

RSVP - "Street Seen"

Traveling Troubadour

by Amanda Dent
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"An old Ovation guitar sits propped up in Jimmy Davis' office. It's a little scuffed and worn, but sound resonates just as clearly as it did more than 20 years ago when he bought it as a teen. " That guitar's been all over the world," Davis says. And both he and his guitar have plenty of fascinating stories to tell of their travels. When he was just 19 years old, Davis was playing a USO tour that landed him in a German border town, performing for U.S. soldiers. "There were short range nuclear weapons," he says nonchalantly. "They were 19; we were 19. Except that they were holding guns and we were holding guitars." Now he limits his travels to slightly less hostile environments. The Memphis native plays coffee houses and festivals around the country, where he camps out, whether it be in the woods or in someone's yard. " It's not a gimmick," he says. "It's something I actually love to do. I think if you're in bars and hotels constantly, it can get mundane. My van is like one big covered wagon." The avid outdoorsman uses nature as his muse. Songs on his recent self-produce solo album, "Campfire Songs," are just that, with many tunes telling a story reaped from a personal experience camping or kayaking. The album is country, but Davis has dabbled in rock, bluegrass and pop styles. He's a versatile, sought-after vocalist and songwriter, having loaned his pipes to artists such as the North Mississippi Allstars, Reba Russell, Johnny Lang, Jim Dickinson and Keith Sykes. Davis has penned songs for country icon Martina McBride and Memphis songstress Amy Lavere, along with many others. Lately, he's tried his hand at producing, most recently for local, up-and-coming band Giant Bear. It's been an evolution from the days in the late '80s when Jimmy Davis & Junction were MTV darlings with the rock hit "Kick the Wall." He later reformed the River Bluff Clan with fellow Junction guitarist Tommy Burroughs. " I like it all," Davis says of his musical taste. "It's one fo the things I liked about the River Bluff Clan: We weren't limited. We played our bluegrass with a rock sensibility." Tinges of Davis' talents can be found in facets of the Memphis music scene, whether in one of his side projects or his work as a trustee with the Memphis chapter of the Recording Academy. "Memphis, you can't really define," he says of the music community. "It's kind of a birthright to mix it up." And although Davis' music takes him to a wealth of destinations, all trails lead that covered wagon back to Memphis.

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