

Perhaps you haven't been paying attention, but Bonnie 'Prince' Billy is clearly one of the great American songwriters to emerge in the last decade. Listen more closely, and you'll see.

Over the course of five albums and countless singles, compilation tracks, collaborations, live performances and material not intended for release, Bonnie 'Prince' Billy has become a sought-after commodity around the free world, as well as some of the uncharted, "evil" parts of the planet.

The Bonnie 'Prince' got his start as the featured singer with the Palace Music band. He struck out on his own in 1998. His first expression was a curious one: "I Am Drinking Again." When had we ever known him to drink before? When had we even known him at all? Here, Bonny's black humor first raised its hoary head, and belched a good one. This record set the tone for that first year: four singles on four different labels from three different countries (Domino, Lowfly, Allcity and Palace Records). This delivered the message that Bonny belonged to no one man — but conversely, to the whole freaking world.

"I Am Drinking Again" was sold to Italian audiences in March and April of 1998 during shows played with Bryan Rich in accompaniment. The mood was romantic. For the remainder of the year, Bonny appeared around Europe and the US in the company of different friends and fellow players — the beginning of a regular and far-flung tour schedule that continues to this day, where shows are played to reach new audiences in new environments for Bonny and his ever-swelling band of brothers to explore and enjoy. Thusly, '99 kicked off with more dates, this time in Ireland, Paris and Reykjavik (and England, proving that there's always an exception to the tour schedule rule) with Easy Times, an ad-hoc trio made up of Mike Fellows, James Lo and Matt Sweeney.

The cold dawn of 1999 brought the darkness — the first Bonnie 'Prince' Billy album, *I See a Darkness* was released in January on Palace Records, taking his name to the masses. This bleak and hectic record remains a fan favorite to this very day. Kids are sick like that. But they like good songs. Looking to see a bit of sunshine, Bonny spent the month of June heading west, north and east in the company of good friends — Bob Arellano, Colin Gagon, Mike Fellows and Joe Propatier — and stopping to play 27 shows along the way. Whew!

In 2000, the *Tour That Always Ends* returned Bonny to the Scandinavian Peninsula for a week of solo in-store performances, bringing him closer to the curious tribes of northern Europe. Free shows ease the tension on everyone, which is something Bonny likes to do once every blue moon or so. Ease the tension, that is. Back in the USSA, a defection to Cuba was arranged in March with Cubano Bob Arellano and his Havanarama leading the charge and Papa M in tow, all of them living la vida loca. Jumping from one island (and hemisphere) to another, Bonny landed in Australia for solo appearances opening for The Dirty Three. Next, a Mediterranean sojourn: a return to Italy and his first ever concerts in Greece with Matt and Spencer Sweeney and Mike Fellows — fun fellows all.

Lest you think that the Bonnie 'Prince' did nothing that but leap on and off of planes, trains, busses and limousines, records tell us that time was also spent in the studio in the year 2000. Releases included the "Little Boy Blue" 7" single, the "More Revery" CDEP and a collaborative EP with Mick Turner (aka The Marquis de Tren) entitled "Get On Jolly." Tour dates with the Marquis and The Monkey Boys (Paul Oldham and Jim White) were played late in the year.

Also in 2000, Johnny Cash released a version of "I See a Darkness" on his *American III: Solitary Man* album. Bonny attended the session, flexing his pipes in harmony with the no-longer-so-solitary Man for a classic version of a classic song.

2001 saw the release of the second Bonnie 'Prince' Billy album, *Ease Down the Road*. This one is another critical and fan favorite — don't those critics and fans ever take a breather? Favorite this, favorite that...ah, God bless 'em anyway. Also released was a live EP with the Marquis de Tren, reliving the odd times on the road with the Monkey Boys the year before. But new odd times were calling him back to the road. And so — January in Ireland with Papa M sharing the bill. March and April on the European continent with David Pajo, David Human, Matt Sweeney and Benjamin Van Dyke. Summer stints in eastern and midwestern states. September in Brussels at La Botanique, where Bonny had a hot three nights of concerts: 79 different songs played solo and with two different Belgian backup bands. The year ended with visits to Ireland, Australia, England, Scotland and Iceland with different group of humans (but not David Human) every time.

