

FAR FROM WASTING AWAY

JUST FOR THE RECORD, THE MARGARITA THAT INSPIRED JIMMY BUFFETT'S MOST FAMOUS SONG WAS DRUNK IN AUSTIN. OR SO HE SAYS.

By John T. Davis. This article originally appeared in the Austin-American Statesman.

But no one, not even Buffett himself, is entirely sure where in the city the fateful beverage was quaffed. It might have been at Castle Creek, a dearly departed place on Lavaca Street that was next to the equally-defunct Capitol Oyster Bar.

That's where I saw Buffett for the first time, back in the mid-1970's. He pulled up just before showtime in a station wagon, yanked his guitar out of the backseat, and walked inside to play for a relative handful of strangers. It was successful, as far as such things go, and when, on the break, the singer announced he was going next door for a dozen raw, about half the tiny audience elected to join him.

"I've played every junior college in the entire state of Texas," said Buffett on a recent trip to Austin, speaking of his scuffling days. "And that's where my affection and love for the people of Texas and their appreciation of music - which is really unique in all the travels that I've done - was formed.

"When you were hitchhiking in Texas with a guitar case, it wasn't treated like an AK-47, it was treated as something that was admired."

Buffett plays the Erwin Center these days, when he is playing at all. He has lately re-cast himself as a mini-mogul, with a career in fiction, and a retail store and a restaurant, and several real estate investments that compete for his attention. The amiable, drifting-with-the-tides facade in display for concert-goers conceals a restless intelligence and eclectic curiosity.

That footloose sense of experimentation is manifested these days in Margaritaville Records, an independent label that has been created, seem-

ingly, out of a notation on Buffett's long lifetime wish list. Based in Nashville, the label has signed two new artists (New Orleans rockers the Iguanas and Evangeline, a Cajun-esque female band) and has released a boxed Buffett retrospective.

Anyone who has been around the music industry for a while has come across star-driven vanity projects before; ego-gratifying custom labels in which the artist dabbles until the new wears off. And then one day, the phones are disconnected and there is a lot of leftover letter-head stationery, and the star is off on some new and more fashionable tangent.

But that is not the case with this endeavor, insisted Shellie Erwin, who, along with English music veteran Bob Mercer, makes up Margaritaville's entire staff. "He's always wanted to have a record label that is artist oriented," she said. "(But) he's very quality oriented. He's really conscious about things that have his name on them."

Buffett remains an MCA recording artist, but, according to Erwin, he has a hand in every stage of the projects initiated in the Margaritaville offices, from finding the talent to guiding them in the

studio to administering their song publishing (in itself a potentially lucrative business) to creating a marketing image. The resulting products will be distributed by MCA, beginning with Evangeline's debut effort and Buffett's box set, *Boats, Beaches, Bars and Bal-lads*.

For a variety of personal and professional reasons, the musician himself has moved back to Nashville. The move may come as a surprise to fans who have grown up with Buffett's salt-cured, Gulf

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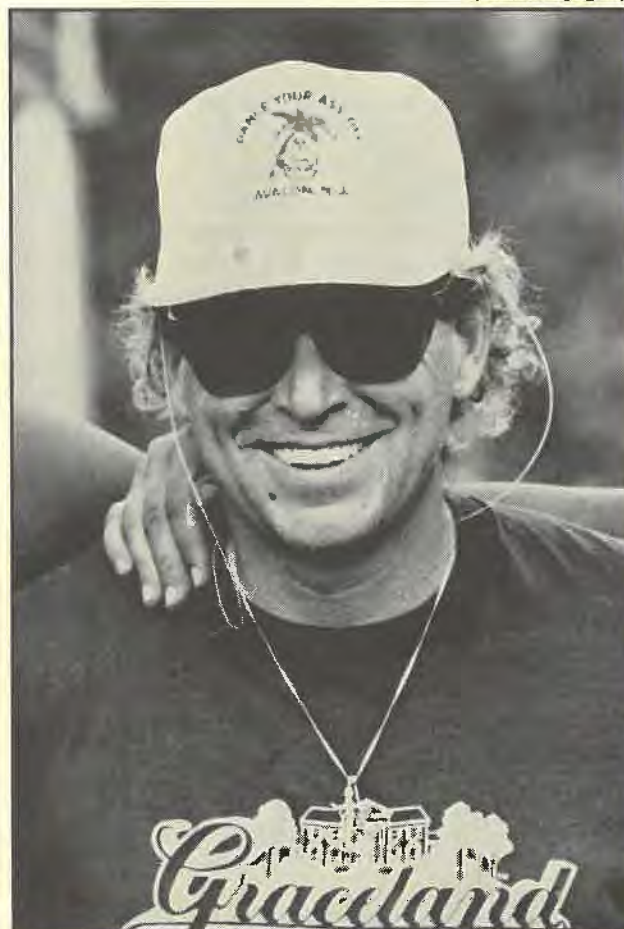


