

A Mythical and Moral Tale To End All Tales With Barrett Davis

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["Aesop Fin" by Barrett Davis, from *The Ballad Of Aesop Fin*]

You know how most songs are based on themes like love, friendship, family, personal conflicts, or observations about or experiences in modern life? Every once in a while, you come across a nature theme or a ghost story or something more abstract, like a Tom Waits or a Steve Poltz song. But very rarely do you hear a theme which is inspired by history that dates back almost a millennium, a history which is shrouded in mystery at that. This is one of those songs, which is the first I have heard that pulls from the Cherokee Indians' legend of the [moon-eyed people](#), who, as the tale goes, inhabited Appalachia before the Cherokee arrived. The first line of this song, "Aesop Fin", by western North Carolina artist Barrett Davis, refers to that mythical race of short, bearded, white-skinned people who had large blue eyes and were blinded by daylight, thus their "moon-eyed" moniker. From there, Barrett Davis carves his own allegory out of this land filled with waterfalls, maples and moonshine stills, and conjures a spirit of renewal from an otherwise very dark and tragic tale of loss.

The story of Barrett Davis is about as Appalachian as it gets: from his upbringing, his ties to family and community, to his vocation and ultimately, to his avocation, music. Like the rich texture of the mountains themselves, Barrett has many layers to his story. His debut album, *The Ballad Of Aesop Fin*, features Woody Platt of Steep Canyon Rangers fame, and is produced by longtime friend and former bandmate Aaron Aiken, now a member of Asheville indie pop group Pink Beds. For Davis, this album is a big swing, very likely a bigger swing than many other artists' debuts, as it took years of building up the fortitude, resources and experience needed to bring it to us. We spoke on a video call in early September 2022, and touched on everything from the sense of place in his music to his faith to what he described as the "old man emotions" that he witnessed on construction sites. It is a conversation that is matched only by the music, and it is all here in this episode on Barrett Davis. I am your host Joe Kendrick, and this is Southern Songs and Stories.

[SSaS intro theme with Corrie Askew voiceover]

Our conversation started with the central character to Barrett Davis' album, Aesop Fin. I noted that the collection seemed to be a mythical journey through Appalachian history, and asked how he created the character and this sort of parallel world:

Barrett Davis 1:38

Um, well, it kind of starts from the beginning of me being raised in this area, in Lake Toxaway. It formulated amongst me being homeschooled and exposed to all different forms of literature. And my father was a historian piecing it all together. Aesop Fin really just represents Fin being the end, and Aesop representing a teller of

tales. So it's really just the it's the end of all tales. For me, it's my entry into the music industry. And it's it's a very, very hard process for me right now, because I've built up such a business right now to to afford a solo release on a scale of you know, medium sized label proportions. It getting into Aesop Fin himself at the time. It wasn't quite as ambitious. It was mostly just a an enjoyment for me. I wrote the song almost 10 years ago, and I was performing a lot around the Asheville area and getting into the character of of him was mostly just out of free thought it just kind of flowed. I didn't really think about its meaning until this year.

Joe Kendrick 3:06

Let's talk a little bit about Appalachia, in the in the world of Aesop in both the real Appalachia what tourists see versus what's really going on in Appalachia, but also on a kind of mythical a and Aesop Fin kind of level. Can you touch on that?

Barrett Davis 3:24

Yeah, so one thing that's fascinated me for the longest time is the Moon-Eyed people. In which a good friend of my dad's who is he's, I think he's Cherokee. Or he might be from I don't really want to say that -- his name is Tom Bell. So he might be from a different reservation and have a different culture. But he was on UNC TV, and it just came to me like that's my dad's old friend. He's talking about [Judaculla Rock](#), and the Moon-Eyed People. And at the time that sparked that sparked the first verse of the Ballad of Aesop Fin, because it's hard to write about the Moon-Eyed people in a way, especially when there's not that much to find on a people like that. So I'd say the mystic and mythical parts of Appalachia, for me that I was exposed to were mostly Native American folklore. As well as some of the things we fantasize about and see on TV. Say, like, for Moonshiners, and things like that, or any of the stuff that you'd see on reality television that kind of plays into the touristy side where that's what you think is going on? As far as what's really going on, it's really just a lot of hard working people living in a rural area. You have a lot of different religious points of views in this area. But a majority it seems to be good southern, you know, Southern Baptist kind of kind of people. And it's surprising how much gets swept under the rug and how much people don't talk about growing up as a kid here. I was raised here born in Transylvania County. It's a wonderful area to be in and there's there's a, there's a lot of kids that get skipped. It affects our lives every day. Yeah.

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Joe Kendrick 6:49

Well, let's go back a bit and talk about your very musical family. And it seems like you were destined to be here and releasing an album and playing music. But you did make a living in the construction business for a good stretch before going ahead and doing this.

Barrett Davis 7:08

Yeah, absolutely. I think about eight years, eight years total. I started doing this to, to make a living on the side of music and kind of helped me raise my family at the time. My wife was Dutch, which is pretty expensive to get married to a person who's from a different country. So we, I had to put on some, some grown up shoes and try to fill them. It was really hard. I did the all the immigration paperwork myself. And it really challenged me in a lot of good ways and got me into kind of finding my roots as a carpenter and from this area. And it really stuck with me, I wanted to do carpentry, because it seemed like something that would give me a commonality to folks that are from here for centuries, as opposed to just being someone who, and my great grandfather is from Barnardsville. I have no idea what his family did. It's so close to Asheville, I still have not that not that much information about his side of the family before him. From my mother's side, it's mostly it's, it's mostly from Europe. So yeah, that was a big reason, just getting into this area. And getting to know the people around here, even better than I did. It changed me in a lot of good ways.

