

Bill Kirchen

Grammy nominated guitarist, singer and songwriter Bill Kirchen first gained national recognition as a founding member of Commander Cody and his Lost Planet Airmen. His trademark guitar licks drove their Hot Rod Lincoln cut into the Top Ten in 1972. He has released ten CDs on his own, and recorded and/or played guitar live with a who's who of Americana and Roots Rock 'N' Roll, among them Gene Vincent, Link Wray, Bo Diddley, Hazel Dickens, Doug Sahm, Hoyt Axton, Emmylou Harris, Maria Muldaur, Dan Hicks, Nick Lowe and Elvis Costello.

Short Bio

Grammy nominated guitarist, singer and songwriter **Bill Kirchen** is one of the fortunate few who can step on any stage, play those trademark licks which drove the seminal **Commander Cody** classic **Hot Rod Lincoln** into the Top Ten nationwide, and elicit instant recognition. Named a “Titan of the Telecaster” by **Guitar Player Magazine**, he celebrates a musical tradition that embraces rock ‘n’ roll, blues and bluegrass, Texas Western swing and California honky-tonk. **Nick Lowe** describes Bill as “... a devastating culmination of the elegant and funky... a really sensational musician, with enormous depth.”

Bill received his **Grammy** nomination in 2001. A winner of multiple **Wammies** over the years, in 2002 he was one of three artists inducted into the **Washington D.C. Area Music Association Hall of Fame** along with **Dave Grohl** (Nirvana, Foo Fighters) and **John Philip Sousa**.

Bill is an architect of what is now known as **Roots Rock ‘n’ Roll** and **Americana**, and still continues to be one of its most active proponents, playing, writing and performing throughout the world.

In demand on the lecture circuit, he has spoken at the **Smithsonian Institution** in Washington, DC as part of the “Electrified, Amplified and Deified - The Electric Guitar” exhibition and at **Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute** in Troy, New York. He was interviewed on the national TV special “Yesterday and Today: Honky Tonk & Western Swing” at the **Broken Spoke in Austin, TX**, where he performed along with **Hank Thompson, Doug Sahm, Don Walser** and more. Bill was a keynote speaker at the International Conference on **Elvis Presley** in Memphis and currently finds time to lead workshops and instruct at **Jorma Kaukonen’s Fur Peace Ranch** and the **Augusta Heritage Center**.

Justly famous for his indelible Telecaster sound, **Bill Kirchen** has been everywhere over the span of a 40-plus-year career: he was a founding member of the legendary **Commander Cody and his Lost Planet Airmen**; he released eight critically acclaimed solo albums; he toured internationally with **Nick Lowe** and has performed with **Doug Sahm, Gene Vincent, Elvis Costello, Dan Hicks, Emmylou Harris, Bruce Hornsby** and **Link Wray**.

Artist Website: www.billkirchen.com

Bill records for Red House Records, Proper Records and Proper American

Notable Quotes

Johnny Cash: “I think he's great ... You should hear him on the new [Nick Lowe] album.”

Rolling Stone: “Opening night was particularly special due to the presence of Les Paul and Albert Lee, ... Bill Kirchen cranked up his Tele for a set that gave the

crowd a hotfoot, sparked by his epic cover of (Hot Rod Lincoln). Danny Gatton Tribute, Tramps, New York, NY”

Washington City Paper: “Like an impassioned preacher in a souped-up convertible, Kirchen described passing Muddy Waters, Link Wray, Merle Haggard, B. B. King, Carl Perkins, Jimi Hendrix and more, nodding in tribute to each one with a perfect guitar quotation as he drove by. ... Bill Kirchen took everyone for the ride of their lives in his Hot Rod Lincoln.”

3rd Coast Music on King of Dieselbilly CD: “...a knockout ... package of great tracks from one of the greatest guitar players of our time.”

Austin American-Statesman: “Bill Kirchen rules. It's just that simple ... ”

Bio

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.

Photos





Photo Credit: Bob Minkin

Poster

