

# STRANDED WHERE I WANT TO BE

Harmony, Humor & Serious Jammin' with Waterline

The keyboard reverberates off the wooden docks against a backdrop of boats, buoys, pelicans and blue water. The guitar strums in time to the billowing sails and setting sun.

A seasonably warm afternoon draws locals and visitors to the sea air, the spirits, and the energy of the music.

A following of devoted fans –“self-proclaimed Waterheads”– circle in close, and have long since known what a good time is in store.

Lyrics echo true for all who listen, and melodies linger in the mind like an old familiar favorite.



Chris Pappalardo and Jim Ellis of Waterline.

Waterline – Jim Ellis and Chris Pappalardo – a high-energy, extremely entertaining, fun-loving duo, met in Richmond playing with a four-piece rock band called *Beluga Wail*. The group “clicked right away” playing clubs, and fraternities and although *Beluga Wail* opened up for *The Spin Doctors* and *The Freddy Jones Band*, the band didn’t seem to be going anywhere. Chris had graduated from Virginia Commonwealth University and Jim was a senior at the University of Richmond. With sights set on New York, LA, or Nashville to pursue the next level, Jim and Chris decided on Nashville.

Yet, as plans were set in motion, Jim had fallen in love, and been offered a banking job in Richmond he felt he couldn’t pass up. Chris made a go of it in Nashville and slowly began to make some serious contacts including Sonny

Landreth – “a new artist who had won numerous awards for his slide guitar ability. We opened for *B B King*, *Buddy Guy*, *Fleetwood Mac*, *Little Feat*, *The Band*, *Bob Dylan* and more. It was a dream come true. The only problem was, Jim wasn’t there,” reflects Chris. Ironically, “after Sonny’s tour was winding down and it was time for a change, Jim called and said he wasn’t happy. (Hence the song, “Going Through the Motions”.) He wanted to play full time again.” They picked five cities, got in the car, and decided on Wilmington, NC.

They followed a love for the beach (inspiration), and the knowledge that a lot of music was going on. Chris remembers, “We were able to meld into the scene right away, we were playing five nights within a few months.” Locals, Rhino, (the former) Ogden Inn, Dockside, and The Dockhouse in

Beaufort, NC, to name a few. A stint in Cabos San Lucas, Mexico, two-years going was a great experience that further enriched their musical aspirations.

Musical aspirations and yearnings have been there for as long as they both can remember. Chris, from the time he was 18 has felt, “there’s always been this thread – play full time – get a real job – come back, play full time”. Even after his experience in Nashville, “blessed with the opportunity to play with some real talent” and play “Fanfare” live in front of an enormous audience, he says it still doesn’t compare to this –



what Waterline is doing now.

For Chris, nature provides an endless source of inspiration, “The waves at the beach, the sun rising over the mountains, feeling the clouds lift off the trees and feeling the breeze coming off the shore. I always strive to let whatever I am playing do nothing more than express what I feel.” To watch him play and sing you can sense he’s got a lot more going on in his mind – he has passion and genuine zest for the moment. His voice is bluesy and bold and takes you by surprise with every new solo.

Jim started playing guitar when he was six, then piano at nine or so. He remembers, “I took piano lessons for three to four years, but grew pretty tired of classical music, so I quit. I’ve been playing in bands since I was 14... I can read music, but I mainly play by ear.” And oh, does he play – sincere and intense – as if the keyboard is a part of him. With eyes closed he’s completely engrossed in every note. Vocally, he emulates James Taylor, soft and contemplative. It is a rare treat



NC. As a singer-song writer, a single lyric, a line, triggers the inspiration. Their first released CD entitled “Stranded”, features Jim’s original songs richly imbued with real life emotions. Chris injects, “Lived every one of them – and still do. That’s the cool thing.”

The other cool thing is the production of their CD which Chris calls a “two-city venture” realized by the best of local (Wilmington) talent and the best of Nashville. Chris is exuberant in the fact that the songs were all tweaked live before recorded, “We took the live sound and got it on tape.”

Jim recalls, “After playing live for about three years, we knew that a CD was long overdue. We first went to John Guttman’s 3:16 Studios here in town and recorded drums for about half the songs. I took that to a friend, Jeff Reid, and his Penguin Mars Studio to record my keyboard tracks, bass and some saxophone for those songs. We then set up a two week period for Nashville, to finish the record. We recorded the rest of the CD on Nashville’s Music Row at Don Scott Hare Productions. All told,

we used six added friends/musicians: Rick Lay (percussion), Bobby King (bass) and Mike

Organ from Nashville, and Vinnie Stout (bass), Leroy Harper (sax) and John Guttman (drums) from Wilmington. The entire experience was fantastic.”

The entire compilation is fantastic, and seeing Waterline perform live is quite an experience. These two are not just another beach crowd band that sounds better with each round of beer – they are serious, talented musicians with a terrific sense of fun, and a dynamic between them that engages the audience in the poignancy of their lyrics. Their cover songs and requests are infused with Waterline flavor. Creative renditions of *Barenaked Ladies* “If I Had a Million Dollars”, *Schoolhouse Rock*’s “Conjunction Junction”, and *Guy Clark*’s “Homegrown Tomatoes”, to name a few, get the crowd going. They like testing the waters with songs that are unexpected. Jim relates, “I think it’s more fun to introduce

people to songs a bit more obscure. To this day, our favorite cover is Marc Cohn’s “Walking in Memphis” – It’s the kind of song that people hear and say “oh yeah, I remember that song, who did that?”

Chris and Jim balance each other well – complementary vocal styles and vibrant personalities constantly feed off each other. Both, extremely gifted on the guitar and keyboard respectively, appear to get great pleasure just jammin, responding to the mood, and the camaraderie between the two of them. During any given show they can go from quiet and reflective to wild and wacky, taking their cues from the audience and adjusting their humor likewise. At one point they send out a toast: “Work like you don’t need the money. Love like you’ve never been hurt. And dance like nobody’s watching!” For Chris, it all goes back to the premise, “we’re good apart, great together.” And anyone lucky enough to have seen a performance of these two can attest to the adventure found in their simpatico.

Victoria White, a true “waterhead”, is amazed to “watch them play – they can look at each other and know what the other is going to do. They just constantly add new stuff and never play a song the same way twice.”

Chris reiterates, “The biggest joy of working in a duo is we never play the same. Jim and I don’t work on this. It just happens. We never create a set list. We start and stop songs differently, play different solos, even change words. Every song is still a blank canvas on which we get to paint.”

**By nights end, it becomes evident that the two musicians looking out on a star-filled sky and three-quarter moon, playing to silhouettes of sails and stargazers, are completely in their element. The waterline shimmers and glistens, the melodies are carried off with the sea-breezes. All go home humming a new tune.**

Check out Waterline’s website at [www.waterlinemusic.com](http://www.waterlinemusic.com)

