

The Story Behind "Kacey Jones Sings Mickey Newbury by Kacey Jones

I first came to Nashville in 1980. I was visiting from my home in the San Francisco Bay Area. I was signed to an indie label at the time and they had flown me to Tennessee for my first Nashville recording session. After my session, Juan Contreras, who worked for Acuff-Rose Publishing, invited me to the Acuff-Rose studios to meet Mickey Newbury. I had no idea who Mickey was but, my still-small-voice was shouting, "say yes!" Little did I know, Mickey had already written hit songs for Kenny Rogers, Andy Williams, Waylon Jennings, Tom Jones, Eddy Arnold, Ray Charles, BB King and Elvis Presley. When we arrived at Acuff-Rose he was in the recording booth, alone, with his gut-string guitar. I watched him as he glided seamlessly from one amazing song to the next. He had the most beautiful voice I'd ever heard and his songs were masterpieces. It was one of those rare times in life when I knew I was in the presence of greatness.

After listening to Mickey for two hours, I turned to Juan and said, "Well, I may as well go back to California and get a job in retail because I'll never be able to write songs like that." Just as Juan was saying, "I bet Mickey wouldn't want to hear you talk like that" Mickey walked up and said, "Mickey wouldn't want to hear her talk like what?" So, I had to repeat what I'd said about "getting a job in retail." It would have been easy for him to say, "Okay, good luck in retail, kid." Instead, he spent the next two hours talking with me, rather, tutoring me, on the craft of songwriting, especially the importance of melody, not to mention sage advice on lyric and composition. His generosity and his willingness to reach out to a young songwriter were nothing less than life changing for me.

Shortly after that evening at Acuff-Rose, I returned to California, inspired, and with a new sense of discipline and enthusiasm for songwriting. I learned several of Mickey's songs and began performing them in my live shows. A few years later, I enjoyed my first Top-5 Billboard hit as a writer when Mickey Gilley recorded, "I'm The One Mama Warned You About." That was followed by David Allan Coe's recording of my song, "Cold Turkey." MCA Records signed my trio, "Ethel and The Shameless Hussies" in 1987, not only because we sang well together but also because Jimmy Bowen was crazy about my original songs. Curb Records signed me to a solo deal in '97 for the same reason...the songs. I seriously doubt these opportunities would have come my way had it not been for that magical meeting with Mickey Newbury in 1980.

For various reasons (mainly geographical) Mickey and I fell out of touch for many years, until 1997 when I phoned him. He was living in Oregon with his wife, Susie, and their children. His health was not good. He had been struggling with pulmonary fibrosis (a nasty disease similar to emphysema) for two years. I called to invite him to record a track for an album that I was producing called, "Pearls in the Snow, The Songs of Kinky Friedman." He and Kinky knew each other and, though Mickey wanted to participate in the project, he wasn't feeling well enough to make the commitment. It was the last time I

ever spoke with him. He passed away in September of 2002. If I had it to do over again, I would've hopped a plane to Oregon in '98 and recorded Mickey there because, as I later discovered, on days when he was feeling strong, he was still able to sing, beautifully, and record, in spite of his illness. I'll always regret not making that trip.

In November 2002, I attended the Frank Brown International Songwriter's Festival in Perdido Key, Florida, where I was invited to perform for a Mickey Newbury tribute concert at the Silver Moon Café. There were ten male performers on the show...and me. I sang the first Newbury song I'd ever learned, "You've Always Got the Blues." The Newbury-loving crowd approved. As I left the stage, a little hand reached out to stop me and I heard the sweetest voice say, "C'mon over here darlin' we need to talk." It was Mickey's beautiful 82-year old mother, Mamie. She was there with her friend, Susan Williamson, to hear us all honor her son. After spending time with them, Mamie and Susan convinced me to attend the Fourth Annual Mickey Newbury Gathering in June 2003 in Austin, Texas.

When I arrived at The Gathering, I instantly made 125 new friends. They were from all over the United States and various parts of the world...Denmark, Japan, Australia, Norway, Germany....some of them didn't even speak English well but, they all spoke the language of Newbury. They all had the same passion for his music. It was the single common denominator that brought them together and made them kindred spirits. Some were singer-songwriters, some musicians, but most were just fans and friends, and many were adept "students of Newbury." They knew everything about the man; his career, his family, all the verses to all his songs, there was even a daily Newbury trivia contest. I learned so much from those people! I especially learned from Mickey's good friends, disc jockey, Ron Lyons, author, Joe Ziemer, and concert promoter, Roy Stamps. I also had the pleasure of meeting Mickey's widow, Susie, for the first time, as well as several of his children, including Chris, Leah, and Laura Shayne. And, of course, Mamie was there as Matriarch of the entire event.

During The Gathering, I participated in daytime concerts and late-night jam sessions and, since we were in Texas, many of the people attending the event knew that I had produced the Kinky Friedman tribute, "Pearls in the Snow." Several of them, including Ron Lyons and Roy Stamps, encouraged me to consider recording my own tribute to Mickey. It was an excellent idea but, the quality of the recording I had in mind would require an adequate budget and I was not in the position to finance such a project at the time. I reluctantly filed the idea away under: Dreams that may or may not come true someday.

