

Jason Ringenberg

Praise the Lord and Pass the Rhinestones!

Renowned music critic Peter Cooper once said, “Jason Ringenberg is Nashville’s greatest 20th-century rock ‘n’ roll frontman.” With statements like that, you would think Jason might rest on his laurels now that he is in his 60s. Not so. His new record *Rhinestoned* once again sets Ringenberg on a collision course with people’s souls. It reaffirms the claim that not only is he one of rock ‘n’ roll’s greatest frontmen but also one of the preeminent singer-songwriters of his generation.

His journey started in the 1960s Midwest, a place straight out of Norman Rockwell’s America. He was born and raised on an Illinois hog farm that bordered the Rock Island Line Railroad. At an early age he heard classic country artists on his dad’s truck radio but also was exposed to the 1960s singer-songwriters like Bob Dylan and Neil Young by his older siblings. He attended college at Southern Illinois University, studying history and music. He played banjo in a bluegrass band called *Gary, Jason, and Chico*. After seeing *The Ramones* in a dorm basement cafeteria, he immediately quit the bluegrass band and formed his own punk rock group, *Shakespeare’s Riot*, gaining notoriety around Southern Illinois as one of the first regional bands to combine classic country with raw punk rock.

By 1981 he realized he had taken that musical journey as far as he could in Southern Illinois. On July 4 he loaded up his ‘71 Econoline van and headed to that musical Mecca of all Meccas: Nashville, Tennessee. He didn’t know a soul nor had ever even set boots in the town. He jumped in feet first, jamming at every dive or party that would let him have the mic. Within a few weeks he formed *Jason and the Nashville Scorchers* and never looked back. Widely considered one of most influential Americana/Outlaw country bands in history, *Jason and the Scorchers* tore up stages across the planet. One UK journalist called their 1984 show at the Marquee “one of the Top Five gigs of all time.”

By the late 80s their legendary luster began to dim, although they continued to tour and make records. In 1991 Ringenberg snagged a record contract with Capitol Nashville. He began to build his solo brand, touring as a solo artist and eventually releasing a series of critically acclaimed records. In 2002 he launched a children’s music character called Farmer Jason, winning an Emmy Award in 2009 for his PBS music video program. He would often perform a Farmer Jason show in the daytime and then a solo Jason

Ringenberg concert that night in the same city. From 2000 to 2015 he performed an average of 200 shows a year all over Europe and North America.

In 2017 he saw yet another renaissance in his career. The U.S. National Park Service approached him to be their Artist-in-Residence at the Sequoia/Kings Canyon National Park. He spent a month hiking those pristine mountains, doing concerts in the campgrounds, and writing songs. He experienced an explosion of creative energy not seen since his salad days with *Jason and the Scorchers*. The resulting songs form the basis for two defining records: *Stand Tall*, released in 2018, and now *Rhinestoned*.

Rhinestoned is heavily influenced by the ethos and energy of mid-1960s Nashville. The record is populated by forgotten ghosts and old souls. There is a song about one of Crazy Horse's close Lakota friends and another about the Freedom Riders. He even tackles a love affair gone wrong in World War I Flanders. He covers Hank Williams, The Carter Family, and the classic Easter hymn *Christ the Lord Is Risen Today*, all the while making each track sound uniquely his own. The record was recorded by George Bradfute, whose studio is located in the basement of the 1950's country superstar Jim Reeves. The old tile floor and pine paneling are still there, conjuring up old memories and soaking up new ones.

So his journey winds on. As Ringenberg says in *Rhinestoned*: "A song can be a lover or a true best friend and it will not forsake you when you reach the end..."