View*, *Guitar Hero*, etc.

MySpace: williebreedingmusic





The L Word

With Lauren Jonik

Jamie Rae

The challenge and freedom for an artist is that there is no set path, no yellow brick road to success. One has to blaze the trail alone and often create not only the way, but also the means, for carving out a career. For singer/songwriter Jamie Rae, this has meant following her heart and learning to reach both deeper within and farther without.

Always drawn to music from her earliest days growing up in Pittsburgh, PA, Jamie Rae

moved to New York City when she was eighteen years old to attend school for musical theater. But, it was when she went on an audition that her path changed. A producer suggested that she learn to play an instrument and begin writing her own music. "The first time I ever picked up a guitar and wrote a song was in this city," Rae explains.

Crossing paths with Thorry Koren of The Kin, who would become her guitar teacher, opened Rae's eyes to the possibilities that lay before her in NYC. "There is so much that this city has to offer for singer/songwriters. Every day, I would grab my guitar and I would go to a different open mic. From doing that, I heard different kinds of songwriters, I met different people, and I collaborated with different people." As a result, Rae decided she wanted to create a CD that represented her sound and soon found herself in the studio with Koren at the helm. The result was the 2006 release of *September Skies*.

In addition to frequently performing her own original music both solo and with a band, Rae has recently been working with several well-known local and national artists, including the legendary Chubby Checker. "It has been an amazing experience. Chubby had his CD release party and I was asked to sing *Slow Twistin'* with him at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland for a thousand people. It was one of the most incredible experiences of my life," Rae recounts. "What Chubby has taught me is that the show is not about you, it is about the audience and you need to make sure that they are having a good time. He is the only performer that I have

ever seen in my life who can turn a room of people sitting with frowns upside down. It never fails. It is pretty unbelievable."

Jamie Rae is also currently a member of The Little Death, a band that features singer Laura Dawn, Aaron Brooks, Daron Murphy, Cherie Martorena and Moby. "I am thrilled to be a part of this band. It has got three part harmonies against this soulful rock music and Laura Dawn is a powerhouse," Rae enthuses.

Additionally, she sings in Ghost Against Ghost, which she describes as having elements of Radiohead, Portishead and Nine Inch Nails and is fronted by singer Chris Bono. Rae has recently begun collaborating on a project called King Hamelin with her friend bassist and flutist Serge, which has allowed her the opportunity to explore learning to play the drums. "The music is bass-driven rock music. It is a lot heavier than most of what I am used to playing." And, last but not least, Rae is a member of AKI Is The Glue, a NYC super group cover band, which features James Maddock, Emily Zuzik and Drew Mortali, amongst others.

Like many artists, Rae faces the obstacle of the unknown, but has been turning it into a stepping-stone. "It is that uncertainty - believing in yourself and that you are doing the right things. You have got to trust it. I feel very successful already. I am working with so many different bands and I'm having such a great time doing it."

MySpace: [jamieraemusic](http://jamieraemusic.com)

To read the full article online, with additional photos, check out www.indiesoundsny.com.

Lauren Jonik is a freelance writer and photographer based in Brooklyn who enjoys blending her love of music with her passion for writing. She is the founder and editor of the website www.soundaffects.net and contributes to several online and print publications.





THE KENNEDYS ...

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IS: So far, I think it's ten albums as The Kennedys. How has your music and the recordings evolved over the years?

Pete: Well, there are two ways to configure a long series of albums. You can consciously create a recognizable style, a "brand," and keep selling it every year, or you can create something that reflects who you are in each year. That's likely to be different, based on the music you're listening to, and on your own experiences during the year. We've followed the latter course, because we look up to Marvin Gaye, The Beatles, The Byrds, U2, Dylan, Richard Thompson, Miles Davis, etc., all of whom re-invented themselves continually on record in an effort to always be totally honest with the audience.

Our first album was very ethereal, coming as it did out of the mists of Ireland, and the second album was an American road album, a very different feel. We followed that with a very acoustic album, *Angel Fire*, and then *Evolver*, which was heavily influenced by club music, and the melange that you hear on the streets of NYC. Needless to say, some of the people who liked the acoustic stuff didn't dig that, but we were honestly portraying who we were that year.

