

# SAVE THE MUSIC

BY ALEX NOTMAN

## THE WAYNE DRURY PROJECT BRINGS MODERN-DAY FOLK SONG REVIVAL TO EUGENE

**S**aturday, Nov. 3, at the Axe and Fiddle was an event 40 years in the making. Hundreds of people filled the pub, occupying every table, lining the staircase overlooking the stage and some even finding spots on the wood floor. Hundreds of faces basked in the glow of flickering tea lights gaze upon the stage as a soft voice filled the cavernous space. Wayne Drury, squeezing his blue eyes shut, leans forward in his wheelchair to the mic as he sings “Cimarron Rose” over the strumming of his former band mates, Rob Anderson on guitar and Randy Crawford on banjo. It is the first time the three men, members of the alt-country band Jackdaw, have been together in the same room since 1972, let alone shared a stage. The last wisps of the outlaw tune leave Drury’s lips and the crowd jumps to their feet in a raucous standing ovation. A woman in the crowd cries out, “Bob Dylan’s got nothing on you,” over the hooting and hollering. This is the Wayne Drury Project and Wayne Drury is the folk hero you have never heard of.

The Wayne Drury Project is not a band, nor is it just an event; it is a full-blown modern-day folk song revival. Nov. 3 was one of a series of shows that the collaboration of musicians known as the Wayne Drury Project will perform in order to save the nearly-forgotten music of Drury, an alt-country musician before there were alt-country musicians, who, after being diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in the ’70s, followed later by a stroke and the removal of a kidney, has struggled to keep playing the private folk canon he created. The canon is filled with catchy and haunting melodies guided by Drury’s silvery Neil Diamond-esque voice, and peppered with plenty of twang, folk and rock ‘n’ roll to nest it firmly in the now-recognized genre. Local musician Gregg Vollstedt (lap steel guitar and vocals for Whopner County Country All-Stars, lap steel guitar for The Whiskey Chasers), who has been greatly influenced by Drury’s music, has spent the last year herding musicians from around the country (the

count at press time was 19) and running practices for a project that culminates with a show Nov. 10 at the WOW Hall — the old stomping grounds of Drury and Jackdaw. The story of the Project doesn’t begin in Eugene; it unfolds somewhere in between London and New York City and Oregon across a span of 65 years.

### LAST COWBOY IN PARIS

Around the turn of the millennium, Rob Anderson was stumbling around his flat’s attic in London when he came across some old Jackdaw LPs — the LPs that he and Drury had recorded over 30 years ago when they snuck into Raspberry Records at the former Oakway Mall (now Oakway Center). Anderson knew the sound engineer who agreed to let them in one night (without the owner’s knowledge) and record in the 16-track studio, where they laid down the tracks “Cimarron Rose,” “Gas Station Girl,” “New York Central Line,” “Separate Ways,” “Country Song” and “Step Right Over.” He listened to the LPs and an idea struck him — he had to revive the music. Anderson

only had infrequent contact with Drury since hopping the Atlantic in 1989, first to Paris and then to London. Drury had visited Anderson once in Paris, after which he wrote the song “Last Cowboy in Paris” about his friend.

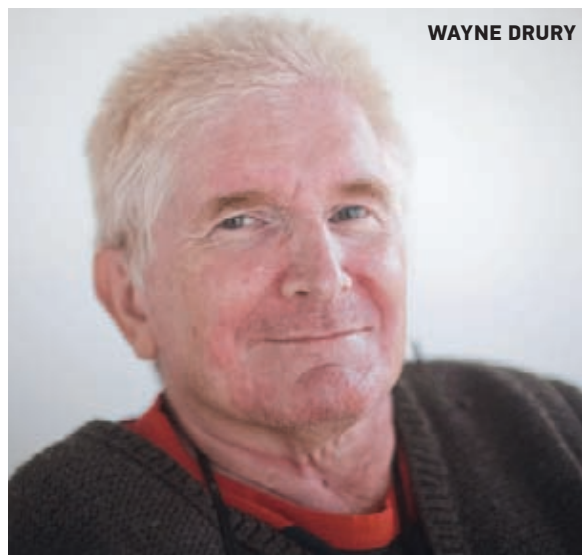
“I contacted Wayne and asked if anything had happened with the songs. Wayne said nothing had been done,” says Anderson, over the phone from London. In the three decades that had passed since that night at Raspberry Records, Drury had been diagnosed with MS, followed by a stroke, which made both speaking and holding a guitar problematic. “I realized if I didn’t do something with them, they would just evaporate.”

Anderson got to work and rallied his own group of musicians, including English folk music legend Wizz Jones and the Spokane-based folk singer-songwriter Laddie Ray Melvin (who flew to London from Washington for the project), none of whom knew or knew of Drury, to shake the cobwebs from his tunes and perform them at heritage folk venues like The Troubadour, Wizz’s Sitting Room and The Ivy House. “It was just magical the way it happened,” he says. “It was driven completely by the belief that the songs were worth saving.” Each gig they played had a larger audience as word got out around old London Town. “Everyone that came responded incredibly to the music, a number of people that came up afterwards were in tears,” Anderson says.

Before long Vollstedt, who went to see Jackdaw perform as a teenager and later would join the band Chicory with Anderson, caught wind of the London-based project and decided that something needed to be done closer to Eugene, closer to Drury.

### COUNTRY SONG

“Alt-country?” Drury says, sitting upright in his bed at the Coast Fork Nursing Center in Cottage Grove. “What the hell is that?” Vollstedt and the project’s public relations representative, Kaitlin Anderson, sit in folding chairs on either side of the bed, laughing. A collage of the past and



WAYNE DRURY