Joe Kendrick 8:48

Nice. Oh, talking a little bit about construction and carpentry. In the press materials I got, it's talking about on the job site, there's a lot of old man emotions getting thrown around that none of us would ever talk about. Hearing all those stories, just fed you all kinds of song material. Tell us about the old man emotions on the job site.

Barrett Davis 9:10

Those are pretty wild. I think one of my good friends and actually, I can't say his name. We were talking for months about just all kinds of stuff. And you know that there's not a lot that people will open up about once they get there and nobody actually thinks about well, how do I connect with another person on an intimate level? And being raised in a musical family? I'm just kind of always the dork. That's in a construction world. That is what we do. We are artists and

emotional people and there was a lot of digging in, you know, digging deeper and making each other feel uncomfortable. You don't find that a lot on a construction crew. So I was definitely the rare bird. and I stuck with the same company for almost the entire eight years. Yeah, those those emotions they come out, for sure. Especially as you get to know people and, and try to find out more about each other and, and challenge each other in different ways. I remember one time I got put in a headlock on a roof. And that was a joke for years after that, because it was so funny that we had both argued over how to install a skylight window. Yeah, good times. Never forget it. It's, they're all such good people. But it really does. They really does feed you a lot of material for just processing all that, you know?

[jump to]

Joe Kendrick 22:19

Barrett, you've got some quintessentially southern reference points in your music: the Bible, moonshine and the region itself -- place, like Highway 64. Can you talk about how you reflect southern culture in your music in either a broad sense, or maybe more specifically for here in western North Carolina?

Barrett Davis 22:41

Yeah, so for "Highway 64". I would say that's mostly a Southern vibe to me. It kind of spawned, growing up and being exposed to a few people around here that have a large influence on authenticity. One man used to come His name is Jessie Norton. He used to show us how a steam engine would work. It was fascinating. And he would give us Appalachian influence, DVDs, books, things like that to keep, which was a rarity. And he also had a sawmill that he had built from scratch, an original circular sawmill. Those kinds of things really helped influence me in that area.

["Highway 64" by Barrett Davis, from *The Ballad Of Aesop Fin*, excerpt]

That is "Highway 64", which leads off *The Ballad Of Aesop Fin*, a song about the age-old moonshine trade and its moral and legal consequences. Highway 64 runs through Brevard, Barrett's home town, which so often gets lumped in with nearby Asheville, which is much larger and has more notoriety. But Brevard, or "Breh-verd" as some folks like to call it, has a great deal to be proud of musically: Travis Book of The Infamous Stringdusters, Sarah Siskind, Jeff Sipe, Pretty Little Goat String Band, and Clint Roberts are just a handful of the artists who call it home. I asked Barrett about the artists there and the Brevard music scene:

Barrett Davis 13:57

Um, it's kind of all that and more of a lot of it is just locals. Good friends of mine. Like for instance, people like Mark Queen. And yeah, I mean, obviously Woody Platt and folks that when you get into Transylvania County and you start meeting people you meet these amazing musicians that have been here for a long time. And they, each one has, has their own little style that they'll play of mountain music and and their own story to tell and and their own things that they can teach you. It's really awesome.

Joe Kendrick 14:36

How did you start working with people like Woody Platt and Jackson Dulaney?

Barrett Davis 14:40

With Jackson Dulaney. I met him through the Goat Band. Really good friends with Josh Carter from the Goat Band. He is my business partner and longtime associate in that in that realm. And he I have to say I, owe him a good bit of my success and being a moral supporter and also somebody with about, you know, six years more experience than me and being a grown up. I lend the hand with the carpentry and, and so far we've really formed a great team. With Jackson Dulaney. We kind of moved into playing together from the Goats and, and forming that relationship together. He's really gotten to know my songs very well. I would have to say he is my Jerry Douglas. I love him a lot. He's a good friend of mine. With Woody, I did a job for him. I think we met at Mountain Song Fest and a couple other places. When I was playing with the Foxfire years ago, I did a twener act. And I just remember he said, Hey, I really love that "Leaving Today" song, man! Thought about that for a long time as a kid. Then as my business progressed, I think four years ago or so he called me up to do some work for him. And it was the beginning of our relationship. And since then, yeah, mostly just casual friendship and in a very sporadic out of the blue call from from my end I just asked him "Hey, will you sing on this track?" This is my biggest vocal track. I need uh, I need some power, you know, some power vocals hardcore. And he really came through Of course, I was very surprised that he said yes.

["Quiver" by Barrett Davis, from *The Ballad Of Aesop Fin*, excerpt]

A bit of "Quiver" by Barrett Davis, with Woody Platt joining him on vocals, It is a story of young forbidden love, but as Barrett says, it is also a song about anyone with a love life restrained by

societal norms, or religious condemnation. We will get to where Barrett stands in regards to religion coming up, but first I asked about what he thought might be the best setting to take in *The Ballad Of Aesop Fin*:

Barrett Davis 18:23

Far is environment. Yeah, a quiet space. "Aesop Fin" is definitely a tune that I listen to still. I don't know how many often folks listen to their records. But that particular track is one that that makes me emotional. I really enjoy the build. I would say this best space to enjoy it would be in nature or in a quiet space because it's a really reflective song to me.

