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Laid Back Rowe Really a Real Foot Tapper

By Rebecca Russell

On stage, the Dave Rowe Trio is as laid back and comfortable as the audience. They wear Hawaiian shirts, khaki shorts, and two of the three have kicked off their flip flops and are keeping time with bare feet. That seems somewhat contradictory when looking at Dave Rowe's latest solo album, *Big Shoes*.

The title, of course, has nothing to do with his footwear. Instead, it is a tribute to his late father and musical mentor, Tom Rowe. "Dave sees this as his legacy," said band manager and booking agent Kathy Schultz. "His dad's whole life was music. Dave feels like this is what he is supposed to do."

Based on the younger Rowe's resume, it must indeed be. "I never had a real job, except at a seafood restaurant," Rowe said, laughter in his eyes. "I did that to save up enough scratch for my first bass guitar, and then I quit." As a musician, he turned professional at the young age of 15, which is pretty amazing considering he didn't pick up an instrument until he was 12. And that was the tuba.

He also had formal lessons on the piano and the pipe organ. "Keyboard instruments are such a fantastic starting point for music that once you understand how they work, you can pretty much pick up anything and figure it out from there," Rowe explained. "That's what I did with the guitar. I first picked it up when I was 19, and almost immediately I understood it. My dad taught me the basic finger-picking pattern soon thereafter."

Dave got his start playing with a country band that doubled as an Irish ensemble. When asked how that was possible, he said, "Just add a drummer." The group would be booked to play at festivals on two different stages, and rarely did the audience catch on that they were one and the same group.

From there he went on to form Rowe by Rowe with his dad. Playing with his dad was the "coolest thing in the world," Rowe said, a touch of sadness behind his smile. Soon after, Denny Breau joined the group and they changed the name to Turkey Hollow, the name of the town Tom Rowe lived in at the time. Breau is an old family friend, being a high school classmate of Tom Rowe's. "They had their first band together, with my mom, actually," Rowe said. It was Breau who introduced him to the Dave Rowe Trio's current bass player, Kevin O'Reilly.

The trio's sound is a mix of traditional, nautical and Irish sounds. When asked about the Irish influence in his music, Rowe broke into a huge grin. He attributes it to the fact that he grew up listening to Schooner Fare, a group composed of his dad "and two guys named Romanoff." He paused a bit for effect, given the improbability of Romanoff as an Irish surname. "Chuck Romanoff went to college in Nova Scotia," he explained, attributing the maritime, Celtic feel of the group's music to the influence of the Canadian seacoast.

Besides the "huge" influence of Schooner Fare, Rowe grew up listening to groups such as Peter, Paul and Mary; the Kingston Trio; the Clancy Brothers; the Eagles; and the Beatles. "I really loved the folk music of the '60s. In fact, my mother took me to a Peter, Paul and Mary concert when I was a teenager." He was also lucky enough to meet Dave Guard, one of the founding members of the folk group, the Kingston Trio. "It was a short meeting, but he gave me some recordings to listen to which absolutely opened my eyes."

Right now, he has his eyes set on continuing to expand the Dave Rowe Trio's fan base. The name was chosen not out of vanity, but rather out of simple brand recognition. In his home state of Maine, many recognize the name from his days playing with his father as a member of Rowe by Rowe.

This should not be a difficult goal, if his recent performance at Milwaukee's Irish Cultural and Heritage Center is any measure. The seats filled quickly, and the audience was enthralled as Rowe's huge, deep voice filled the room and vibrated off the walls. Within minutes, he had everyone singing and clapping along. It was a toe-tapping good time, whether barefoot or wearing big shoes.

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