

John Prine Biography

“My brother Dave taught me a chord and the first time I held down a chord I didn’t muffle it, well, I just sat there with my ear on the wood even after the sound died feeling the vibrations. From there, it was me sitting there alone in a room singing to a wall.”

And what about his very first audience?

“Well, the wall seemed to like it...” Prine says now with a twinkle in his eye and his characteristic understatement. That wall has an awful lot in common with countless people Prine has touched his songs. He’s certainly come a long way since he made his first appearance at The Westlake Hospital in Maywood Illinois on October 10, 1946, the son of tool and die maker William Mason Prine and his wife Verna Valentine Hamm. Being third in a family of four children meant that Prine “got away with everything”... which included the latitude of giving his imagination free reign. Coupled with a childhood that was rich with classic American values and traditions-many which would later be incorporated into his songs-like summertime visits with his relatives in Paradise, Kentucky. While building this foundation, Prine was also evolving from just another kid into one of the young men hanging out on street corners of Maywood. It may have seemed an unlikely nurturing ground for someone who would become both a non-judgmental social commentator and a champion of the common man.

It would take a stint in the U.S. Army in Germany and a job with the Post Office before Prine would make his public debut at an “open mic” night at a local bar fueled by a few beers and the knowledge that he could do it better than everyone else he’d seen that evening. “There were all these amateurs that were getting up,” Prine recalls, “and they were terrible. So I started making some comments about it and the next thing I knew somebody said, ‘well, if you think you can do it better...’ I said ‘I could’ and got up on the stage and played ‘Sam Stone’, ‘Hello In There’ and ‘Paradise’ and people seemed to like it.” Including the club owner who promptly offered Prine a job. After asking how long he’d have to play for, he went home and wrote the rest of what was to become his first self-titled debut album. It wasn’t long before a little guy from Chicago named Steve Goodman met Prine and would become his best friend as well as being responsible for bringing Kris Kristofferson to The Earl Of Old Town to see Prine...a move which would result in Prine’s gaining a national label deal.

From there, Prine went from being a local singer/songwriter to being an artist on a national label, lavished with praise from critics around the country. Throughout Prine’s major label migrations, which would eventually cover eight albums and two companies, he continued refining his voice and attracting fans who closely identified with his emotional sharp shooting. “It’s a great feeling when you put something in a song and

other people say that's exactly how they feel. That's the most gratifying thing about songwriting for me: it's always been a real outlet for me-being able to put those feeling down. Among the songs that Prine wrote during this period were such classics as "Please Don't Bury Me," "Fish And Whistle," and "Souvenirs"; and there were also the more humorous offerings which proved that Prine could find the irony in it all: "Dear Abby", "Sabu Visits The Twin Cities", "Illegal Smile", even "Christmas In Prison."

But John Prine's special visions and personal integrity – something which attracted Bette Midler to cover "Hello In There", Bonnie Raitt to adopt "Angel From Montgomery" as her own, and the numerous country artists such as Tammy Wynette and Johnny Cash to release their versions of "Unwed Fathers"- wasn't best served by the big labels' way of doing business. He had his following, but there had to be something else to making records... So he called it quits with the big companies and took some time to re-think what he was doing. Out of that soul searching, Prine decided to put on another hat-record company executive.

After moving to Nashville in the early 1980's, he decided to start making records his way. To that end Prine formed Oh Boy records, a venture created with longtime manager Al Bunetta and his associate Dan Einstein.

His first independent release in 1984, **Aimless Love**, was followed up in 1986 by the Grammy nominated album **German Afternoons**, and the 1988 Grammy nominated **John Prine Live**. Prine later won a Grammy for 1991's **The Missing Years**, which featured appearances by Bruce Springsteen and Tom Petty...and consequently became one of his best selling albums to date. In 1995 he released **Lost Dogs & Mixed Blessings**, followed in 1997 by **Live On Tour**.

1999 saw the release of the Grammy nominated **In Spite Of Ourselves**, an album comprised of classic country lovin', leavin', and cheating songs, of which only the title cut is a Prine original. Featuring duets with Lucinda Williams, Trisha Yearwood, Melba Montgomery, Emmylou Harris, Dolores Keane, Patty Loveless, Connie Smith and Fiona Prine.

Souvenirs, released in 2000, is a group of re-recordings of many of Prine's Classic tunes, many of which date back to his earliest days of songwriting. Oh Boy Records has recently release it's first DVD Video project - **John Prine Live From Sessions At West 54th** - which includes all the entire hour special from the PBS broadcast as well as outtakes and an extensive interview. This DVD is one of the first releases from an independent label to be mixed in 5.1 Dolby Surround Sound.

So now John Prine has the best of all worlds: a loyal following and being able to make his music his way – doing whatever he believes is best for his songs.