2002 kicked off with Bonny jumping onstage to sing with Giant Sand in New York and striding onstage to sing with Marianne Faithfull in London and Nashville. March was spent touring surfing spots on the pacific coast with a gig at every whistle-stop. Bonny then brought his star power to a bankrupt indie festival in southern England as a personal favor to his friends in Shellac. And the festival lived! Sort of...2002 also found Bonny in New York, San Francisco, Oslo, London, Louisville and Baltimore. In November, he returned to Greece to play once again (this time solo) and debuted in Turkey. In between dates, Bonny collaborated with Erik Wesselo on a book with music. The 'Prince' was worldwide and multimedia, showing no signs of slacking. But the best was yet to come.

In late 2002, sessions were held for the next album, which was released in 2003 as *Master and Everyone*. On a short east-coast tour in January, Bonny debuted the album live, from start to finish. Then *Master and Everyone* took off, becoming one of the hottest-selling Bonnie 'Prince' Billy records ever. A celebratory mood was invasive. In May, the "Mountains and Deserts" tour of America took Bonny and band from southwest to northwest over the course of eighteen shows, most of which were followed by a night camping out under the stars, clouds, rain, sand and urine all of which are healthful and cleansing when experienced properly. The encore of choice was

"Kokomo," leaving no one any doubt where their hearts were at. Then Roskilde Festival in Sweden, with a few Scandinavian concerts around that appearance, and Bonny returned to America to open dates for Bjork around the country. An online diary kept fans and friends apprised of the 'Prince's (abridged) every move.

Released in January 2004, Greatest Palace Music reconsidered fifteen classic Palace songs in the company of Nashville's finest session players, including Eddie Bayers, Stuart Duncan, Mark Fain, Mike Johnson, Bruce Watkins and Hargus "Pig" Robbins. As this monumental record hit the streets, Bonny along with Paul Oldham and the ubiquitous Matt and Spencer Sweeney, was playing for the very first time in Japan, where fans had waited years for this. Their love was dutiful and punctual.

For the "Pebbles and Ripples" tour of the American southeast that May, Bonny recorded cover versions of songs suggested by touring partners Brightblack (who did the same in return) for an EP that was sold on the tour. Freaks worldwide turned to eBay to get their copies, but these high-priced purchases paled next to the power of the shows. The tour was a righteous romp featuring Ryder McNair, Dave Bird, Matt Sweeney, Pete Townsend and Pink Nasty, unforgettable for all who witnessed it. As fall fell across America, Bonny was in Australia, enjoying the springtime. Two shows at the end of the year offered an ominous preview as to the way of 2005: Bonny and Matt Sweeney on their lonesome, billed as "Superwolf."

The Superwolf album was released in January 2005 and was followed by long runs through America and Europe (including a really outrageous number of festival dates). Bonnie also traveled to Toronto, Ontario to sing with Current 93. Another highlight of 2005 was the day in New York when five free shows were played in five different stores. A lot of motherfuckers came out to those shows. And some great kids too. The year concluded with the release of Summer in the Southeast, a document of performances from the "Pebbles and Ripples" tour of 2004, rocking and rolling harder than on any record Bonny had released to date and proving to all those eBay kids that their agoraphobia had to end next time the Bonnie 'Prince' came a knocking.

As 2006 takes to the wind, Bonny is back from lengthy passes through New Zealand and Scotland. So far, everything is taken care of. But something is missing. And the best is still yet to come. You're not alone if you're wondering — among the many challenges to face, many new places and faces to see, what happens next?

The Letting Go.