Joe Kendrick 18:59

I don't think we've talked about Aaron Aiken, yet, but you've had a long association with him. And he's in a band called Pink Beds, which sounds nothing like the music that you're making. And I love that he's producing this. Can you talk about that?

Barrett Davis 19:16

Yeah, Aaron has been probably my closest friend. For years, he was in the Foxfire with me from the beginning. He was in the battle of the bands with me in high school. And you remember we practice so much. It was ridiculous. And yeah, getting to know him so closely, since I was I think 14 or 13 has really helped me as a musician and challenged me in a lot of ways because he's so phenomenally good. His his new act, the Pink Beds are really awesome. I think I started recording this album with him. Probably, probably he was still in the Remarks. So I think it was 2018. And getting to watch him practice, uh one time, Abbyy, Abby Bryant and the Echos came to practice in his living room. It was super cool. And then later in the day, we did some more recording on the "Highway 64". The the track off of the album, be the first track off my album. Yeah, that was really, really awesome. I would say he is probably one of the most talented artists in this area, and has just an amazing, amazing talent for figuring out a sound and in its space. See, as I grew up, I was in the 2010s era. So being in the, being in that era, but I went to Europe for a few years and or a few months and got to experience in Amsterdam, a lot of different indie folk, and a lot of different things that were really prominent at the time. And I thought going into this album, I really love Charley Crockett, I really love Sierra Farrell. And I really just love like this new vibe coming from all these amazing artists that's authentic, clean, no, like funny business and how they really pull that presence out. And another thing I realized about

myself is like, I'm a 2000s, boy, and I'm going to come bring this in, and I'm going to tie it in with my my bluegrass love. I'm going to tie it in with folk and country and see where I land in the mix. And that's really funny because I think the Ballad of Aesop Fin would be the first one we started with, me and Aaron, and then getting into that. That was that was even before he was in Charlotte, with his first band, The Remarks. So I guess I'll have to correct myself on that statement and digging into that song, "The Ballad of Aesop Fin". Each artist came in and did something totally different. Each artist came in and played their part, and asked me what should they play and I just said, "Play whatever comes to your mind." And that song is I think it's the most well put together song on the whole album.

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With songs like "Lazarus" and the many lyrical references to the Bible in *The Ballad Of Aesop Fin*, and knowing that he met his banjo player Owen Grooms in church, I asked him to touch on where he was coming from with that:

Barrett Davis 23:53

Oh, yeah, man. Um, personally, I I rely on my relationship with with Jesus to get me through. It's it's been something that I've had as a journey since I was five or six years old. It's not always the same journey. Sometimes I'm what some would call you know, a non believer and other times I'm what some would call a fanatic. It's interesting how it changes through your life. And now that I've gotten to this point, and now that I'm at this age, being raised in this area, and being exposed to this area's religion, and being exposed to also international religion and to get a chance to compare the two, because I I've been able to leave this country and to see how others are worshiping as well. I honestly wouldn't know what to say to somebody, except to just reach out and pray for them. It's such a strange thing to think about religion, it really just comes down to a relationship, I just communicate all day in my head. I'm 100% on the go, and it's just draining. That's what I do. This is how I get by.

["Lazarus" by Barrett Davis, live at Albino Skunk Music Festival 10-08-22, continuing as bed]

Ending our episode with a live version of "Lazarus" by Barrett Davis, recorded live at the Albino Skunk Music Festival in October, 2022. Thank you for listening! Southern Songs and Stories is a part of the podcast lineup of both public radio WNCW and Osiris Media, with all of the Osiris shows available at <https://www.osirispod.com/> . New episodes of this podcast are also available on Bluegrass Planet Radio at <https://www.bluegrassplanetradio.com/>. We are glad you have played this episode, and would be even more so were you to share this with someone. It is oh so easy to follow us on your podcast platform of choice, and then it will only take a minute to

give it a good rating and, where it is an option, a review. Great ratings, and reviews especially, will make Southern Songs and Stories and the artists it profiles more likely to be found by more people just like you. Thanks to Corrie Askew for producing the radio adaptations of this series on public radio WNCW. Our theme songs are by Joshua Meng. I'm your host and producer Joe Kendrick, and this is Southern Songs and Stories: the music of the South and the artists who make it.

Being from a place where success is defined more by survival than surplus

Barrett Davis has yet to turn thirty years old, but his inspiration stretches back nearly a millennium, perhaps more, to the Judaculla Rock and the Cherokee Indians' legend of the Moon-Eyed People.

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/avna51z16v20tvzgfabg3/h?dl=0&rlkey=bqdfv4qn6zbtgf0qaq82xlgzh>

<https://www.blueridgeoutdoors.com/features/appalachian-legends/>

Joe Kendrick 1:08

Wonderful. Barrett Davis on Southern songs and stories. Glad to get to talk to you today and to especially talk about your record Aesop Fin your debut album. And first, just my first impression of the album of being kind of a mystical, rather mythical journey into the aesthetic and the art of history of Appalachia. Can you tell us about the character Aesop Fin and how you created this sort of parallel world?

