

Hometown Sounds: Seaford's Ron Fetner has made music the center of his life for 40 years



Seaford-based songwriter Ron Fetner, second from left. (Courtesy of Ron Fetner / September 24, 2009)

Ron Fetner is an award-winning songwriter who has managed to keep music at the center of his life for 40 years.

Having grown up in Vienna, Va., Fetner spent years playing with the Washington, D.C., rock band Cherry Smash before relocating to the Peninsula in the 1980s.

Here, he played guitar with blues act Buddy Parker Band and eventually struck out on his own as a mostly acoustic performer and songsmith.

His writing has won him national attention. He's been a finalist at the prestigious MerleFest Chris Austin Song Contest several times and, in 2001, he was picked as a winner in the Kerrville Folk Festival New Folk Competition. That attention didn't win him a recording contract, but it did help him get gigs and sustain his career.

Fetner says he was never disappointed that he didn't get signed. "I really didn't expect that anyway," he said. "Acoustic people and some of the alt-country folks were some of the first ones doing independent things. You didn't necessarily have to have a label behind you."

Fetner has independently released five albums of his own songs. He says he's got at least one more in the works.

"I really don't have any regrets," said the 60-year-old musician. "I've known a lot of really great musicians, who, as they got older, just fell out of it. I was just lucky that I was able to stay in."

Here, Fetner talks about his music and the mind set that's helped him persevere.

Home base? Seaford, York County

When did you start playing music? Professionally in the late '60s, based out of Washington, D.C. I moved to the Tidewater area in 1983.

Describe your style. The modern label would be Americana. My roots are in blues, acoustic folk blues, Memphis soul, and rock. The songs on my CDs range from bluegrass-folk to rock, with hints of jazz, soul, and Appalachia. I perform 70 percent of the time as a solo artist but use backing musicians for some shows.

What's your favorite local place to play? Most of my performances are in concert and listening venues, but I have two favorites locally — Williamsburg Regional Library Theatre and Williamsburg's First Night celebration. Both have great listening audiences. Even though I haven't performed there yet, the Bena Country Store is bound to be a great performing location. The 100-year-old building has a great vibe.

Sample set list: I play mostly originals but have recorded cover versions of "Route 66," "Streets of London," "Miss My Mary" and "House Of The Rising Sun."

Discography:

"Empty House" 1987 [out-of-print cassette release]

"This Box I'm Looking Through" 1996

"Turning For Home" 2001

"Defying Gravity" 2004

"Sunday Morning Blue" 2008

How do you know when you've written a good song? If I can convey the emotion I felt when I wrote it when I perform the song live, then I feel that I've succeeded in writing a quality song. A good audience response always helps, too.

What local entertainer deserves more attention? On the blues side of things, Bobby "BlackHat" Walters. I played with Bobby at an open mike function. He's a great talent. On the acoustic side of things, Macon Gurley has the kind of voice that makes people stop and listen. Macon has the angelic qualities of Alison Krauss and Claire Lynch.

What do you hope to accomplish? I feel very fortunate that I'd been able to call music my profession for 40 years. I'm blessed to make a living at what I love to do. Presently, I'm in the process of writing new material and hoping to release a new project in the near future. The goal is to stick close to my early electric R&B roots and record with a full band.

Hometown Sounds is a weekly feature about local musicians who regularly perform on and around the Peninsula.

News to use

Here's where to catch Ron Fetner in coming weeks:

- **Saturday**, Bena Country Store/Almost Square Concerts, Hayes, Middle Peninsula, 8835 Guinea Road. 804-684-5215.
- **Oct. 10**, Port Warwick Arts and Sculpture Festival, noon-1:15 p.m., Newport News, www.pwartsfest.org.
- **Oct. 10**, Tuscany's Coffee House, Yorktown, 7-9 p.m.
- **Oct. 23**, Tidewater Friends of Folk Music Coffeehouse Series, First United Methodist Church, corner of Warwick and Main in Hilton Village, Newport News, 7:30 p.m.

For more information, visit www.myspace.com/ronfetner or www.ronfetner.com