

I Am Not Interested In Balance

An Interview With Loren Hicks

By Kayt Lucas

Loren Hicks is not your average song writer. Nor is he your average banjo player. In his words, “The banjo evokes strong images to most people, and it is hard for them to break out of that box to see the possibilities ...and I am not in it so I can help the people that want "banjo"...”



And what is "banjo" exactly? The instrument itself, while never typical in construction, has heavy associations with steadfast traditions. Old time music, blue grass and folk music call for particular styles of playing. The expectation of what a banjo might play is often locked into a lexicon of riffs that are considered fundamental to the language of the instrument. Loren Hicks breaks the mold.

Drawing from his broad interests in music, Loren loves to experiment. “Especially (styles) I haven't played before and particularly those where a banjo is considered beyond unusual: Reggae, blues, rock, klezmer, anything rhythmic.”

“No one expects what I do with it.”



Loren's writing captivates audiences in Toronto and across the continent as he travels by motorcycle to visit musicians and other friends. His urge to write is unrelenting. "It is constant, but gets unbearable when I hear

others play live." Loren often introduces one of his songs as having been written on the road, on his bike, while unable to write anything down due to extreme weather and nowhere to pull over safely.

Loren writes in the morning, sometimes starting with lyrics, sometimes music. He is particularly inspired by rhythms as evidenced by his musical tastes, so some tunes start with the beats and tempos. It takes him between a few hours and up to three years to complete a song to his satisfaction. Of all the work he is moved to begin, a few gems emerge every year. About his subjects, Loren offers:

"Whimsy.

Loss.

Redemption.

Solitude.

Fun.

Not love - I prefer less travelled paths."



Writing is a solo pursuit, collaborating later on band arrangements and recording projects. On bringing songs to a band: "I really believe it's not a challenge - it's an opportunity. I am blessed that the people I play with are open to almost anything. Unless it's trite - but then I want it killed, too."

Loren's selection of instruments and his creative use of technology, give him the ability to choose from a broad range of qualities and tones. Several banjos are true outliers. He has electrified, modernized models as well as some less unusual styles. Amongst them, a classic, one-of-a-kind historically interesting specimen humbles the rest. Musical instruments are often works of art, and a few of Loren's fit the description with custom skins, custom hardware, extraordinary wood work on the neck and head, totally unique mother-of-pearl applications and lovingly crafted or chosen straps.

From a writing perspective, Loren's banjos break open the flavour options for his songs, as well as his contributions to the work of his musical collaborators. Not unlike his obsession with cooking and the perfection of his ingredients, he is able to carefully select his words and his instruments, all while reinventing the recipe.

When asked how he balances his music with the rest of his life, Loren responds "I am not interested in balance."

