

6,713.8 Miles of PK Gregory

BY HANK ERWIN

“I almost got punched in the face over ‘Folsom Prison Blues,’” PK Gregory tells me one beautiful Jerome morning on the patio of the **Flatiron**. Several years ago, a drunken patron at a local bar asked PK to play the notorious Johnny Cash tune. PK had just played the song but told the man he’d play it again later. Later didn’t come soon enough and an exchange of words nearly resulted in a brawl between the belligerent requestor and PK’s drummer.

“My drummer — he was crazy. He was picking up the snare drum very slowly, I could see him out of the corner of my eye. I knew he was going to beat that guy to a pulp. So I said, ‘Hey man, don’t worry about it. I’ll play ‘Folsom Prison Blues’ again.’ That was about the time I decided I was going to phase out doing any covers at all.”

For the record, PK preferred obscure covers. “You know that Fiona Apple song, ‘Criminal’? That was fun to do just so I could sing the line ‘I’ve been a bad, bad girl’ and see who looked up from their beer.”

Playing all original songs has done PK well. Having recently returned home to Cottonwood after a month-long tour, he logged 6,713.8 miles over 32 days. “I needed to get out of town and spread myself around. I was hoping to make some new contacts, play for some new people, garner some new fans, and I did all that.

“Places like the **Phoenix Saloon** (New Braunfels, Texas), which were legitimate music venues, were probably the best in terms of making contacts and getting everyone real into it. The place was really big and it was packed. The other most rewarding shows were house concerts. The whole idea is that people pay a cover, sit down, there’s a little stage, and you listen — everybody shuts up and listens. It’s awesome because I can get into a conversation with the people and if we really click, there’s a creative aspect that’s just really gratifying.”

With the help of Facebook, PK was able to couch surf with several old friends across the country, one of which he hadn’t seen since eighth grade. He only had to pay for one hotel room. “Every step along the way people took care of me, feeding me and giving me a place to sleep, coming to my shows, buying my CDs ... It was both gratifying and humbling, gotta say.”

PK’s vast connections are partly due to his upbringing. Born in Anchorage, Alaska, his family moved to Texas when he was a year old, then to a farm in Oklahoma, where his father woke him early in the morning before elementary school to plow the fields with a tractor. From there, they moved to Stavanger, Norway. When he was 14, he wrote his first couple of songs and got hooked. He began to wonder if he could do it for a living even though he knew his father wouldn’t approve.

He struggled in the restaurant and wine business for 20 years. “I was a good front of house person, good wine seller, knowledgeable about food ... but ‘there’s no pain like being good at something that you hate.’” Working at **Dahl & DiLuca** in Sedona is where PK met his wife, Erin, 11 years ago. “Erin has been my biggest supporter with music. I don’t think I could have done any of this without her support. I think it was our second date, she said, ‘Alright so you’re a songwriter, play me a song.’ She was from a large family of musicians, which made her a good judge. So I played her one song and she said, ‘You need to quit your job.’”

The couple moved to Oregon where PK flipped houses until the market collapsed in 2008. “We ended up coming back here because of a little piece of property I own in Cottonwood, I wanted to save it from the bank. I lost the house in Oregon, lost everything, I was pretty much financially ruined, so I went back into the restaurant business.” It lasted three months. He’d call Erin from work, having panic attacks. “She’d say, ‘Quit your job and just start booking some gigs.’” The first gig he played in the Verde Valley was in 2011 at **Arizona Stronghold** in Cottonwood.

PK employs a bass drum with a kick pedal using his left foot, and a snare drum with a kick pedal using his right foot. He plays his guitar completely right-handed even though he’s a southpaw. Singing and playing harmonica to boot, PK is a four-piece one-man-band. “Geddy Lee singing, playing bass, keyboards, and moog foot pedals inspired me to develop my foot percussion, harmonica, and guitar thing.” Earlier influences were roots Americana.



“The first thing I really remember sticking in my head was Eddie Arnold’s album *Cattle Call*. My parents had it on vinyl. I sat with the giant headphones with the coiled chord. This was very simple guitar accompaniment to old cowboy songs, like Sons of the Pioneers stuff. I still put my daughter to sleep singing his songs.”

PK’s last album, *Four Chords and a Damn Lie*, was recorded at home. “It’s about capturing the performance, not about how expensive the equipment is. Sometimes there’s nothing better than a perfect three-chord song ... simple lyrics, catchy melody, and it just sticks in your head. *Four Chords and a Damn Lie* was my way of saying I love a perfect 3-chord song but I also love a perfect 13-chord song.”

What’s next? “I have to plan the next tour, I have to record a new record, I have to step it forward, or else I wind up falling back. You gotta keep pushing the peanut. I have to figure out how to tour without leaving my family for so long.” PK and Erin have two children, River (nine) and Zevon (one). “Either shorter runs, or they come with me. I’d love to get a new album out this fall and hopefully another tour in the spring. I don’t do this for the money but the money enables me to do it.” PKGregory.com 🐦