

PRINE, from page 10

business. In fact, Fiona's got me working harder than ever!"

"For Better, Or Worse" boasts its share of CMA Female Vocalists of the Year with Krauss, Miranda Lambert, Kathy Mattea and Lee Ann Womack. It also includes Grammy winner Kacey Musgraves, critics' faves Holly Williams, Morgane Stapleton and the lovely Fiona Prine.

"When this started, Fiona and Jody told me I was doing the fourth side of 'In Spite of Ourselves' for vinyl, so I did five songs," Prine confides. "And then they said, 'If you do another nine, we're going to make it its own release.' How do you argue with that thinking?"

Prine has always been sympatico with women. Whether it's the past her prime barfly looking for love in "The Oldest Baby in the World," the heroine of "Angel from Montgomery" or the heavy girl with the oddball beau in "Donald & Lydia," he tempers his vision of those slightly broken females with kindness, awareness and a strong dose of empathy.

"Life's that way, and who's to say?" Prine says of the women in his songs. "(Angel)'s husband wasn't abusive to her, he just didn't talk much or pay her any attention, and it quietly drove her crazy – and back then people didn't want to get divorced because of the kids or the stigma.

"I always thought I was writing more observations, anyway. The songs were the way people lived, how it looked to me, felt to me, smelled. And a lot of these songs, too, are about relationships, not so much man and woman, but more man to man or person

to person."

Discovered by Kris Kristofferson, when Prine's best friend Steve Goodman opened for him, the soon-to-be-movie star flew the pair of Chicago folkies to New York where they signed to big-time record deals. Looking back, Prine marvels at how quickly he went from invisible mailman to being proclaimed "the new Dylan," losing his ability to observe unnoticed.

Still, he's done OK. Twenty albums – not including retrospectives – later, Prine remains a teller of truths and an impaler of, well, jerks. Getting ready to meet a friend at the Golden Cue for happy hour – "What happier place is there? All that neon

just brings out the lies in people," he says of the soon-to-be-closed billiards parlor in the Melrose neighborhood. He talks politics tempered with common sense.

"I don't want to pick on one person," Prine says. "I like to let people draw their own conclusions. Part of what the listener gets from the songs – that's part of the song, what they bring to it. And I never want to hit people over the head, but maybe give them something they've seen before, maybe in different colors or another way. When you do that, they might see things

differently."

Pausing, his voice drops a little. While ever a gentleman, that doesn't mean he's wide-eyed and believes all people's intentions mirror his. "I'm opinionated as anybody. I see people and envision what their life is like. I might be totally wrong, but as a writer, I try to come up with a good story. Raw imagination and good instincts might surprise you."

He certainly wouldn't have imagined playing the 100th Anniversary of the National Parks at the Grand Canyon with Emmylou Harris and President Obama. Nor would he have envisioned "In Spite of Ourselves" being the song that reunited

Miss Piggy and Kermit the Frog.

"Loads of people write me letters they got married to that song," he says about the song that paints relationships in teeny, but exceedingly accurate detail. "But Kermit and Miss Piggy? It was the first time they talked together in over a year! They had to change a few words, but they sang it – and it brought them together."

With a gleam in his eye, Prine confides, "People say Jack White did it, hanging with Kermit and talking about women. But I know it was the song that broke the ice."

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Merriment is something Prine cherishes. After three bouts with cancer, he takes every moment seriously. Wherever he is, he hopes to find the best part of it – and he also believes that to honor being alive, one must be true to the world around them, leave it a better place.

The craggy-voiced songwriter with a proclivity for old time music with bluegrass undertones has done charity shows for Room in The Inn, Thistle Farms and Campaign for a Landmine Free World.

Without missing a beat, he offers a perspective that has its dignity in place. "I know homeless people aren't bums, Holly. They all got screwed out of something, ended up on the streets because of the times we live in – and nobody wants to talk about that part.

"That's kind of why I wrote 'Come Back To Us, Barbara Lewis (Hare Krishna Beauregard).' She probably came from wealth of some kind, ran off to be a hippie, joined a religious cult, got married. She tried so many things, she forgot what she was looking for. It happens. It just does."

Happy hour is drawing even nearer, and Prine has people to meet and eight ball to shoot. He's already started writing new songs – "the regular records aren't nearly as fun," he concedes – and thinking about what kind of solo project he might make. Through all the tough times, challenges and losses, he's managed to maintain some grace; it seems in many ways as if he's never been happier. But that doesn't mean he's lost sight of the thread.

Courtesy of Street Roots' sister paper, The Contributor, Nashville, Tenn. / INSP.ngo

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