



Writer Of The Week: Kim Richey

By [Evan Schlansky](#) September 20th, 2010

Kim Richey is a veteran singer-songwriter whose songs have been covered by artists like Trisha Yearwood, Brooks & Dunn, and Mindy McCready. She's also guested on records by Ryan Adams, Shawn Colvin, and Mary Chapin Carpenter. Her own albums are critically-acclaimed (2002's *Rise* was named Alt-Country Album of the Year by *People* magazine) and beloved by fans, and her latest, *Wreck Your Wheels*, is a pure slice of Americana goodness.

You said making *Wreck Your Wheels* a “spur of the moment decision.” How so?

Well, I was supposed to be going to Washington State to visit with friends for a while when I had a sudden change of finances and had to cancel the trip. At the time, I seemed to be at loose ends in general and was talking with Neilson Hubbard about getting together to do some writing. He suggested we do some recording along with Kris Donegan and Kurt Yoquilet and see what happened. Kris and Kurt played in the touring band with me last time around. We moved the furniture aside in my living room and set up there for a few days to go over songs and arrangements. That's where it all started.

When did you start writing songs? Were they much different from the songs you write now?

Bill Lloyd asked me to join a band he was in while we were both at Western Kentucky University. The band played all original songs (thereby disqualifying us for most paying gigs) and I was the only one that didn't write. I thought I'd give it a try. The first song I wrote was one minute long. I didn't want to take up too much space in case it all went wrong. How much different are the songs I write now? Well, they're longer for one thing. I still like to write songs about relationships. That comes to me the easiest. I think I'm still trying to communicate the way I feel and things I might have difficulty actually saying to someone in person through song writing.

How do you approach co-writing? Do you enjoy it?

It's different every time. How I approach songwriting with other people depends on who I'm writing with and how well I know them. When it works, it's the best thing ever. You get to create something you are proud of out of thin air with another person. I love having someone there to share the experience. I enjoy the collaboration – the give and take. When it is not good, it's like a bad blind date. One thing I love about writing with other people is the way you get to know someone in a very short time. Writing a song with another person is an intimate process if you're not just going through the motions.

What are the challenges and rewards of being a solo artist, versus being in a band?

I've only ever really been a solo artist aside from the just for fun bands when I was in school. I never wanted to be a solo artist. Maybe that's why I like writing songs with other people. In my dream world, I'd be in a band singing harmony. Like I said, I'm more of a collaborator. From friends who have been in bands, I hear it is not always one big happy family. Still....

Your songs have been covered by some major artists.

Trisha Yearwood has recorded the most of my songs. She recorded "Those Words We Said", "Believe Me Baby", "I Lied" and "Where Are You Now." I'm always glad to have her record one of my songs because I know they're going to sound great. I love her and the way she sings the songs. I'm not really sure who brought the songs to her attention to tell you the truth. Patty Loveless also did a beautiful cover of a song off my first album, "That's Exactly What I Mean," and had Mary Chapin Carpenter and I sing backing vocals.

What's a song on *Wreck Your Wheels* you really want people to hear, and why?

I'd like people to hear "Wreck Your Wheels" for a number of reasons. I think it's a good driving-in-your-car song. I love the way everyone plays on that track, especially the spooky pedal steel part and Matthew Ryan is singing with me (!) and I like what the song says and the way it says it – all those things. Plus, Mando Saenz and I wrote that song together and I'd like more people to find out about Mando. That's probably more than enough reasons.

What's a lyric you're particularly proud of on the album?

"Careful How You Go" is one of my favorite lyrics. That song hung around for ages before I could come up with a second verse that I was happy with. When I was first spending time in London, I stayed with a friend and we would go on epic walks late at night. We'd set off around 11 or 12 and walk for hours around London – sometimes until the sun would start to come up and the birds would start singing. On one of these walks it began to snow – big, soft, silent flakes that covered the city and made the evening magical. It is one of my best memories. This song is about that evening.

Are there any words you love, or hate?

Hmmmmmm. "It" might get a bit over used in songwriting. I think I remember someone telling me that Harlan Howard was not a fan of the word. Most times, I think a person can do better than "it". (Here's where I go back through my answers to these questions and try and remove as many "it"s as possible. Yikes.)

Who's an underrated songwriter, in your opinion?

I would say that Emmylou Harris is underrated as a songwriter because most people know her for the songs she has covered by other writers. She's an amazing songwriter. "Red Dirt Girl" is a gorgeous record. When I first heard "Red Dirt Girl", I played it over and over. Later on, when I was playing a show with Emmylou, I tried to tell her how much I loved the record. Out of nervousness, I called the record "Red Dirt Road" - a Brooks and Dunn song out at the time. She was kind. I was hoping somebody would just shoot me.

How do you typically write songs? Words first, or melody?

Usually a melody will make me think of a phrase and then I have to try and figure out what is interesting about it and what it might mean in the song. Sometimes I think of a bit of lyric when I am walking around letting my mind wander. Those bits end up in songs every so often when I find a place for them. Songs most always start with a bit of music for me, though.

Do you find yourself revising a lot, or do you like to write automatically?

A couple month ago I heard Barbara Kingsolver give a talk at the Southbank Literary Festival. She was amazing. I was in the second row. She told us that the hard work was writing the first draft of the book. That was the work. The fun started with the revisions. She spoke about being able to pull the ending then, like a thread, back through to the beginning once she knew how the story was going to wind up. I'm a reviser too.

What's a song you wish you'd written?

"Moon River."