Since then, we've had a blend of influences, with the most important move being away from a pop-culture visual image, toward really strong songs. Once we moved away from experimenting with production and formalism, our following started to solidify around the songs.

IS: Your latest album is *Better Dreams*. What's the story of that?

Maura: I've been lucky enough to have always been able to write from dreams. In some cases, I'll dream whole songs as in our

song *Stand*. As it happens, we teach a week-long summer music camp for adults up in New Hampshire every year, and one of my students asked if I'd think about teaching a course in writing songs from dreams after she heard me talking about writing *Stand*. I'd never considered that it would be something I could teach, but I put together a well-thought-out plan in the form of a once-a-week-for-six-weeks workshop. I had ten students for the first session, and immediately got more interest from word-of-mouth, so I did another series for twelve students. Everyone made really cool dream journals that they were dedicated to writing in each day, and I developed exercises for them to do in and out of class.

Now, as I was teaching this course, Pete and I continued to write, as we always do, but there was this strong focus on dreams because that's what we were immersed in at the time. Both sessions were a big success, and every student came to class with one, two, sometimes three or more songs that they had written during the week, and they were all impressed that their songs no longer had to be autobiographical. The dream imagery allowed them to tap into subjects and archetypes that were more universal and artistic. I was also able to teach my students how to "come awake" in dreams (a.k.a. lucid dreaming). The key is to train yourself to notice whether you're awake or dreaming at will.

In my case, whenever I hear someone singing, I try to figure out if I'm awake or dreaming. Because this is my regular cue, I've been able to capture whole songs from these magical (and much appreciated) dream characters. One case on our *Better Dreams* CD is the song *I Found A Road*. In my dream, Leslie Gore was singing this song to me. Because I was able to become lucid, I "made" her sing the song over and over so that by the time I awoke I had the whole thing memorized. Thanks, Leslie!

IS: So in this age of iTunes, etc., are physical CDs still relevant?

Pete: I don't think CDs are relevant at all. That's not to say there was anything wrong with them in the 80's and 90's, but that era has passed. I don't really need to "hold something in my hands" while I listen to music, and how are those tiny liner notes better than an interactive web site? I love having access to millions of songs just by clicking on iTunes, and I've learned more about music in the past four years than I did in all the time prior to that, because I can hear samples without spending thousands of dollars that I don't have on CDs. I just buy the music I want, and I've never downloaded a song illegally. It's not about thievery, it's about access.

Maura: I agree totally with Pete. I'm addicted to iTunes, Pandora and eMusic, among other great online music resources, that invite you to discover new music, and that actually lead you to music that you're likely to connect with. When we were DJs at Sirius, I made a point to try and discover great new songs on a daily basis by exploring these online digital music treasuries. It's one of the good habits that I've maintained! And now that we're in New York for good, and limited in storage space, I've uploaded my CD collection to my computer (and backed it up!), so I don't need to store all those CDs. Still, and much to Pete's chagrin, I've been unable (and steadfastly unwilling) to purge my awesome vinyl collection!

IS: You've toured a lot over the years. Any particularly memorable gigs or moments?

Pete: We loved playing in England with Nanci, because she played Hammersmith Odeon and lots of other venues that The Beatles played, and we would stand in the "John" position (Pete), or the "George" position (Maura), onstage. The Falcon Ridge Festival, upstate, is really great, too, and we really miss Allan Pepper and the Bottom Line. That was a great venue, and I'll never forget playing the "Gift of Music" show right

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SXSW Scene Setting

SXSW is back again, March 18th to 22nd in Austin, TX. This annual event is always a major one in the musical calendar, even though it has long since ceased to be a place where A&R reps scout for the next big band, and where music execs meet to do deals.

There is a business element to the festival, with a music conference and a tradeshow. Neither are what they should be, to be frank, though it's worthwhile checking them out just to be sure not to miss something.

But the great thing about the festival is the music - this year some 1,800 acts will perform at more than 80 venues throughout this compact city. Add to that a ton of officially sanctioned day parties and a huge number of unofficial gigs.