Photo: Suzanne Hitchcock

ELAYNE CULPEPPER LEFT WISCONSIN

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he newest member of The Coral Reefer Band is Elayne Culpepper. Carmen Miranda for all you concert goers. Singing background vocals for Jimmy Buffett is second nature for Elayne, after all she's been doing it in Key West for the last decade. Elayne studied musical theater and dance for 13 years, so it's no accident she landed a gig with historically one of the most popular acts to tour this summer. Jimmy Buffett concerts are a perennial sell-out; often in record setting time. (I'm talking *minutes* here.) Elayne needless to say, is psyched.

Key West in 1976 was quite a different place than it is now; Mel Fisher was still digging in the sand, Captain Tony actually owned Captain Tony's Saloon, and Jimmy Buffett...well, Jimmy was doing OK. Bars and beer halls had yet to be replaced by bistros and boutiques. A calmer, less neon atmosphere prevailed. This was the Key West that featured Elayne Culpepper appearing with *The Big Coppitt Cowboys* at the *Half Shell Raw Bar*. Times have changed, for Key West as well as Elayne...and presumably for The Big Coppitt Cowboys.

"I sang with several bands when I first arrived in Key West. Most of the places that were popular then are gone. Sloppy Joe's

Nuestra Senora de Atocha. Jimmy happened to be in town and went out to the dive site. "We were at the Pier House that week and Jimmy sang with us that night. That was really cool."

Her professional relationship with Jimmy Buffett afforded Elayne many opportunities. In 1987 the little place on Duval Street referred to earlier became the *Margaritaville Cafe*. New Year's Eve of that same year featured the Full Sail Band performing with Jimmy and a visiting friend Steve Winwood. "That was a definite high for us, on the same stage with Steve Winwood!" Other Margaritaville appearances followed; R&B legends Steve Cropper and Donald "Duck" Dunn, jazz great Ralph MacDonald, and Ozark Mountain Daredevil Larry Lee. In fact Elayne happened to be at Shrimpsound, Jimmy's Key West recording studio, when Larry Lee was recording a *Corona Beer* commercial and she was asked to participate.

In 1990 Elayne Culpepper relocated to Nashville, TN. "I was hoping to learn more about the business side of music, I've met a lot of people, made a lot of contacts." These contacts include renewed acquaintances with Steve Winwood and Steve Cropper, both Nashville residents.

How did you come to be touring as part of *The Coral Reefer Band* this summer? "I knew Jimmy was spending a lot of time

FOR CALIFORNIA IN 1976...

is still here, and a couple of the resorts." Elayne performed for several years and then fled to Colorado to "regroup." "I was rapidly approaching burn-out, having entirely too much fun."

She returned to Key West, as they always do, and resumed her singing career in 1983. At this time she began singing with the *Full Sail Band* and became a local favorite. "We were traveling a lot then; from Hilton Head, SC. to Sanibel Island, FL., but we considered Key West our home. All our friends were there, and we were pretty well received."

Elayne is too modest, Full Sail Band was the most popular band in Key West during the 80's; performing at the Full Moon Saloon, The Pier House, and a little place at 500 Duval Street called Del Rios. "Jimmy would sit in every so often and play with us. I think that may have led to our popularity."

I asked Elayne how Jimmy Buffett came to be a frequent guest player with the band. "Full Sail was accepted and popular with the locals. We played a lot of Jimmy's stuff at the time, so we were familiar with the music and he felt comfortable with us. Jimmy also knew we could handle the music and it gave him a chance to have a good time with the music without a rigid concert structure."

In July 1985, Mel Fisher, celebrated treasure salvor, found what was referred to as the Motherlode; tons of silver bars proof positive that he had found the lost Spanish Galleon

in Nashville, I was hoping to catch him at his office there [Margaritaville Records] to get some advice on other things going on."