Barrett Davis 1:38

Um, well, it kind of starts from the beginning of me being raised in this area and Lake Toxaway. It formulated amongst me being homeschooled and exposed to all different forms of literature. And my father was a historian piecing it all together. Aesop Fin really just represents Fin being the end, and Aesop representing a teller of tales. So it's really just the it's the end of all tales. For me, it's my entry into the music industry. And it's it's a very, very hard process for me right now, because I've built up such a business right now to afford a solo release on a scale of you know, medium sized label proportions. It getting into Aesop Fin himself at the time. It wasn't quite as ambitious. It was mostly just a an enjoyment for me. I wrote the song almost 10 years ago, and I was performing a lot around the Asheville area and getting into the character of of him was mostly just out of free thought it just kind of flowed. I didn't really think about its meaning until this year.

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Joe Kendrick 5:25

You don't happen to know of an artist named Pony Bradshaw. He's from North Georgia.

Barrett Davis 5:30

I've read about Pony Bradshaw, but I don't

Joe Kendrick 5:45

I'm sorry, I muted myself. I meant to mute myself just to cough and it didn't come off. All right, so about Pony Bradshaw just wanted to say that there's a little bit of commonality. It seems to me between

you and his last album, Calico Jim, or the last album, I'm familiar with Calico Jim, there's a character in Appalachia. And there's a lot of, of those same sort of themes and the vibe of it. So. And he's also extremely, you know, I think he's told me that he reads more than he actually plays music. He's way into literature.

Barrett Davis 6:24

Yeah. Yeah, I can resonate with that. Being, being at this point in my life. I haven't played many gigs this year. And it's, it's definitely been a journey for me, along the way of just stuff work and, and, you know, staking a living and trying to trying to come up with this good size debut. Yeah.

Joe Kendrick 6:49

Well, let's go back a bit and talk about your very musical family. And it seems like you were destined to be here and releasing an album and playing music. But you did make a living in the construction business for a good stretch before going ahead and doing this.

Barrett Davis 7:08

Yeah, absolutely. I think about eight years, eight years total. I started doing this to, to make a living on the side of music and kind of helped me raise my family at the time. My wife was Dutch, which is pretty expensive to get married to a person who's from a different country. So we, I had to put on some, some grown up shoes and try to fill them. It was really hard. I did the all the immigration paperwork myself. And it really challenged me in a lot of good ways and got me into kind of finding my roots as a carpenter and from this area. And it really stuck with me, I wanted to do carpentry, because it seemed like something that would give me a commonality to folks that are from here for centuries, as opposed to just being someone who, and my great grandfather is from Barnardsville. I have no idea what his family did. It's so close to Asheville, I still have not that not that much information about his side of the family before him. From my mother's side, it's mostly it's, it's mostly from Europe. So yeah, that was a big reason, just getting into this area. And getting to know the people around here, even better than I did. It changed me in a lot of good ways.

Joe Kendrick 8:48

Nice. Oh, talking a little bit about construction and carpentry. In the press materials I got, it's talking about on the job site, there's a lot of old man emotions getting thrown around that none of us would ever talk about. Hearing all those stories, just fed you all kinds of song material. Tell us about the old man emotions on the job site.

Barrett Davis 9:10

Those are pretty wild. I think one of my good friends and actually, I can't say his name. We were talking for months about just all kinds of stuff. And you know that there's not a lot that people will open up about once they get there and nobody actually thinks about well, how do I connect with another person on an intimate level? And being raised in a musical family? I'm just kind of always the dork. That's in a construction world. That is what we do. We are artists and emotional people and there was a lot of digging in, you know, digging deeper and making each other feel uncomfortable. You don't find that a lot on a construction crew. So I was definitely the rare bird. and I stuck with the same company for almost the entire eight years. Yeah, those those emotions they come out, for sure. Especially as you get to know people and, and try to find out more about each other and, and challenge each other in different ways. I remember one time I got put in a headlock on a roof. And that was a joke for years after that, because it was so funny that we had both argued over how to install a skylight window. Yeah, good times. Never forget it. It's, they're all such good people. But it really does. They really does feed you a lot of material for just processing all that, you know?

Joe Kendrick 10:50

Well, you say that you were kind of the odd one in the bunch. But I can see a lot of similarities between the trades, like construction, and making music can be and out on the road. There's so many things that kind of go hand in hand almost.

Barrett Davis 11:06

Yes, yeah, each one of us. Men and women up here working have have our own story to tell and have basically had to stake our own route. That is a huge commonality between the two. Because usually what you'll find here, this is the rural south, there's no union, there's no anything to back you up, there's no journeyman education, it's up

to you to find the best teacher, it's up to you to find the best pay. And it's up to you to find a situation that feeds you and feeds your school or you know, feeds your pocket as well and keeps you healthy. So it's yeah, you're definitely on your own in a big time way. And I've seen people sink hard and I've seen people thrive in this environment and I yeah, my heart goes out to all of them.

Joe Kendrick 12:00

And that's so North Carolina as far as music, too, with just DIY all the way that's our history. There's not all that much industry to really give you a blueprint or a framework. So people have been doing it for themselves just like you. Although now we'll get into a lot of the helping hands in the in the the great artists that you're working with too, it's not like you're an island over here but but at the same time I think your your example is is spot on with the trades in the south in the rural south like you say there's there's no union there's not going to be a union at this rate. There's that's that's another thing that is just right in pocket was especially music from around here.

