

"I love playing music.
That's it. It's that simple."

TIM BARRY

The James River meanders through rural Virginia, and situated by its highest navigable point is the city of Richmond. It's on these shores, and in a quiet neighborhood nearby called Oregon Hill, that a simple man with a simple motto sits on a rickety wooden porch, guitar in hand and dog by his side. That motto is, "Ride fast, live slow," and the man is Tim Barry.

Many know Barry as the leader of seminal Richmond hardcore/punk band Avail. We see the rage, the angst, and the intensity in Avail's music, and at near-riotous live shows. Those that are really paying attention, however, also hear the vulnerability and sensitivity peering through the sonic barrage, exposed and naked for all to see. "Have you ever been kicked when you're already down?" asks Barry on "Taken," a track from 2000's *One Wrench*.

Avail have always been a band who embrace their humanity just as much as their fury. Barry is largely responsible for this, for reasons beyond him penning the majority of Avail's songs.

His friends say Barry will do anything for the people around him. His shirt-off-his-back nature shines through his rough, tattooed exterior. Recently, Barry graciously opened up his home to us, giving us beds to sleep in, one of which was his.

We quickly find out he loves talking about his friends and hanging out with them. He tells us about his friend, Christina, and her furniture design that consists of materials collected from junk yards and train yards; Tasha, who is a sculptor; his friend Travis and his photography; or Justin, a dancer at the Richmond Ballet where Barry frequently works when he is not on the

road or working on music.

And it's this eclectic group of friends and family, the railroad lines that crisscross the formerly industrial face of Richmond, and the James River that inspire much of Barry's music. It is apparent in Avail's lyrics, and those same influences come through in the solo work he has undertaken in the past year. He released a demo in 2005, on which he was largely unaccompanied, and has just finished recording a full-length album.

"I did the demo on a whim... just recorded it for myself and some friends," recalls Barry of the eight-song release that began as CDRs he produced and distributed himself. But the recording, which was originally an afterthought for Barry that he posted on Avail's website, quickly gained attention. He humbly admits, "I've always underestimated Avail and honestly didn't think too many people went to that website, but within a week I had 50 orders, and I was like, 'Oh shit, I don't even have a computer!'"

Word began to spread and it was not long before labels were offering to package and distribute the disc on a larger scale. Barry resisted, though. "I was getting offers... and I'd said no to all of them because I didn't really want it to get out that big. And then a German label [Dancing in the Dark Records] offered to put it out, and I thought, 'Cool, I'll do a European-only release and sell some here,' and that's how it ended up coming out. But it was really because I didn't have the time or energy to be burning CD-Rs and sending them to people."

The demo, dubbed *Laurel St. Demo 2005*, is



a totally new avenue for fans of Avail. It is an acoustic-driven, southern-fried mix of country, rock, bluegrass, folk, and blues. Some Avail purists might be in for a shock, but surely some will find it refreshing. And there will certainly be detractors who believe Barry is just riding the trend of punks softening and going folk.

"My buddy was telling me the other night about the bandwagon of dudes in punk bands doing solo projects now. I didn't really know that was going on, but I put a lot of effort in this and I hope people take it serious and know it's not just Tim from Avail making a solo thing to kill time or some shit. I'm not criticizing anyone else; I don't know what anyone else is doing. But I actually mean it. I love music. That's it. It's that simple."

It's plain to see, judging from the candor of lyrics like, "I was high on cocaine, I was down on luck, was swimming laps in whiskey, and I could feel you catching up," from "Gumshoe Andy." And you can tell he feels it in the desperation of lines like, "And I miss you so much I die at sunrise," from "Sorrow Floats," and, "But it was never home, home's just a distraction I invent when I can't make rent," from "No News from North."

The honesty continues on the new record, slated for release sometime this fall on Suburban Home Records. It is tentatively entitled

[Photos by Jordana Stura]

Rivanna Junction, a spot on the main line railroad track Barry took us, where we shared beers and whiskey with his friends by the James, then swam and chilled by a campfire in the southern summer heat. "The reason I'm calling it that is I think that's where I wrote all the songs."

This time Barry made it a family affair. Literally. His sister joins him on violin and his brother adds piano. There are also appearances by his friends on guitar, dobro, and drums, and some "old country dudes" like Billy Lux, a notable local Richmond upright bass player. "I just did it differently with the anticipation that I was actually making a record that I wanted to listen from beginning to end. It's fun to collaborate with other people; write the songs and have them play their proper instruments and allow me to just sing the songs."

Only one song from *Laurel St.*, "Church of Level Track," made it to the new record. The rest are a diverse bunch of songs, ranging from straight-up bluegrass tunes, to rambling country songs, mixed with a few tracks that include

minimal instrumentation and Barry's aching and weary voice.

He laments, "My, my, what a beautiful lie," of the changes he's seen in Richmond. He sings outlaw songs of a battered sister and the man responsible shot dead, of chasing trains and sleeping in the woods and drinking whiskey. "I'm very honest, when you listen to the lyrics. I do a lot more storytelling. A lot of the stuff is more journal entry-esque."

The music is reminiscent of Johnny Cash and Woody Guthrie, Bruce Springsteen and Willie Nelson. Even so it holds a distinctly Tim Barry stamp. It spits venom and swallows tears.

And he doesn't plan on stopping there. When asked if this solo record was a one-shot deal, he vehemently replies, "The solo stuff, no. There's no way. We just finished the record and I'm already writing new songs. And we're writing a new Avail record. People are supposed to grow out of that kind of music, like it should be phase. But somehow we're lucky and people still come to our shows and have fun, and we still have fun."

But with Avail's touring schedule much less demanding now, Barry has been burning the candle at both ends, touring with the band and then doing some solo dates. "Avail is not as busy as we used to be. It's kind of fun to focus on something different for a while, too. Everybody does their own thing. We're supportive of each other, period."

Often the idea of a solo project connotes the end of a band or the mid-band-life crisis of one of its members. Not the case with Avail and Barry. It's simply a labor of love. "I've been listening to folk music and all kinds of music for so long. I've always made it and tried to play other people's songs. So I'll do it forever."

Thanks for the southern hospitality, Tim.

For more info, go to: timbarryrva.com

Links for other good peeps in Richmond:
travisconner.com
minimumwagerecording.com
christinastratman.com