One afternoon Elayne did indeed catch Jimmy at the office, "I've been looking for you," Jimmy said, "let's talk."

"I didn't know Jimmy was going to ask me to tour with him. I knew he knew that I was in Nashville and not particularly busy, so he asked. No audition, no second thoughts, nothing." "I came to him for advice, and he had already been considering me for the tour."

As for the *Recession Recess Tour*, Elayne says Jimmy is concentrating more on the music and less on the theatrics. To try and duplicate last year's tour would be impossible. The comparisons would be endless. The song list spans Jimmy's entire career. In fact Elayne was more familiar with many of the older songs, than the other singers. "I was able to help with some of the lyrics, but it is a little different singing with other backup singers, not just with Jimmy alone. The same songs have different harmonies. I had to relearn some of the vocal arrangements. I've enjoyed every minute of it."

Look for Elayne this summer, she'll be the one that bears a startling resemblance to Carmen Miranda. Tell her I said hi, or better yet, I'll tell her myself when she comes to Key West during the tour break. See ya' Elayne, you owe me a beer.

SHE'S ALMOST THERE.

Elayne Cuipepper & some guy with a mustache at the Full Moon Saloon.
Photo: Chris Robinson.



Elayne in Nashville, 1992.

I WANT MY JBTV

There are currently a dozen or more Jimmy Buffett videos in existence. These videos, dating back to 1971 are a telling history not only of Jimmy Buffett, but also of video production techniques. Some videos are very well done, some...well let's just leave it at that...*some* are very well done.

The point is there is a terrific video compilation sitting on a shelf somewhere! Let's get 'em off the shelf. These videos range from "Come Monday", "One Particular Harbour" and "Take Another Road" to the live recording of Harry Belafonte's "Jamaica Farewell" from the **Feeding Frenzy Tour**.

The production and legal preparation necessary to assemble all the videos is enormous. *We must demonstrate a demand* to justify what is going to be a very complex task. Please complete the form below, fold and mail using a 29-cent stamp. Tell your friends! Mail it in today!

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No kidding! All of Jimmy's videos!
Hell yeah I'd buy it. Will it include that great
movie from the OUTPOST Tour? How about
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CARIBBEAN SOUL PINS

Gold plated, baked enamel with clasp pin back. Available in Caribbean Soul Chameleon or Cheeseburger style. \$12.50



CHEESEBURGER PILLOW

Original soft-sculptured creation. Hand crafted using non-toxic paints and shredded cotton/polyester filling. Hand made in El Salvador. Pillow measures 12" x 6". \$26.00



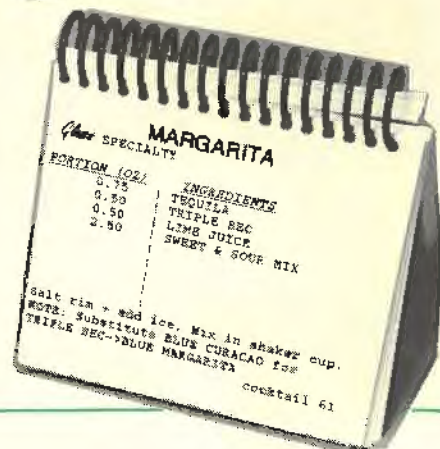
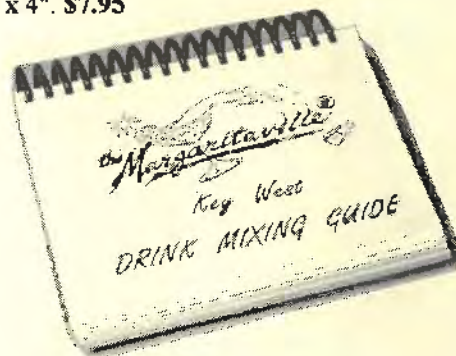
MARGARITAVILLE LICENSE PLATES

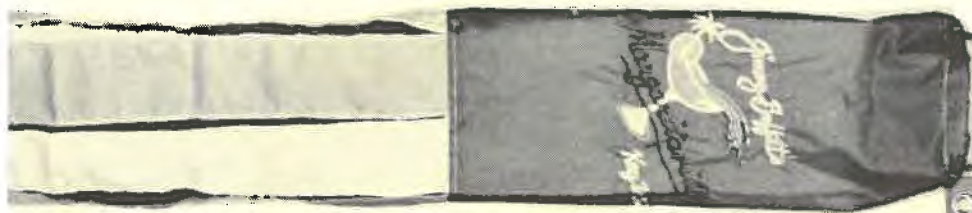
Standard size metal license plates patterned after official Florida Manatee plates. \$1.00 from each sale is contributed toward saving manatees. License plates are \$8.00 each.