Barrett Davis 12:46

Yeah. Oh, yeah. My My grandfather worked for Lockheed and all I ever used to hear about was college degrees and engineering and unions and my other grandfather on my mom's side worked for GM. He built airplanes during World War Two for for that. My, the other grandfather that I mentioned worked for Lockheed he he built airplanes of course, his whole career and that was that was different it's totally different world.

Joe Kendrick 13:12

That is wild. Well, let's talk about Brevard or as the locals say Brevard. And I think it's interesting to note that the Brevard music scene is when it comes to outsiders it's always lumped in with Asheville there's it's a you're describing it to someone from that's not familiar with the region you might just say okay, well they're from Asheville just because you don't want to have to explain Brevard but that's that's really not that fair, because it has its own spark. You've got the Rangers you've got Jeff Sipe. You've got Pretty Little Goat and on and on. Could you point us to some more of the artists there and give us a feel for what you see going on in the music scene in Brevard.

Barrett Davis 13:57

Um, it's kind of all that and more of a lot of it is just locals. Good friends of mine. Like for instance, people like Mark Queen. And yeah, I mean, obviously Woody Platt and folks that when you get into Transylvania County and you start meeting people you meet these amazing musicians that have been here for a long time. And the each one has, has their own little style that they'll play of mountain music and and their own story to tell and and their own things that they can teach you. It's really awesome.

Joe Kendrick 14:36

How did you start working with people like Woody Platt and Jackson Dulaney?

Barrett Davis 14:40

With Jackson Dulaney. I met him through the goat band. Really good friends with Josh Carter from the Goat Band. He is my business partner and longtime associate in that in that realm. And he I have to say I, you know him a good bit of my success and being a moral supporter and also somebody with about, you know, six years more experience than me and being a grown up. I lend the hand with the carpentry and, and so far we've really formed a great team. With Jackson Dulaney. We kind of moved into playing together from the Goats and, and forming that relationship together. He's really gotten to know my songs very well. I would have to say he is my Jerry Douglas. I love him a lot. He's a good friend of mine. With Woody, I did a job for him. I think we met at Mountain Song Fest and a couple other places. When I was playing with the Foxfire years ago, I did a twener act. And I just remember he said, Hey, I really love that "Leaving Today" song, man! Thought about that for a long time as a kid. Then as my business progressed, I think four years ago or so he called me up to do some work for him. And it was the beginning of our relationship. And since then, yeah, mostly just casual friendship and in a very sporadic out of the blue call from from my end I just asked him "Hey, will you sing on this track?" This is my biggest vocal track. I need uh, I need some power, you know, some power vocals hardcore. And he really came through Of course, I was very surprised that he said yes.

Joe Kendrick 16:35

I'm happy it worked out. Tell us about the rest of the band.

Barrett Davis 16:39

So in my group I like to play with the same people as much as possible. So far, it has been JT Lynnville from the Goat Band and Owen Grooms for the most part. They have really helped me with kind of forming a base for my sound whenever I go play places in public having him on, JT on the bass and Owen on the banjo with me, I can lean on their vocals at times. They can also intervene and play a tune to kind of change the scenery. And and it really has helped form somewhat of a sound for me for this album. They're just so good. JT is so in the pocket. And Owen is very, very talented in the way that he plays nylon strings, which I really love the softness. It really helps. And then one of my really, really good friends, Derek Gardner. He is a amazing pianist. I think he is from Birmingham, Alabama, as well. Which, where's Owen's from. And he is amazing on the keys. I've I met him through church. And he's just an awesome guy. I call him all the time for advice and and he's been one of my good friends for years.

Joe Kendrick 18:07

Barrett, I wouldn't say that your album is a really an upbeat feel throughout but it does have a bounce to a lot of the songs. Could you let us know what you think might be the best setting to take in Aesop Fin?

Barrett Davis 18:23

Far is environment. Yeah, a quiet space. "Aesop Fin" is definitely a tune that I listen to still. I don't know how many often folks listen to their records. But that particular track is one that that makes me emotional. I really enjoy the build. I would say this best space to enjoy it would be in nature or in a quiet space because it's a really reflective song to me.

Joe Kendrick 18:59

I don't think we've talked about Aaron Aiken, yet, but you've had a long association with him. And he's in a band called Pink Beds, which sounds nothing like the music that you're making. And I love that he's producing this. Can you talk about that?

