

## Memphis Flyer

# Have Dodge, Will Travel

by Andrea Lisle

June 1, 2006

"Local musician Jimmy Davis has been making the most of his time on the road. " I camp out when I'm traveling," Davis says, explaining that after playing a Poplar Bluff, Missouri, club called the Wine Rack last weekend, he pulled his Dodge Caravan into a favorite spot, climbed into his bunk, and communed with Mother Nature. " Only it was raining," he adds with a chuckle, "so I woke up pretty early and drove back to Memphis." Davis is currently touring hard, promoting his latest album, *Campfire Songs*, released on his own Jimmy Daddy's Music label. This Thursday, June 22nd, he'll be appearing at the Hi-Tone Café. In the past year, Davis has logged more than 10,000 miles in his Dodge Caravan, hitting clubs in Texas, Arkansas, Missouri, Illinois, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Virginia. "After a gig," he says, "I like to drive a couple of hours to a favorite campsite or find a new place. My van is rigged with a kitchen in the very back, so it's accessible by opening the tailgate, and my bunk is in the middle. I don't know if it would work with a bunch of musicians, but I love it. I'm getting to do my shows and live the life I sing about." The tracks on *Campfire Songs* -- Davis' second solo acoustic record in two years -- took two decades to complete. " This country is filled with these great stories that aren't in the history books, stuff that's true Americana," Davis says. "I'm always looking for those really cool folk tales that no one's gotten ahold of yet, that oral storytelling tradition that country music is supposed to be about. " Every year, I'd go out alone and come home with another song," he reveals. "I actually wrote 'Tennessee' when I was 19, in Germany on a USO tour, which was my first time away from home. Then I wrote 'Watching the Fire Burn Down' right after that record-company crap. I was trying to redefine myself, and I got a publishing deal and went on a camping trip and came back with that song." The "record-company crap" that Davis is referring to is, of course, the dramatic aftermath of his 1987 major-label debut, the hard-rocking *Kick the Wall*, which was released by MCA. That album -- and its eponymous single -- quickly climbed the pop charts, but stardom proved fleeting. " This is a frustrating business," he notes. "I thought that I really wanted to be a rock star, and when they took that away from me, I didn't know what I was supposed to do. At the time, music wasn't the most important thing -- being a star was. I had to reexamine everything. My calling is music. I started playing when I was 9 years old. I learned that there's more to life than being a rock star." In a bid to reclaim his equilibrium, Davis gravitated toward the music he first learned to play -- simple, storytelling songs by country stalwarts Johnny Cash and Tom T. Hall. In 1990, he entered Sounds Unreel recording studio with Jim Dickinson and cut "Folsom Prison Blues" with mandolin and banjo. "Nobody got it," he says with a wry grin, "and they thought I'd lost my mind. But I was happy. I got off on the music, and it turned me back around." With *Campfire Songs* to promote, and his new duty as trustee for the local chapter of the Recording Academy to fulfill, Davis has plenty to contend with, so he's enlisted Andria Cline of Skinny River Productions, who is booking him along with local singer-songwriters Cory Branan and Blair Combest. " I like being independent," he says, "but I don't like doing all this other crap -- being a booking agent, a record label, and a publishing company. I understand the business, but it takes so much away from my creative side. " If my life had gone the way I'd expected, I'd be retired by now," Davis notes. "I wouldn't be a road dog. But I'm really happy. I like it."

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