

Kirchen's Cody days began in 1967 when he co-founded Commander Cody and His Lost Planet Airmen. They recorded seven albums for Paramount and Warner Brothers, one of which (*Live from Deep in the Heart of Texas*) rightfully made Rolling Stone's list of the Best 100 Albums of All Time. The original band established its place in the infancy of the Americana movement by being one of the first and only rock-n-roll bands to infuse their honky-tonk sound with pure, blood-and-guts country roots and Western swing. It's Kirchen's indelible guitar licks that define their top-ten charting hit, "Hot Rod Lincoln," a song that eventually took on a post-Cody life of its own.

Today, Kirchen and his own band's extended version of Hot Rod Lincoln is his universally loved signature masterpiece, a breathtaking, pumped up joyride through the last 60 years of guitar history. It starts with Johnny Cash and breezes by everyone from Howlin' Wolf to the Merles (Travis and Haggard), the Ray Family (Link, Alvino, and Stevie) to the King Family (Freddy, BB, Albert, Ben E., Don, Carol, Billie Jean and The King), Carl Perkins to the Sex Pistols and then some. Rolling Stone called it "epic". The concept started on stage as a joke, a way for Kirchen to amuse his band members, throwing them off by calling out a name and trying to play through it. "We tried to keep each other off-balance in the middle of a performance, when we first added Johnny Cash in between the car horns it cracked us up, so we again. At that point of the show the band would be up on two wheels bouncing off the guardrail but it was exciting. When we went to record it we tried to goof it up a little, just to keep it spontaneous."

Before Bill Kirchen ever picked up a Telecaster he was a classical trombonist. That's what he was studying as a teenager at Interlochen Center for the Arts in the early 60's when he first fell for the guitar, in part due to the blossoming "folk scare" [his words] and in part thanks to his guitar-playing cabin counselor, Dave Siglin (founder of The Ark in Bill's hometown Ann Arbor, Michigan). Just turned 16, Bill rescued his mom's old banjo from the attic, got a copy of Pete Seeger's *How to Play the 5-String Banjo* book and hitch-hiked to the 1964 Newport Folk Festival. Kirchen: "I witnessed stuff that knocked me out - Lightnin' Hopkins, the Kweskin Jug Band, Son House, Johnny Cash, the Staples Singers, my original guitar hero Mississippi John Hurt. The top of my head flipped open and it's never shut." He'd head for New York when he could, hanging out in the Village and letting the whole scene wash over him. When he went back to Newport in '65 and saw Dylan go electric, then on to New York City to see the Lovin' Spoonful at the Night Owl, it "ruined me for normal work." His strikingly powerful Dylan covers are staples of the live show to this day.

After the California-based Cody band split, Kirchen started his own band, The Moonlighters, and cut two more albums before relocating to DC in the mid-80's. There he started his Too Much Fun trio, released ten more critically-acclaimed albums and began his robust touring schedule of 200-plus dates a year around the country and as far afield as Lapland, Israel, and Palestine.

In 2001, Kirchen received a Grammy nomination for his instrumental "Poultry in Motion." The following year he was inducted into the Washington Area Music Association Hall of Fame, neatly sandwiched between John Phillip Sousa and Dave Grohl. He has played and recorded with a long list of luminaries, including Nick Lowe, Doug Sahm, Elvis Costello, Link Wray, Emmylou Harris, Hoyt Axton and Gene Vincent. Bill is pretty sure that he is the only person to have, in a single year, stood on stage and played with both Ralph Stanley and Elvis Costello.

Now living in Austin Texas, Bill maintains his rigorous and far-reaching tour schedule and also teaches at Augusta Heritage Center, Centrum Voiceworks and Jorma Kaukonen's Fur Peace Ranch.