Barrett Davis 19:16

Yeah, Aaron has been probably my closest friend. For years, he was in the Fox Fire with me from the beginning. He was in the battle of the bands with me in high school. And you remember we practice so much. It was ridiculous. And yeah, I getting to know him so closely, since I was I think 14 or 13 has really helped me as a musician and challenged me in a lot of ways because he's so phenomenally good. His his new act, the Pink Beds are really awesome. I think I started recording this album with him. and probably probably he was still in the Remarks. So I think it was 2018. And getting to watch him practice, uh one time, Abbyy, Abby Bryant and the Echos came to practice in his living room. It was super cool. And then later in the day, we did some more recording on the "Highway 64". The the track off of the album, be the first track off my album. Yeah, that was really, really awesome. I would say he is probably one of the most talented artists in this area, and has just an amazing, amazing talent for figuring out a sound and in its space. See, as I grew up, I was in the 2010s era. So being in the being in that era, but I went to Europe for a few years and or a few months and got to experience in Amsterdam, a lot of different indie folk, and a lot of different things that were really prominent at the time. And I thought going into this album, I really love Charley Crockett, I really love Sierra Farrell. And I really just love like this new vibe coming from all these amazing artists that's authentic, clean, no, like funny business and how they really pull that presence out. And another thing I realized about myself is like, I'm a 2000s, boy, and I'm going to come bring this in, and I'm going to tie it in with my my bluegrass love. I'm going to tie it in with folk and country and see where I land in the mix. And that's really funny because I think the Ballad of Aesop Fin would be the first one we started with me and Aaron, and then getting into that. That was that was even before he was in Charlotte, with his first band, The Remarks. So I guess I'll have to correct myself on that statement and digging into that song, "The Ballad of Aesop Fin". Each artists came in and did something totally different. Each artist came in and played their part, and asked me what should they play and I just said, play whatever comes to your mind. And that song is I think it's the most well put together song on the whole album.

Joe Kendrick 22:19

Barrett, you've got some quintessentially southern reference points in your music: the Bible, moonshine and the region itself -- place, like Highway 64. Can you talk about how you reflect southern culture in your music in either a broad sense, or maybe more specifically for here in western North Carolina?

Barrett Davis 22:41

Yeah, so for "Highway 64". I would say that's mostly a Southern vibe to me. It kind of spawned, growing up and being exposed to a few people around here that have a large influence on authenticity. One man used to come His name is Jessie Norton. He used to show us how a steam engine would work. It was fascinating. And he would give us Appalachian influence, DVDs, books, things like that to keep, which was a rarity. And he also had a sawmill that he had built from scratch, an original circular sawmill. Those kinds of things really helped influence me in that area. Maybe help me expound on this some more, I'm losing my train of thought,

Joe Kendrick 23:36

Well, you've got place I mean, that's always so central to the South, and being from a specific place, and I hear that come out in your music. But you've also got a lot of biblical themes in here. And you mentioned church, so can you touch on that?

Barrett Davis 23:53

Oh, yeah, man. Um, personally, I I rely on my relationship with with Jesus to get me through. It's it's been something that I've had as a journey since I was five or six years old. It's not always the same journey. Sometimes I'm what some would call you know, a non believer and other times I'm what some would call a fanatic. It's interesting how it changes through your life. And now that I've gotten to this point, and now that I'm at this age, being raised in this area, and being exposed to this area's religion, and being exposed to also international religion and to get a chance to compare the two, because I I've been able to leave this country and to see how others are worshiping as well. I honestly wouldn't know what to say to somebody, except to just reach out and pray for them. It's such a strange thing to think about religion, it really just comes down to a relationship, I just communicate all day in my head. I'm 100% on the go, and it's just draining. That's what I do. This is how I get by.

Joe Kendrick 25:31

What do you think about the flip side of that, about what you think your music might tell people outside the region, about what you might want it to convey?

Barrett Davis 25:42

What I want my music to convey is a beautiful representation of this area, and a beautiful representation of what I've been exposed to as a child growing up here. I wanted to convey freedom, that there is absolutely no you know, condemnation for me and for for anyone who's tapping into this record. Very, very

Joe Kendrick 26:16

I like it. Yeah. Well, what's next? Are you going to stay in full time music? You're going to go back to construction here and again, how's it going to work out?

Barrett Davis 26:25

Um, well, just this is this is my journey. So I've basically built this company to, to afford this record. And I, it was a tug of war between, should I release? Should I not release? Should I release it with some promotion, I can't afford the promotion, back and forth. So eventually, I've got to the point where this is funding that and I can't really tell when this is going to stop and when that's going to pick up I believe that, that having IVPR do my press and hopefully getting a great radio promoter will sling me into full time music, and I'm very encouraged to see what's going to happen to my business as I work through it with my business partner and, and my family.

Joe Kendrick 27:15

And so are you playing any dates?

Barrett Davis 27:16

Yeah, I'll be open folk in Asheville. Be September. Maybe it's the 13th. Or that week of and then. I've got the album release concert at Pilot Cove, October 6.

Joe Kendrick 27:36

And then from there, whether or not you really hit the road or not, is still to be decided.

Barrett Davis 27:41

Yeah, I've been communicating with Nicholas Williams who is in charge of the, he's the creator of American songwriter, Songcatcher. podcast.

Joe Kendrick 27:51

Yeah. Nicholas Edward Williams. He's awesome.

Barrett Davis 27:53

Yes, he's a beautiful man. I love that guy. And he has helped me so much. He's in charge of my Kickstarter and advising me on a few other things and some of my ad management. And I'm hoping that between him and myself, I will be able to book at least 50 great shows next year. That's my goal.

Joe Kendrick 28:16

More power to you.

Barrett Davis 28:17

Yes, thank you.

Joe Kendrick 28:18

I think a lot of people are gonna get turned on to this record. I really do.

Barrett Davis 28:21

Yeah, I'm excited. I'm so happy to. To start it. I've only played 12 gigs this year. I'm so excited that I get to start it with IVPR, and Sarah and Mariah Ivey to help me out with that.

