**Jef Chandler Finds Swing in his Step**

—by Dan Armonaitis

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Jef Chandler grew up in Simpsonville and has been a fixture on the Upstate music scene since the mid-1990s, when he played in an acclaimed acoustic band called Big Brown Bowl.

Inspired by his older brother's “vast record collection” and by the musicianship of his two grandfathers, Chandler got interested in music at a young age. He took piano lessons starting at age 7 and got his first guitar when he was 12 years old.

A graduate of Furman University, Chandler has grown into one of the area's most respected singer-songwriters with an expansive catalog of heartfelt tunes that draw from a wide range of folk, country, bluegrass and rock 'n' roll influences.

Chandler released his debut album, “Talking Out the Fire,” in 1999 and has since released two more solo albums while also collaborating with some of the area's finest musicians.

Chandler is now a member of the Bad Popes, a Greenville-based quintet rounded out by Mike Bagwell on pedal steel, Joe Cash on drums, Chris Garrett on bass and Charles Hedgepath on guitar.

The Bad Popes, whose Americana-flavored sound is rooted in traditional country and Western swing, recently released their sophomore album, “Town & Country.” The band will perform at 9:30 p.m. Saturday at the Cellar Club in Spartanburg.

Question: As a songwriter, what do you believe is the most important thing every good song should have?

Answer: A good melody. That, and interesting lyrics, are the two main ingredients for me.

Q: Having shared many of the songwriting credits with the Bad Popes, what are the benefits of co-writing?

A: You get to do things that you wouldn't normally do. Plus, it helps expand your own vocabulary as a writer, lyrically, and as a musician. For instance, Mike, the pedal steel player, will come up with chord progressions that I wouldn't come up with.

Q: What makes the Bad Popes such a unique musical experience?

A: Around here, I don't think a lot of people are doing Western swing-type of songs. And, also, I like the way that Mike Bagwell and Charles Hedegepath play off each other with (instrumental) leads. You're not getting one voice; you're getting two voices with the leads.

Q: What impresses you about the Upstate music scene?

A: Just the incredible amount of good players here — good guitar players, good bass players, good drummers, everything. We have a lot of musicians in this area who are phenomenal, playing (on the level of) what you'd find in Nashville or some other large city.

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