There's even a second music festival - the RedGorilla Music Fest - which runs alongside SXSW in venues that the main festival has not taken over. All in all, it's a great opportunity to discover new music and to meet and schmooze with others in the industry.

This year, it will be interesting to see whether as many showcases are sponsored by labels and other music industry firms. With the economy the way it is, on top of the

generally fucked up state of the music biz, the word is that big money will be less of an influence. And perhaps that means the showcase selection this time is more of a meritocracy. We'll know soon enough.

All in all, nearly 90 NYC acts have been selected for showcases. Some of the notables include: Ali Eskandarian, Alicia Jo Rabins, Au Revoir Simone, Ben Jelen, Chris Bergson, Fionn Ó Lochlainn, Golem, Hopewell, Hymns, Langhorne Slim and Nell Bryden (photo below).



For a full list of NYC acts, check out the February 1st post on www.indiesoundsny.com. Of course, this list is of official showcases only. If you are a NYC act and you're heading to SXSW to play in a day party or an unofficial show, be sure to email and tell us - pete@indiesoundsny.com.

Now, all this talk of SXSW is also a good time to remind all that www.indiesoundsny.com is now also www.indiesoundsaustin.com. And that this is the final print issue of the monthly print publication.

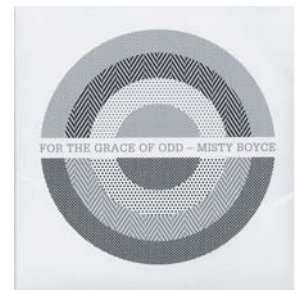
At the websites, there will continue to be monthly features, as well as daily news and feature posts. That includes contributions from musicians. So pitch me!

Also changing is Harris Radio, which is transforming into a podcast from March. Check it out at www.harrisradio.com.

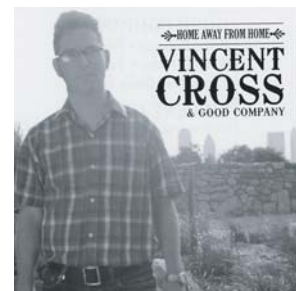
WHAT'S NEW ON CD



Allison Scola
A Braver Kind
www.allisonscola.com



Misty Boyce
For The Grace Of Odd
www.myspace.com/mistyboyce



Vincent Cross & Good Company
Home Away From Home
www.myspace.com/vincentcrossx

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THE KENNEDYS ...

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after 9/11. The audience was all local people from downtown, 'cause there weren't any tourists. The house lights went down, and Jackie DeShannon walked onstage and sang, *What the World Needs Now is Love*. That was a moment.

Maura: Yes, my favorite moments have always been unexpected ... that time we debuted our pan-religious gospel song, *Stand*, at the Falcon Ridge Folk Festival on a Sunday morning, and the entire mountainside spontaneously stood up and sang it with us. I'm glad *they* were singing, because I was moved to tears at what was happening and couldn't sing at all!

I'll also never forget certain times in the studio ... hearing Roger McGuinn play his 12-string Rickenbacker on *Life is Large* and then proceed to very generously regale us with stories from his days in The Byrds ... that was like being in a cathedral hearing the Pope give a sermon. Also, singing in the studio for Nanci Griffith's *Other Voices II* album: I was in a circle around an omni mic with Emmylou Harris, Carolyn Hester, Odetta! Talk about being in church!

But maybe the moment I'll remember the most also involves two of my heroes: Nanci Griffith and Emmylou. It was my first gig with Nanci, at the State Theater in Austin, when she was taping the video release concert of *Other Voices, Other Rooms*. I was so nervous ... I'd never played with anyone else before ... just my own bands. I was actually sharing a microphone, onstage and in front of cameras, with Emmylou, and it was the first time I'd ever met her. I was so in awe of her that I didn't want my voice to get in the way of hers, so I hung back. At one point while we were singing, Emmylou put her hand on my back and gently nudged me closer to the mic. It was a beautiful, generous and nurturing moment that she

probably didn't think twice about, but it's a memory I'll take to the grave.

IS: Now you're back living in NYC, where are you playing out in town?