Joe Kendrick 28:35

So what did I leave out Barrett, what else do you like to do?

Barrett Davis 28:37

I like to hang out with my kids. And honestly I like to relax at home and try to come up with some time to write a new song because it's been it's been a minute. I think it's been since April since I wrote a new song. Usually when I get the chance to relax and do that I get to really dig in. Lately I've been, every chance I get I've been running off to go fishing. And currently the job I've been on is in Lake Toxaway on the lake. First time I've ever got to do that in the 28 years of living here. And I brought in a 10 and a half pound catfish and six pound largemouth bass. Things I've never done in my life. And I got to do them all on the lake that I have revered slightly. Growing up here I used to play and entertain at the Greystone in with my dad. And that really jazzed me up, it got me really into acoustic performance and the art of not being too loud or creating too many notes. While it's in good tone. They have a really interesting dining room. I think the acoustics are fantastic. I don't know how much they play there anymore. I think they might have jazz artists and things. But I got out of that industry long ago to help me having the time to do other things I try. I really try to stick with venues and listening crowds.

Joe Kendrick 30:20

Yeah, well, what about your family? How do they? What do they think about your new music?

Barrett Davis 30:26

Um, I think they're all pretty excited. My kids. Specifically, my oldest is seven. She asks me every day you know, what do you need prayer for? You need help with? With your Kickstarter with your album? And she asks me if it's over yet, because she knows what's going through my mind quite often about it.

Joe Kendrick 30:51

That the your seven year old is asking you if you need help with things like Kickstarter.

Barrett Davis 30:58

Yeah, yeah. words come out of my mouth. I'm very, very vocal about what I'm going through because I have so many different details to focus on. Yeah. So she, she hears those and I think she's also my verbal child. So

Joe Kendrick 31:19

Wonderful. Barrett Davis on Southern songs and stories. It's been wonderful talking to you. And we're really looking forward to seeing how Aesop Fin does when it gets out there into the world.

Barrett Davis 31:30

Yes, as am I thank you so much for having me.

Joe Kendrick 31:33

Thank you, Barrett. Awesome. We'll see you.

Unknown Speaker 31:36

Bye bye.

Transcribed by <https://otter.ai>

Questions:

Your album *Aesop Fin* is a kind of mythical journey into the aesthetic and the arch of history of Appalachia. Tell us about the character Aesop Fin and how you created this parallel world.

The Appalachia that millions of tourists see versus the dark side of Appalachia, both mythically and in the everyday.

Do you know Pony Bradshaw? His album Calico Jim has some things in common

Tell us about your very musical family. It seems that you were destined to be a music artist although you made a living in your construction business before making your first album.

Tell us about On the jobsite, there's a lot of old man emotions getting thrown around that none of us would ever talk about," Davis says. "Hearing all those stories? It just fed me all kinds of song material.

Let's talk about the music scene of Brevard, which is most always lumped in with Asheville when people describe it to outsiders. But Brevard has its own spark, with the Rangers, Jeff Sipe, Pretty Little Goat ... could you point us to some more artists there and give us a feel for what's going on in the scene?

Working with Woody Platt, Jackson Dulaney

Your album is not really upbeat but there is a bounce in many of its songs. What might be the best setting to take in *Aesop Fin*?

Working with Aaron Aiken from Pink Beds (which sounds so different)

You have some quintessentially Southern reference points in your music: the Bible, moonshine, and the region itself. Can you talk about how you reflect Southern culture in your music in a broad sense or more specifically for a place like western NC? Do you think about what your music might tell people outside the region, about what you want it to convey?

What are your plans? Full time music? Construction too? What else do you enjoy doing?

When one finds themselves standing at the crossroads of their long-held dreams, you're left with two choices — either turn in one direction of complacency or go the other way and plunge headfirst into the endless possibilities of your aspirations.

For Western North Carolina singer-songwriter/guitarist Barrett Davis, he chose the life of a ragged troubadour. It's a whirlwind existence of stages and microphones, of anonymous faces in the crowd eager to see what you have to offer, an arduous trek along that lost highway — constantly in search of your inner truths and honest self.

"I just came to this serious point in my life where I realized that if I want to make music and perform, then it's now or never — I've got to make something of it," the 29-year-old Davis says.

That something is Davis' latest album, "The Ballad of Aesop Finn," a vibrant tapestry, meandering from modern Americana to classic country, indie-folk to the "high, lonesome sound" of bluegrass.

The record itself is a kitchen sink of tones — as heard on "Quiver," "Lazarus" and "Carolina Still" — one which ideally showcases the wide-range and unknown depths of Davis, his musical pursuits and exploits.

"Aesop Finn is a mythical character, raised in the woods. His dad is a moonshine runner, his mother nowhere to be found," Davis says. "Aesop finds a lover and ends up getting killed in a gambling incident, then she ends up tumbling into a waterfall — it's symbolic of the vicious cycle of tragedies in these mountains of Appalachia."

Growing up in Lake Toxaway, a rural outpost community in the mountainous ridges of Transylvania County, Davis was surrounded by music from an early age — exposed to the blues licks of his guitar-playing father, the swirling classical sounds of his mother's piano playing or the inner echoes of his sister, now a professional opera singer.