A month later, I received a call from Susan Williamson. She told me that if money was the only thing keeping me from moving forward with my plans to record a Newbury tribute, that I should stop worrying about it and get busy selecting which songs to record. She said, "I'll help you raise the money you need to do this project right." She started by

putting her own money where her mouth was right then and there and becoming the first Executive Producer to sign on to this project. She then rallied for additional support on the message board at www.MickeyNewbury.com Within days, Joey Latunski, a Nebraska resident and friend of Mickey's, came forward with additional financing. His generosity was followed shortly by that of John and Sue Meares, longtime friends of Mickey's from North Carolina. I had met Joey, John and Sue at The Gathering, however, I had no idea we'd be taking this journey together. A few months later Pete Holmes and Larry and Gale Book came aboard as Co-Executive Producers. Shortly after that Larry and Gale brought four other couples to the 'party' including, Doug and Donna Silsbee, Deb and Brian Cairns, Greg and Carole Thompson, and Jude and Gary Reno. My old buddy, Randy Cudd, who knew and loved Mickey, also became an investor. When my friend Kristi Giudici got involved and became a Co-Executive Producer, I knew we were off and running. How rare and how fortunate was I to find people such as these who wanted to share this dream with me. It was all coming together. The time was right and so was this amazing team of friends.

My new challenge became trying to select only fifteen of Mickey's songs (out of a thousand). I'd originally planned to cut fourteen songs but when I heard "Song of Sorrow" I knew I had to record it. The opening line is the reason I chose it as the first song on this album: "They call me a fool and a dreamer, tell me I'm wasting my time, how I will search for the rest of my life for a rainbow I never will find."

For me, that "rainbow" was the chance to finally record an album of serious material. I have enjoyed a long career in the music business writing and recording mostly humorous songs. And though I've had a marvelous time with that material, it was never my intention to become known solely as, "the chick that does the funny songs." It just kind of happened. My whole career has pretty much been an accident, a lucky accident ...falling up, always falling up.

When I moved to Nashville in '86 I needed to make rent money so I started a campy trio called, "Ethel and The Shameless Hussies." We were sort of like Bette Midler and The Harlettes only 'countrified.' We had a lot of fun and we sang well together. A year later we were signed to MCA Records. It was exciting. However, when you hang your hat on a comedy act with a provocative name and provocative songs, you can sometimes paint yourself into a corner. Ray Stevens warned me about that. He said, "Kacey, if you start out in Nashville as a comedy act you better be prepared to stay there because, they won't let you be more than one thing."

I took Ray's advice about comedy seriously. That's why I've included at least one ballad on every album I've ever done (except the Curb CD) because, along with all the funny songs, I've written some serious ones, too. And, it was important to me for my audience to know that I was "more than one thing." There was a lot of truth in what Ray had said.

Still, writing humorous songs came easy to me and I enjoyed watching the audience react to them so, I kept writing and they kept laughing.

Mickey wrote, "Time has a way of changing everything, Truth has a way of changing all the time." And the times were definitely changing for me. In July 2004 my beloved father, Charlie, put a bullet in his head, ending a tragic five-year battle with emphysema. I don't care how well-adjusted you think you are, the fact is, suicide will catch your ass by surprise...especially when it's your dad. In February 2005, my pal Captain Midnight died unexpectedly. He and I became friends while I was producing "Pearls in the Snow" and he wrote the liner notes for that album. A month later one of my best girlfriends, Sharyn Lane, lost her courageous battle with pancreatic cancer. While losing Sharyn, I was terrified that I might lose my other best friend, Peggy Bradley. Sadly, Peggy passed away in July after a brave fight with breast cancer. Everyone I loved was leaving...so many tears, so many good-byes. I didn't feel like singing funny songs. And I sure as hell didn't feel like writing any.

The thing that kept me going amidst the grief, loss, and death, was the chance to sing and record Mickey's songs. They're mostly sad and melancholy songs. Singing them was like wrapping a comforter around my shoulders. I needed to linger in those sad beautiful lyrics for awhile. I wanted to drink in those tender melodies. They soothed my heart and healed my soul. Someone asked Mickey why he rarely wrote happy songs. He replied, "When I'm happy I play golf. When I'm sad I write songs."

We recorded the basic tracks for this album for three consecutive days in late March, 2005 at County Q Studios in Nashville. The musicians were all friends of mine. More importantly, they loved Newbury's music. The two guitar players, Brent Moyer and Mark Dreyer, had known Mickey and had performed with him. Each of the players gave the performance of a lifetime...on every track. Eddie Dunbar played bass (and sang harmony on "Why You Been Gone So Long."). My friend, Paul Scholton played drums and percussion. The incredibly gifted, Jimmy Nichols, did all the keyboard work and the string arrangements. Those boys inspired me. As a result, many of the lead vocals you hear on this album were taken from the three original tracking days. I am keenly aware of the fact that a few of the vocal tracks contain imperfections however, to maintain the heart and soul of the performance, the trade-off was worth it.

While recording this album, it was important to me to honor not only Mickey's songs, but also his brilliant sense as an arranger. So, if you're already a Newbury fan, some of these arrangements may ring familiar. That's because I love Mickey's arrangements. He was so ahead of his time that, in my opinion, they're right on time for 2006. I also love the way he utilized sound effects and interludes to segue the songs on his albums and so, I've also used sound effects and interludes on this album; some of them are original and some were created by Mickey. I am grateful to Susan Newbury and Mountain Retreat Music for granting me permission to use those effects on this album.

With a little luck and a lot of help from my friends it is my intention to lift the name, Mickey Newbury, up to where it rightfully belongs...at the top.