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# Waterline



It's time for that beach walk you've been waiting for all day...all week...or all year. Those who are out on the beach often learn to read the tell-tale signs of whether the tide is going or coming by searching for the waterline—that point of division between wet and dry sand...constantly changing and evolving, never standing still.

Story by BJ Cothran

Which makes Waterline the perfect name for the musical duo of Chris Pappalardo and Jim Ellis—two locals who call the island their inspiration and their new home.

Their careers have evolved over the years—separately and together—both playing with various bands since 1992. Among other accomplishments, Jim performed with several Virginia area bands, and Chris toured with slide guitar legends Sonny Landreth and Lee Roy Parnell.

But a weekend trip to play together on the Carolina coast convinced them both what they already knew deep down—that they wanted to live near the sea...they wanted to play together...and they wanted to give performing full time again a shot. Here's where the never standing still part comes in, and Waterline as a band was born, alive and kicking.

Getting their feet into the local water, they quickly evolved a style that Jim calls “coastal kick-back music.”

“We play a lot like a rocked-up Jimmy Buffett or a country James Taylor, if that makes any sense,” explains Chris.

Once you hear them play, you’ll know what they mean. It’s familiar and comfortable, upbeat yet relaxing, a mixture of the music we know and love with a new twist. The talent practically oozes out when Jim takes on the keyboard in what can be described as a bluesy Bruce Hornsby style that naturally complements Chris’s expertise as he switches between acoustic, electric, and bottleneck slide guitars.

When asked about why they’ve chosen to work as a band of two, the duo answered almost identically.

“The best part is what happens without planning, the musical flexibility,” says Jim. “Bands typically have a set list, and they rehearse songs exactly, a certain way.”

“We play songs based on how the crowd is reacting,” adds Chris. “We rarely play the same song the same way or in the same order, so our live shows are always different.”

“We’re free to extend songs if we’re feeling something, play things differently without feeling like we’re going to throw each other off by doing so,” says Jim. “And since we’ve been playing together for so many years, we’re often on the same page when we go through our *in the moment* set list.”

“Plus, being just the two of us, we travel easily and our set-up and tear-down is simple,” quips Chris.

But most of all, they both love to write and perform music. And with every performance, the fan base seems to be expanding. Jimmy Buffett has Parrotheads, the Grateful Dead has Deadheads and Waterline has Waterheads.

Chris explained that the name came from fans themselves at a live performance a few years back. Those fifteen or so fans became “The Original Waterheads” with more and more Waterheads joining the family all the time.

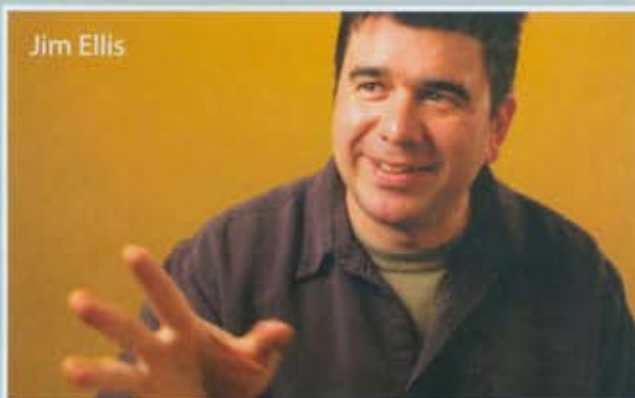
When he first heard the name, Chris described the moment as “strange and wonderful,” adding that it made him realize that people were really listening. “It made me want to play that much better and practice that much more.”

Luckily they both have supportive wives and families who moved here with them so that Jim and Chris could go after their dreams. Even though they came at different times, the two families both ended up in North Topsail Beach only four blocks apart.

“I can’t help but be inspired by my surroundings here on Topsail,” says Jim. “I feel like I notice the world’s beauty more now that I’m here, and I literally feel like I’m on vacation all the time.”

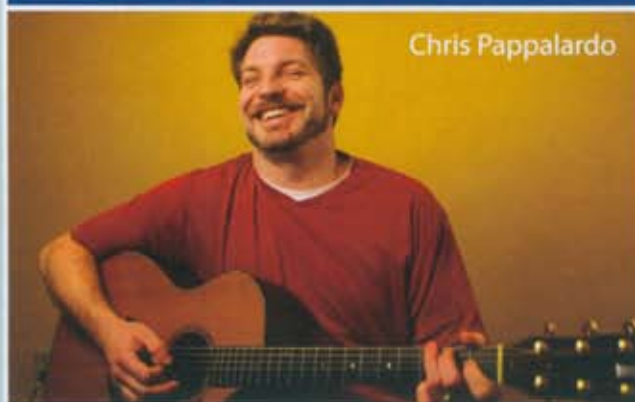
And with all this inspiration, it’s a great place for the duo to compose, although both admit that the creative process often takes years to get one song from conception to the recording studio.

“Usually the best ideas just pop in your head out of nowhere,” says Chris. “I’ve recorded them in my phone when I’m driving, gotten them while eating dinner, or just lying in bed.”



Jim Ellis

“We play a lot like a rocked-up Jimmy Buffett or a country James Taylor, if that makes any sense,” explains Chris.



Chris Pappalardo

For the most part, Chris and Jim write music and lyrics independently, and then at the right time, they bring their separate ideas to the table and work out the parts together.

And the process works beautifully, as exemplified in their latest release entitled Long Goners. The name came about for several reasons. First, they had the good fortune of having John Hiatt's band, The Goners, back them up on the CD.

"Plus, it took a long time to get this CD finished and a long time for Jim and I to decide to play full time again," says Chris.

"And since the CD marked a new start for Waterline after a six-year hiatus, it all pointed to Long Goners as being the most appropriate title," adds Jim.

"Who would have thought that you could do what you love for a living, and even bigger. Who would have dreamed you could not only do what you love and make a living, but also live where you want and do it," says Chris. "I don't want to sound corny, but I wake up most days feeling inspired. Living here and playing music is a dream come true." 🌊

## The Disk



HERE ON AN ISLAND

Calling all weekend warriors  
 Summer Tom Sawyers  
 Adventuring down to the sea  
 This here's a special place  
 And I'll give you a taste  
 But take this advice from me  
 Forget your rooftop rack  
 With all those bags you packed  
 You've got to simplify your act  
 You need a lesson in a state of mind

Here on an island  
 You can't help smilin'  
 It's a feeling you get  
 When you cross that bridge  
 And leave the world behind  
 Here on an island  
 You lose track of time  
 It's therapy for your mind  
 On an island

I'm counting my blessings daily  
 I was slowly fading  
 When I saw it all so clear  
 I clocked my 9 to 5  
 Fought rush hour drives  
 For a 2 week vacation a year  
 But it took that salt in my skin  
 And that ocean wind  
 To breathe some life into me again  
 Now it's holiday all of the time  
 Here on an island...

You can shake your head and make your bed on the mainland  
 Yeah that's a perfectly civilized game plan  
 But it's such a shame man  
 Cause here on an island...

Waterline plays locally on and near the island, including the Mainsail Commodore Room and Skully's.

For an up-to-date schedule, go to [www.waterlinemusic.com](http://www.waterlinemusic.com).