

John Bunzow

“John destroys the boundaries between great rock, country, r&b, and soul music by owning his noteworthy sound with respect to the great artists who came before.”

Ray Kennedy

Five time Grammy winner. Producer, Engineer, Musician
(Steve Earle, Billy Joe Shaver)

With his fourth CD, Counterfeit Salvation, John Bunzow continues to establish himself as an inspired and innovative American roots singer/songwriter/guitarist of depth, substance and groove.

The Portland, Oregon, native has been called one of the finest roots writers-musicians on the current music scene. Producer Pete Anderson (Dwight Yoakam, Meat Puppets, Steve Forbert) said he is “...without doubt the best artist I’ve heard in recent times.” Chicago Tribune columnist Jack Hurst credits Bunzow with mixing “the rootsy with the revolutionary.”

Bunzow, now based in Portland, has built a long and storied career. Infused early with a strong love of Southern music the artist has developed his own unique fusion of roots rock and blues, seasoned with everything from reggae and country rock to pop. He counts among his “Mt. Rushmore of influences,” as he puts it, Bob Dylan, Merle Haggard, Tom Waits, Mike Bloomfield, Albert King, country picker Jerry Reed, Jimmy Webb, Randy Newman, Steve Earle, and Jerry Garcia, among many.

During his early years, Bunzow performed with bands that favored original music, as well as working as a solo singer/songwriter and even trafficking in a country music tour of truck stops and county fairs. The artist found himself bouncing around various music scenes including San Francisco, Seattle and LA. But it was in Nashville that his songwriting created new opportunities, Bunzow says. “My focus was always as a songwriter, and that is what brought me to Nashville – twice.”

Bunzow’s second Nashville sojourn resulted in a songwriting deal with EMI and a recording contract with Liberty Records (Capitol Records). His 1996 Pete Anderson-produced CD, Stories of the Years, was critically acclaimed by press and radio. Music journalists proclaimed him one of the brightest new talents on music’s horizon. The Gavin Report raved, “John Bunzow is a songwriter’s songwriter and could be the catalyst in Nashville’s eventual shift out of its hyper-hat mode.”

Following the Liberty Records label release, Bunzow divided his time between playing on recording sessions and playing for alternative country artists including Chris Knight and Allison Moorer, and writing for Famous Music. He has had his songs recorded by the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, Patty Loveless, and artist Jack Ingram (produced by Steve Earle/Ray Kennedy) as well as being featured in major motion pictures.

As a performer, Bunzow has played Farm Aid, the Grand Ole Opry, and toured throughout Europe, as well as being featured in videos and programming on CMT. He has opened shows for or shared stages with such varied acts as Willie Nelson, Neil Young, Steve Earle, Guy Clark, John Hiatt, Todd Snider, Carl Perkins, Allison Krauss, Trisha Yearwood and John Mellencamp.

The wheels nearly came off the bus after his permanent return to the Pacific Northwest. “I made some risky lifestyle choices and got off the rails for awhile,” he says. And if that wasn’t enough, add to those struggles a life-threatening battle with some serious health issues that sidelined him for a spell. As John puts it, “I had a few detours along the way.”

But with intense personal struggle comes new resolve. Bunzow earned a masters degree in education to teach at-risk youth, and got more deeply into his music. Two years ago he put himself back on an intense discipline of songwriting and performing, collected himself, and recently headed back to the comfortable confines of Nashville and a familiar cadre of studios, musicians and engineers. In one week he produced and delivered “Counterfeit Salvation,” an 11-song reflection of where his life has taken him.

Bunzow continues to write and perform solo and with his band throughout the Pacific Northwest and contributes his songs and guitar playing to various recording projects.

“I am blessed and lucky to have come out the other side,” he says. “I feel fortunate and am looking forward to writing and playing in a full-time, focused way. It was great to go to Nashville and work with old and new friends. But it’s also a blessing to play with my Portland guys. Walkin’ on the bright side of the road.”

Don Campbell

(Musician, Journalist, Author)