“But, for me, I stuck with bluegrass and carpentry,” Davis chuckles. “There was just something about bluegrass, folk and mountain music that has always called to me, conjuring something from real deep inside me that I haven’t been able to shake since I first heard it.”

As a teenager, Davis would find himself wandering into the nearby city of Brevard, often seeing the pickin’-n-singin’ styles of Grammy-winning hometown act The Steep Canyon Rangers or witnessing firsthand the intricate melodic prowess of legendary drummer Jeff Sipe at local open mic nights.

And it wasn’t long before Davis had a band of his own, Foxfire (2011-2014), an indie-folk ensemble that bounced around Southern Appalachia before disbanding, with its members each finding their own musical path — including Aaron Aiken, who produced “The Ballad of Aesop Finn” and now frontman of psychedelic-rock outfit Pink Beds.

Davis himself went on hiatus for several years, getting married and raising a young family, all while starting his own construction business to put food on the table for his wife and two kids. And though he was building homes and taking on remodeling projects around Southern Appalachia, his internal antenna never stopped picking up on words and phrases for song ideas.

“Eight years of carpentry was draining, where it was a lot like working in a kitchen. On the jobsite, there’s a lot of old man emotions getting thrown around that none of us would ever talk about,” Davis says. “Hearing all those stories? It just fed me all kinds of song material. It was like therapy for me to filter out someone’s traumatic experience they told me, and to learn something about myself within that process.”

Eventually, Davis wandered back into the realm of recording and live performance, finding himself as guest musician and contributing songwriter for rising North Carolina indie-folk group Pretty Little Goat, which resulted in his tune “Toe the Line” landing on the band’s renowned album, “Big Storm.”

“And I enjoyed that kind of family experience of being in a band,” Davis says. “I also became extremely aware of what it actually takes to run a business, to what it takes to survive and find footing in the music industry.”

“The Ballad of Aesop Finn” is also a full circle thing for Davis, where a collaboration with Rangers lead singer Woody Platt on “Quiver” is just the tip of the iceberg of Davis’ past blending into his vision for tomorrow. The record also tapped the shoulders of regional heavyweights Jackson Dulaney and Ryan Stigmon.

The small, glowing ember of inspiration and creativity, which has always remained at the core of Davis, is now a burning, eternal fire — bringing forth an honest sense of self through the prism of his perceptive lyrics and heartfelt melodies.

“Every gig is the most important day of my life — it’s got to be the important performance I’ve ever played. If it’s not, then why am I out here?” Davis says with conviction. “My focus has always been about getting to know the people in the audience, and learning how to communicate with a listening crowd — making that connection between performance and listener.”

Songs in order of release:

Quiver (Featuring Woody Platt): (Live film)

Quiver is a story of two young lovers finding their way through a forbidden affection. Crushing social boundaries and overcoming their fear of achieving true freedom through passion and determination. It can stand as a show of support to all who find their love lives to be under the restraint of societal norms or religious condemnation.

Lazarus: (Official and live film)

A song about friendship and renewal. Lazarus serves as a reminder that life is too important to waste time hating your brother. Life on earth is short and dependent on friendship. Given the existence of man on this earth is even shorter in comparison to the grand old age of earth, be good to one another.

Carolina Still: (live film)

Since the late 1800's North Carolina Moonshine has made its way into the lips and livers of its avid supporters. Carolina Still is a story I wrote to honor the memory of my Great Grandfather Gus Davis, a descendant of Buncombe County and a lover of a good corn mash.

Rest of the Album:**HWY 64:**

A story of the moonshiner's lament based on what they used to call the "Olde Moonshine State." The historical HWY 64 lines up for a stretch with what they call Moonshiner 28 which runs past my birthplace. This song is a protest of government overreach and stands as a reminder of the negative effects of prohibition of any goods that can be sold by the common folk, whether that be Marijuana or good old Mountain Dew. I have learned that in the poorest Counties of the Appalachian Mountains, any act of commerce might just be your way out of a very bad situation.

Your Worth:

This tale of a lover's worth speaks of passion that flows from the blue ridge mountain streams and into the great floods of the Tennessee river valley. This love overlooks the beauty of the Appalachia's from its leaping place of Lookout Mountain, Georgia.

Oh Sleeper:

A song to shed light on the darkest spaces of mental health and torment. This story is in reference to an old verse in the book of Ephesians "Get up, sleeper! Arise from the dead, and the Messiah will shine on you."

The Ballad of Aesop Fin:

The Ballad of Aesop Fin is a culmination of Appalachian folklore and tales of young manhood. Drawing reference to the casualties of love, gambling and substance abuse; "Fin," like many in this region, experienced a life disturbed by loss, grief and rejection. He finds his peace in the mystic death of the ancient soil which feeds the giant Hemlocks of old, resting beneath the Appalachian canopies that once carried on like the folk tales of old.

Bama Shores:

Two places have always had my heart. Amsterdam and Alabama. I spent much in Alabama as a young man and also worked a few jobs in the Netherlands at the age of 18. Upon my return to the states I came across a Netherlander who had just arrived the previous day. After long conversations and many joyful moments we packed up and began a monumental road trip through Alabama to watch Stevie Wonder play on the gulf. We eloped and the rest is history. After 8 years of our union we have come to the conclusion that happiness is there for those who are brave enough to claim it and staying in that place takes much reflection and sacrifice.