MARGARITAVILLE/KEY WEST DRINK MIXING GUIDE

There's more to life than Corona Beer & Margarita's! Why there's the Duck's Ass. How about a Dirty Mother or a Tootsie Roll? Over 100 cocktails are listed in the Margaritaville Drink Mixing Guide. Spiral binding allows for easy access to recipes. Booklet measures approx. 4" x 4". \$7.95





MARGARITAVILLE WINDSOCK

From Windy Creations our colorful windsock measures 60 inches. Margaritaville Store logo embroidered in 18" top. Six bright, colorful streamers measure 42". \$34.00



MARGARITAVILLE BOAT FLAG

With or without a boat, this flag looks great. Boat flag measures 14x20. \$26.00

CARIBBEAN SOUL *Designs from Jimmy Buffett's own Caribbean Soul clothing line.*

New Wrap Design DAY & NIGHT. Artwork you've come to expect from Caribbean Soul. Front of OSFA shirt features day, while night is on reverse. Sleeves also accented. One Size Fits All. White Background only. \$20.00

Front

Back



Caribbean Soul 100% cotton crew neck T's. Size: M,L,XL and XXL. Colors: White, Yellow, Blue, Mint or Beige. \$14.95



DUVAL STREET



MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE

KEEP YOUR PANTS ON! NEW MARGARITAVILLE BELTS

Three different Margaritaville design stitched on 100% cotton webbing backing. Features solid brass buckle and full grain leather tongue. Available in Margaritaville Store, Cheeseburger or Parrot Head designs. Belt comes in 6 sizes, measured in inches; 26-28, 30-32, 34-36, 38-40, 42-44 & 46-48. \$20.00



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From the Margaritaville Store AFTER SIX Collection. Silk/polyester blend with private Margaritaville label. Available in Navy, Burgandy or Silver Grey. \$22.50



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& Western beach-bum persona. And, from the standpoint of ambiance, it may be hard to understand his willingness to trade his home base in Key West for a new address in Music City.

But Buffett has never been a stranger to Nashville. Most of his albums have been recorded, either wholly or in part, in or near the city. And, although he would probably prefer to forget the interlude, he originally set out to make his mark as a country singer in the early 1970's. His first album for the tiny Barnaby Records label, *Down To Earth*, sold a whopping 324 copies, according to the *Rolling Stone Encyclopedia of Rock and Roll*.

Next, Barnaby lost the master tapes to his second album, and shortly thereafter Buffett was looking at Nashville in his rear-view mirror. He wandered down to the Coconut Grove section of Miami and stumbled (the word is not chosen idly) onto singer-songwriter Jerry Jeff Walker, who was the Grove's resident eccentric at the time. Walker, in turn, introduced Buffett to the Land's End mysteries of Key West.

Now, fast forward this movie...another place, another time.

Nearly 20 years later, on May 6 to be precise, Buffett and Walker found themselves face to face once more, on a television soundstage at KLRU. Buffett had flown in with just a guitar and a hanging bag (shades of Castle Creek!) to record an episode of *The Texas Connection*, the cable-TV music program that Walker hosts on The Nashville Network. The pair were joined

THE TRACKS OF HIS LIVE ALBUMS ARE JAMMED WITH THE SORTS OF LONG, SPIRALING SHAGGY DOG STORIES THAT MARK TWAIN, OR LATER-DAY SCRIBES WALKER PERCY AND THOMAS MCGUANE, MIGHT HAVE TOLD.

by Buffett's longtime companero and harmonica sideman, Greg "Fingers" Taylor.

"Jerry Jeff knew all these spots before everybody else," said Buffett, speaking of his introduction to the Florida Keys. "I just kind of followed him around. I'm sure glad we went, because it saved my career. Or I found one... The first time I came to Key West was in mid-November, and it was in the 80's, and everyone was in shorts and riding bicycles."

