

COVER STORY

CITY LIFE

ARTS

MUSIC

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COLUMNISTS

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Features

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## Not Your Average Kitty

by Ernie, Paik

May 23, 2018

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Former Chattanooga Big Kitty makes a strong musical mark

Big Kitty is a lot of things, simultaneously—it's an easygoing calico cat, a fearless feline guardian and the reincarnation of bluesman Blind Willie Johnson.

This mythical kitty is also the imaginative musical outlet of Clark Williams, whose strange, secret world of nature involves a bevy of odd organisms including singing ferns, winged insects with human faces and a giant mouse named Jesus.

A former Chattanooga who relocated to Sebastopol, Calif. a few years ago, Williams established himself locally both as a unique songwriter with vivid songs that tell unusual folk tales with elements of fantasy and also a charming performer in either a solo or band configuration, singing with his distinctively warm and reedy voice.

While nature often imbues Williams' songwriting, it is a more complicated subject for him than one might realize, and he took the time to answer a few questions for The Pulse in advance of two Chattanooga shows on May 25 at Frequency Arts and JJ's Bohemia.

"I think the common dichotomy of nature/civilization is useful but ultimately misleading," said Williams. "It's common to think of fragile nature and robust industrial civilization. In a localized way it's true, but in a universal way, industry for all its might is just one tendril of nature.

"I'm very against the expansion of the industrial-technological realm and believe it's misguided but take comfort in knowing that it is ultimately weak and won't last," said Williams. "It may mean the destruction of humans, but that's alright, life will go on.

"This mystery of life in all forms is a beautiful play of dark and light, so much grander and more complex than is conceivable, and yet it is what we know best, because that is what we are," said Williams. "Our ability to understand nature in this universal sense by means of language is limited by its structure, and our culture makes it hard on people to use their imagination and to feel connection with nature."

This is where music comes in, articulating parts of life and nature in ways that no other expression can.

"Songs are a very humble way of twisting language around and adding tonality in order to express different stuff that would be unreachable otherwise," said Williams. "Yet this unreachable stuff is literally the stuff of life—it gives access to the 99% of existence that is invisible to us because we are juggling working and raising families and need to be liked and understood by our friends and families.

"Songs are acceptable and people know what songs are, but they're radical visions of the vast mystery of life, that we can feel but can't describe, can't touch, that we cut ourselves off from in order to work and fulfill our responsibility," said Williams. "A song gets to it in a wiggly worm kind of tiny way.

"Living in northern coastal California has been wonderful because the natural world is novel and extraordinarily beautiful—the Pacific Ocean in particular," said Williams, who moved with his wife Yuriko Hoshino—an artist and occasional Big Kitty performer—and his daughter. "I also spent a few weeks in Guatemala studying Spanish and was awed by the intense natural beauty of Central America.

"Tennessee and the Southeast are also extremely beautiful," said Williams. "But it's been good for me to experience other manifestations of nature because I can see them without the veil of nostalgia that I see both Appalachia and the deep South through."

Among Big Kitty's musical highlights within the last year have been the release of two albums—Excelsior Breeze Catchers and ...A Legend in the Field of Entertainment—and a month-long tour.

Williams has also been performing a blend of originals, country, Hawaiian and Latin American music with a group in Sonoma County with upright bass and pedal steel guitar, and he unveiled a new nightclub-

style act that combines songs with monologues and dancing at the Imaginists’ theater in Santa Rosa earlier this year.

“That show or parts of it is what I’m going to do at JJ’s [Bohemia]. I’m also playing at Frequency Arts that same night for Billy Joe [Johnson’s] photography show at Frequency Arts, and for that one I will play guitar and sing,” said Williams. “This tour is really special because I’m doing it with my real life brother, William Lee, whose stage name is Blind Will See.”

What’s next for Big Kitty? “The family and I are moving to Spain in just a couple of months,” said Williams. “I don’t know what lies ahead but surely it is more music!”

by Ernie, Paik  
May 23, 2018

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Friday

November 30, 2018

MARKETS

Chattanooga Market at Erlanger

Nov 30, 2018 10:30 AM

Erlanger Hospital

**ART & EXHIBITIONS**

**Our Neighbors - A Photo Exhibition of Highland Park and Ridgedale**

Nov 30, 2018 4:30 PM - 7:30 PM

Amani Chattanooga

**CONCERTS & LIVE MUSIC**

**Binji Varsossa**

Nov 30, 2018 6:00 PM

Cancun Restaurant Downtown

**THIS & THAT**

**Ice on the Landing**

Nov 30, 2018 6:00 PM

Chattanooga Choo Choo

**CONCERTS & LIVE MUSIC**

**Gino Fanelli**

Nov 30, 2018 6:30 PM

Westin Dorato Bar

**CONCERTS & LIVE MUSIC**

**John Carroll**

Nov 30, 2018 6:30 PM

Westin Alchemy Bar

**THIS & THAT**

**No Shave November Finale**

Nov 30, 2018 6:30 PM

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