Pete: Well, the Living Room is kind of our home base, now. We do solo gigs, duo gigs, multiple bills, in-the-rounds, whatever is going on, and if we're off, I like to go down and sit in with whomever. It's more than a gig, it's a scene, in the best sense; a bunch of artists supporting and encouraging each other. We've also played the Cutting Room and Joe's Pub, as well as some special events at South Street Seaport, Madison Square Park, and a cool, completely unplugged show at the Rubin Museum. I did a solo gig at Banjo Jim's, and that's a great little intimate room. Les Paul, in his nineties, recently said that his lifelong goal has always been to play small clubs in New York City. There's a wealth of great venues right now for original music.

Maura: I've been really getting into playing my solo shows, mainly at The Living Room, and debuting my new solo material. I'm on a writing streak and it's nice to be able to work out new songs for a friendly audience.

IS: Any wisdom on the state of the music business, and how to make a living as an indie act?

Pete: The music business is in the best state it's ever been in, because the music itself is finally out of the hands of the robber barons. Musicians have been dreaming of this day since the early New Orleans jazz musicians wouldn't record, because they smelled something fishy. Louis Armstrong did it and became a star, and rightfully so. He was a cultural genius, but who made more money from his music, him or the record label? We all know the answer to that!

Wouldn't it have been great if Armstrong, Holiday, Ellington, Parker, etc. all controlled their own music and garnered the rewards they actually deserved? It's possible now. David Crosby said, "You can be a slave, or

you can be Ani DiFranco," and Paul McCartney recently complained that every time he sings *Hey Jude*, he has to pay somebody! That plantation system is now shutting down, and as Leonard Cohen sang, *hallelujah!*

IS: What's next for The Kennedys?

Maura: Pete just put out his solo CD, *Guitarlinger*, and he's been doing a number of solo shows around NYC, Boston and Philly. He's also teaching guitar at First Flight music on 1st Avenue/10th street in the East Village. He's been doing a bunch of sessions as a guitarist and also mastering some albums. He's been really getting into co-writing lately with a bunch of NYC writers as well. He's got so much going on I can't keep track of it all.

As for me, I'm just finishing up my debut solo CD, *Parade Of Echoes*. I wrote the songs over the past year and posted them to my website as they were written and recorded. Some of the versions that are online are the demo versions, and the CD versions will be different, so if you want the demo versions, get 'em now before I take them down. When I started out, I didn't even *want* to do a CD at all. I thought it was passé. I was embracing the new paradigm of online delivery only, but alas, many of my enthusiasts are Luddites! So I'm going ahead with the CD after all.

And as for The Kennedys, the sky's the limit. As you may have figured out by now, we have more ideas than we have time. There's always something new to explore, and always a new way to express yourself, and no matter how expansive your creative vision is, New York City is the place to realize it!

Web: www.kennedysmusic.com

Read an extended version of this interview at www.indiesoundsny.com.



**Backline****Five Vital Questions For ...
Barack H. Obama**

Indie Sounds: What would be your porn name (coming from Chicago, you probably know this already, but that's your middle name and the street where you grew up)?

Barack Obama: Well, funnily enough, that would be Hussein Kuku!

IS: OK, so Clinton, Palin, Ann Coulter. Marry, murder or screw?

Barack: Tough one! I'm going to have to marry Hillary, feels like that already sometimes anyway! Ann Coulter will have to have the chop and that just leaves Ms. Palin!

IS: Who would be in your dream band?

Barack: Hell lady, these are tough questions! Well, you know I've been picking a few dream teams lately.

So, Aretha Franklin on vocals, Bill Clinton on saxophone (or will he steal the show?), Tessa Perry on bass, Rahm Emanuel keeping the beat on drums and this dude Pete Harris pimpin' my shit as manager! Soul man.

IS: Will your new policies support the arts?

Barack: Absolutely, I aim to revolutionize the cultural fabric of the US by subsidizing all artists and musicians. No more day jobs, you guys need to focus on the task in hand and inspire others. Yes we can!

IS: What do you read when on the White House toilet?

Barack: I'm a fan of anything that Oprah suggests ... I'm in her book club.

Barack Obama is the 44th President of the United States of America.

Web: www.whitehouse.gov

Questions set by Tessa Perry,
www.tessaperry.com.

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*** News, Features, Photos ***

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