That reminiscence led Buffett into *I Have Found Me A Home*, a song with a 1973 vintage. Buffett did not have much of the world under his belt at that point, but the song shimmers with luminous imagery as he summed up Key West's soon-come charm: "The days drift by/They don't have names/None of the streets here look the same..." Not even Ernest Hemingway, another Key West exile, could have summed up the place so compactly.

"Key West had a great dichotomy of people, from artists to shrimpers...and all the business was done at a bar," Buffett recalled. "The first night we played, it was a dollar cover charge, and Truman Capote was in the front row. We're in the Shipwreck Lounge and we're famous!"

WHY MARGARITAVILLE RECORDS?



I have been lucky enough to survive through the last twenty years of pop music and still not be considered a dinosaur, and when I decided to ask for a record label, well damn, they gave me one. I guess by doing this some people may get the impression that I know what I am doing. Surviving has been achieved by a combination of hard work, luck and a little talent to boot.

When I was a kid, I had one favorite radio station, WTIX, the mighty 690 that sent its signal from New Orleans along the Mississippi Gulf Coast, across Mobile Bay to find me sitting on the pier listening to my music. Radio is no longer that simple, and I don't profess to know that much about it. I do know that music may be a business, but it is also a very basic human need. It was tribal way before it became commercial. My tribe is a

strange one. They wear feathers, fins, are multi-colored, and have become quite a large flock.

The whole point of having a record label to me is to provide these people with music to fulfill that primal urge; background music for their lifestyle. I feel that the fragmentation of radio has left a lot of people with nothing to listen to but their own collections of tapes, records and CD's. As a consumer, I have yet to find a radio station I can keep on the dial longer than five minutes with the exception of National Public Radio.

I have no desire to try and change the evolution of radio or entertainment. The reason for Margaritaville Records to exist is threefold. First, to provide the faithful Parrot Head listener with some other kinds of music to compliment their Buffett collections. Second, to provide a label that is artist owned and artist oriented for those young and upcoming groups who actually write songs and play instruments, and are willing to make the sacrifices it takes to make it. Third, make a little money and have a little fun. Just remember, in a hundred years, all of this won't matter anyway.



PARTY IN A BOX

The reviews are in. *Boats, Beaches, Bars & Ballads* is a hit.

"While there's no dress code for this set, there is a code of honor in the music. Buffett never cheats a song. A crafty singer and a fastidious songwriter, he knows how to carry a tune - be it with dignity or total tomfoolery - and compose a fine line."

"Some might think the 46 year-old Buffett is just a carefree beachcomber; others a good ole' boy, a Nashville cat. That may be what he wanted us to believe. What becomes evident, listening to Buffett's collected work and reading the accompanying 63-page *Parrot Head Handbook*, is that the music is as much about dreamers, schemers and heroes - *achievers* - as it is about escapists on boats, beaches and in bars."

"In much of his music, steel drums are as prominent as guitars. And calypso, reggae, zouk and socca rhythms sway and percolate, moving like the tides...He incorporated Afro-Caribbean rhythms, arrangements and instrumentation in his music long before the marketing term World Beat was coined. Yet he is just as comfortable as a comedic country crooner or contemplative troubador."

"Viewed collectively, Buffett's songs are about living life on your own terms while still giving a damn about the world around you."

THIS ISSUE OF THE COCONUT TELEGRAPH IS DEDICATED TO CARLOS "DANNY" HERRERA, THE INVENTOR OF THE MARGARITA. MR. HERRERA DIED IN MAY. HE WAS 90 YEARS OLD. THINK ABOUT IT.

EVANGELINE

Excellent But Eclectic

"The self-titled debut of the New Orleans-based band is an impressive mix of country-cajun-rock music highlighted by impassioned harmonies, bouyant fiddles and sparkling guitars and mandolins."

"Though the music covers a range of emotions while exploring various aspects of love, the band's style may be too eclectic for airplay. Perhaps the fact that the five members are women will give radio and television the gimmick they require for airplay and videoplay these days. Gimmicks are not necessary here, however. The musicianship is stellar - the ability to perform live is a prerequisite at Margaritaville Records."

"The band exudes confidence, enthusiasm and joy. Just about everyone sings, creating a lush, sweet vocal sound. The tunes are ear-catching and the production is razor sharp."

"Evangeline has crossed its collective fingers, let its Bayou roots show and made an honest record."



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