

Beach Busker

by David James

I fondly remember those warm, weekend evenings at twilight on the beach. After the frolic of the waves flattened, sending the surfers home and, after the last bait was spent, sending the surfcasters away, I'd set up the little, foldable, 3'x4', rectangular stage I always carried in my truck, uncase my tired, old, pawn shop-acquired Fender guitar and open my evening singing a couple of Hank Williams songs and then take a couple of requests. I'd do about six, or so, familiar Country & Western songs.

But my regulars all knew what was coming next and it always did. My segue. I'd pull my old Hohner harmonica out of my back pocket and begin slowly tapping my sneaker, creating my signature, snail-slow, deeply resonating Jimmy Reed song, "Down In Mississippi", bending all music from then on into the Rhythm & Blues most had come to hear. To me, C&W correlates well with R&B — which for a long time was referred to as race music. I've always thought a comparison was grounded each to each in the same way jelly compares to jam — both often came from the same fruit. In a way, Rock and Roll vertically integrates both and serves to tamp down any jealousy between the genres because it contains elements of both with neither form being subservient.

Every night out there I would get a few bucks — in folding and change — tossed in the flipped, Birmingham Barons ball cap that I always placed in front of my small stage. My playlist was pretty full and I was able to play on for about three hours — only taking breaks to wipe sweat, to take a few sips of beer and to piss. I just loved it.

It was just the thing to relieve the fuck out of my old boring-assed, Monday to Friday work of filling teeth and fitting dentures.

