

OUTBACK IN OBERSTAMMHEIM... DON RICARDO'S REPORT FROM THE HIGH RHINE... MAY 2016

I went to see a show last Saturday where a man was playing I knew only from a book my old friend, John Lomax III had written. Bill Chambers made a living and raised his family out in the farthest Australian Outback by shooting foxes. In the off times they entertained themselves playing music. From this came a family group called the Dead Ringer Band. Lomax became the group's manager for a number of years. From that group Bill's daughter, Kasey Chambers went on to become an international Americana star. (Great read: *Red Desert Skies*, Allen & Unwin, Australia, 2001).

When I heard that Bill Chambers was coming to playing the Alabama Steakhouse just down the road in Oberstammheim, I knew I had to go. I knew he had a solid reputation as a songwriter and guitarist. I had never heard his music, but I suspected a guy who could nail foxes in the head from two-hundred yards out would be spot-on in his music as well. My neighbor and bass playing friend Hans Ruedi Brandenberger picked me up and we rode over to the club together to check out the action.

They gave us a larruping good show. Bill had brought along a couple of young musicians, a guitarist and a drummer, both barely in their twenties who opened. Then Bill came on, playing a couple of acoustic songs by himself. "We lost a great friend in the music last week," he mused at one point, and I thought he might follow with a Guy Clark song; but the remark floated away and I didn't think anybody else in the room noticed. Then the young guys came up. I think they play in daughter Kasey Chamber's band. The guitarist reminded me of the late Eddie Shaver, Billy Joe's son, when he was tearing it up. For the final part of the show they were joined by members of the Shitkickers, a Swiss Band on bass, banjo-mandolin, and accordion. "A shitkicker is a cowboy," I explained to Hans-Ruedi. They were kicking ass too. Switching between acoustic, electric, and lap steel guitar, Bill rocked as hard as the youngsters. I didn't see any line dancers in the crowd, so maybe it wasn't country music. Some people feel uncomfortable with music that defies easy categorization, but I saw only smiling faces.

I got to talk with Bill for a few minutes before they started. I wished there had been more time, because he seemed exactly the sort of guy you'd want to sit down and drink a few beers with. We exchanged CDs. I gave his a copy of *Gulf Coast Tales*, the record we made in Texas in 2013 with the print of the ship Julie Sola carved. I knew that Bill had also worked as a commercial fisherman. Sure enough, when he gave me a copy of his new CD, it had a picture of a boat on the cover. I'm ever partial to albums and CDs—and bottles of wine and whisky—with a ship on the cover. From Guy Clark, RIP, to Cutty Sark.

The threads of this story seem so happenstance and random, it's hard to make sense of it, except perhaps to marvel how music gets around. More like a jam towards the end, things became a little chaotic, and threatened to spin out once or twice. Not your normal cover fare, the last three songs they performed were "Did You Ever See Dallas," written by Jimmie Dale Gilmore; "Who's Gonna Build Your Wall?" by Tom Russell, and "Copperhead Road," by Steve Earle. I believe those gentlemen would have been pleased.

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In other news I've been adding late edits to *All of this was Mine*, my novel-in-progress. As I've mentioned here before, I've decided to see if I can attract the interest from a professional agent or publisher this time around. In pursuit of this I've been working to refine the story down to a few lines, reduce it to minimal perfection. Shorter than a synopsis, or even a query, the next step would be to winnow it down to a single sentence. A line log that's called, a summary that states the central conflict of the story, providing synopsis and emotional hook; like a dry fly, well-tied and presented, to lure a wary trout.

I don't know if people go to websites these days. Visitors to mine will find our Texas gigs from early spring are still up there. I understand this is unprofessional, but I'm waiting on a couple of confirmations before I post a new schedule. Meanwhile, for our Swiss friends in the area, we have a gig coming up here in Diessenhofen, next Saturday at the Leue. A trio show with Hans-Ruedi, and Peter Uehlinger on guitar; Hauptstrasse, starting time about eight o'clock. www.leue-event.ch ... Come early and take a walk around this cool old town.

Richard J. Dobson

Diessenhofen am Rhein, 30 May 2016

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