

Billy Kemp



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From the Land of Pleasant Living, Baltimore native Billy Kemp is a song and music maker. He is a multi-instrumentalist but is best known for his tasteful, inventive guitar playing.

Billy first made points in the Baltimore area by forming the Paradise Pickers in 1977, a hybrid of country and rock which released one record in 1980. From the outset, Billy swung between the Willies—Nelson and Dixon—hitting an upbeat two-step for one song and hammering down a classic Chicago backbeat the next.

During the '80s Billy followed his heart and went to Nashville, where he made it to the stage of the Grand Ole Opry. While based in Music City, he toured internationally with Tommy Overstreet, Terri Gibbs and Bandana and performed locally with Opry member Jeanne Pruett at the mother church of Country Music.

Billy returned to Maryland in 1988 and released one album with the reformed Paradise Rockers before landing the spot as lead guitarist for renegade rock-n-roller Tommy Conwell and the Young Rumlbers in 1990.

During the '90s Billy went back to school and earned a music degree from the University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC). He composed and recorded music for Maryland Public Television, worked as a music facilitator at the Baltimore City Detention Center, taught as adjunct faculty at UMBC and produced numerous CDs for regional artists in the Baltimore/DC area. He also recorded and released two CDs on his own label, Willbilly Records.

In 2000 Billy formed a new roots-rock ensemble, Willbilly—his nickname in high school because of his love for country, blues and folk music. He also expanded his role as a producer and studio-owner, establishing a successful recording facility in a barn in rural Maryland, as well as continuing his teaching work at UMBC.

From 2005 through 2016 Billy was half of the Appalachian Folk duo Jeni and Billy, which toured extensively in the US, Canada and the U.K. and released seven CDs.

Billy released solo recordings, *Another Life* in 2017, *The Painter's Bucket* in 2018, *The Craig Demos* in 2020 and his latest, *Onions, Old Movies & You* in 2023. He has toured in the US and Britain as a solo artist, performing concerts that include songs from his recent solo releases, as well as selections from a rich and extensive back-catalogue. From Lone Star country to urban shuffles and Appalachian waltzes, Billy remains a songwriter with a love of story.

"About Billy Kemp, I think he his quite good. He reminds me of some Austin type songwriters; also a cross between Leroy Preston and Loudon Wainwright both excellent writers. He's better than 90% of the music I receive." - Roseanne Cash

"An amiable and entertaining performer, Billy had the audience in the palm of his hand from the moment he stepped on stage. His stories and the background to his songs were both humorous and enthralling." -Alan Cackett, former editor, Maverick Magazine UK

"Literate songs in a country blues manner. A collection of down-to-earth tales punctuated by vivid lyrics and crisp guitar work." - Dirty Linen

"Billy Kemp, a gifted multi-instrumentalist with an impressive list of studio and road credentials frames these songs with austere and subtle acoustic arrangements built on various combinations of guitar, banjo, bass, mandolin and harmonica." Bob Allen, Bluegrass Unlimited, USA

"Billy Kemp plays originals with roots in rock and country. If his material recalls all-American artists from Buddy Holly to Bob Seger, what puts it over is the conviction and passion of Kemp's delivery." Joe Sasfy, Washington Post, USA

"Billy Kemp doesn't overplay but makes every note count. His ability to fill holes and use a chord to its utmost effect is what perks up the ears. If you're a fan of Robbie Robertson or Amos Garrett you'll love his touch." Peter North, The Sun, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada