

David Wilcox: 'Like a conversation with a friend'

David Wilcox's songs travel.

Like a drive across America in an Airstream trailer; they offer up fascinating new places and ideas, along with time to drink in their meaning. That's no coincidence, by the way: the highly regarded singer-songwriter recently returned from two years of traveling with his wife and son in an Airstream trailer.

"I thought, these songs were conceived and born in the trailer, why not record them there?" Wilcox said not long ago from his Asheville, N.C. home. Once we were home, we brought all the studio gear out into the Airstream and it sounded great.

At his personal half-century mark, Wilcox offers a thoughtful musical perspective informed by more than two decades of touring. Even during time spent traveling with wife Nance and son Nate in their shiny, vintage-appeal trailer, the in-demand performer broke off for periodic live shows. With this, his 13th album, he again delivers what his audiences want: music that connects with their hearts and souls, while opening new doors of experience.

"There are people that expect a lot from music," he said. "It's like a conversation with a friend where you get reminded of you who are; it wakes up what's best in your heart."

A native of Ohio, Wilcox has based his career out of the South since the 1980s, when he emerged as a live performer in North Carolina and won the music industry's attention in Nashville. After getting a taste of the major-label ride on A&M for three releases, he then recorded for other labels like Vanguard, and now he's releasing *Airstream*, his fourth CD on the Colorado-based independent, What Are Records? There's more than ever to sing about for Wilcox these days.

"I think this music could serve a lot of people", he said, "But over the years I've made my peace that my job is the depth of experience, not how far it spreads."

Airstream makes its distinctive musical and lyrical points with a range of contemporary styles, from folk balladry to acoustic soul and reggae. All could easily have inspired full-scale arrangements, but Wilcox chose to make a recording as intimate as his one-man shows - just his versatile baritone and agile guitar work.

"We decided to make this a voice-and-guitar record; even beautiful harmonies didn't make it to the mix," he said. "The simple arrangements just worked best for this batch of songs."

The ability to perform solo makes possible appearances such as a recent, last-minute trip to Africa, where Wilcox performed in Sudan at the country's first national day of prayer. Concern about national and international crises led to songs such as 'Three Brothers', a moving, allegory of Middle East turmoil; 'Reaper Sweepstakes', about the universal marketing of fear; and 'Falling for It', a biting satire of political deception.

"I was playing at the Birchmere and stuck it in the middle of the set", Wilcox said of 'Falling for It'. "But people stood up and applauded. They stood up and stayed up and kept applauding. It got to the point that, 'OK, I get it."

Other tunes, such as 'Forever Now', are unabashedly romantic reflections of Wilcox's own life, or artistically flexible rewrites of same. "Look what I found: the edges are brown/The picture of us in that old boardwalk town," he sings in 'Forever Now', a tale of love lost, remembered and found.

Wilcox's gift allows him to make compelling music out of experiences as common as a parent's mixed joy and alarm about a teenager's first driver's license. In 'This Old Car' that passage becomes a parable of independence being born.

Overall, listeners with a taste for high musical quality and songs of nuanced expression will find much to celebrate while traveling along with Wilcox's *Airstream*. As Wilcox's career has evolved, in appearances everywhere from seminaries to theaters, and biker bars to yoga centers, he's found an audience ready to receive his particular brand of road wisdom.

"I have always chosen to play in settings where, at the end of the night, I am more hopeful about what music can do for the heart than I was at the beginning", he said.

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