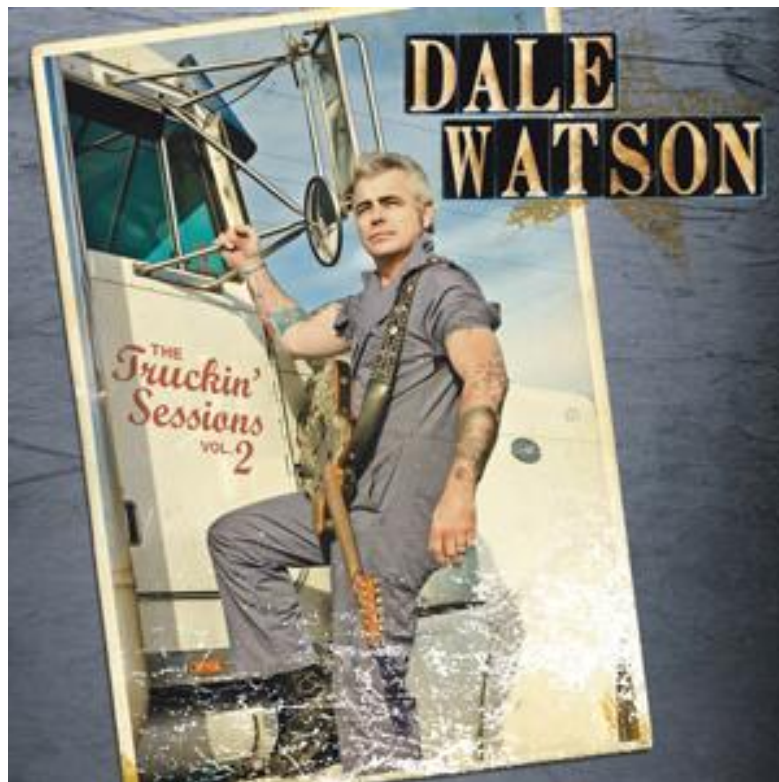


Dale Watson: The Titanium Fox



“If tomorrow never comes will she know how much I loved her?”

If Tomorrow Never Comes by Garth Brooks

“Tomorrow never comes. Every time a new day dawns, the hour is never known when tomorrow never comes.”

Tomorrow Never Comes by Dale Watson

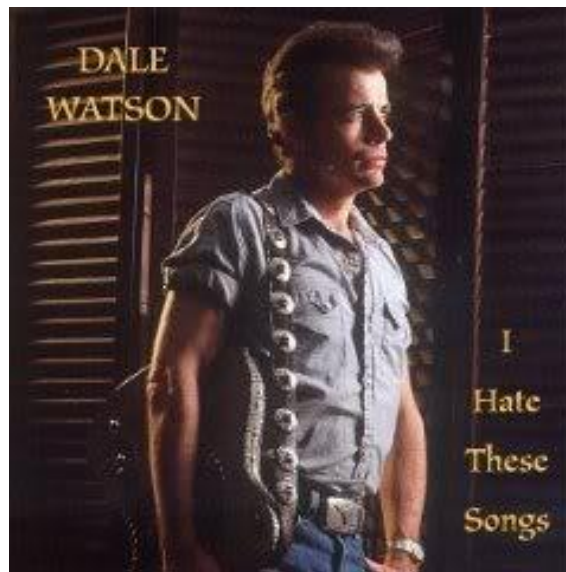
Now that ruggedly handsome country crooner Charlie Rich has let his hair down one last time behind the closed doors of Memorial Park Cemetery in Memphis, I vote that Dale Watson carries on some space-age derivation of his famed moniker The Silver Fox.

The white pompadoured Texan has the same ability to shuffle between classic country, blues, rockabilly, and his own brand of pure American music. Watson is the last of a dying breed. You won't catch him in a collarless shirt emblazoned with neon buffalo emerging from hellfire, you won't see him wedged in a crotch harness flying across a stage, and it is doubtful he has designs on revamping his sound for a mass audience. Long ago he sang about truckin'. Yesterday he sang about truckin'.

Current country is content with shining a light on the good times while Watson's hillbilly underbelly turns over rocks to see what's wriggling underground. Garth Brooks had a hit with *If Tomorrow Never Comes*. He sang about finding the joy in each moment of your

life and letting everyone know how much they are loved. Dale Watson told a harder nihilistic truth in *Tomorrow Never Comes*.

If somber album titles crack you up, somewhere between an issue of Moe Bandy's *Here I Am Drunk Again* and Roy Clark's *Happy to Be Unhappy*, you can file your copy of Dale Watson's *I Hate These Songs*. Whatever perverse marketing campaign sought to draw western writing away from themes of unrepentant alcoholism, chronic depression, and the inevitability of the grave has deprived the listening audience of a gentle melodic way to absorb dark realities within the safe sphere of comic lyricism and a two-step beat.



Dale Watson will never have a comeback because he never goes away. His career longevity has reached the mythic proportions of tall tales. He has put out a song for every tree Johnny Appleseed has grown, his rigorous touring schedule rivals Paul Bunyan's journey, and he's done as much for cowpoke superlatives as Pecos Bill (trading in tornado riding for crossing the country in a beat up Suburban). He is the Casey Jones of big rigs and the Blue Ox of heartbreak.

Most people have witnessed Dale Watson perform more times than they have seen their own image in a mirror. From August 9th until the 15th he will be working the Oneida Casino Lounge singing songs of drinking, driving, and dying over the luckless ping of the one armed bandit.

In a pre-performance interview we discussed the corruption of authentic country music, creepy media influence on the development of young girls, job failure, his brief stint as a nudie model, and suicide. As I recall, we laughed the whole time.

SCENE: For readers who don't know the Dale Watson lexicon, how do you define the Ameripolitan genre?

Dale Watson: I can best describe it as what country music would have sounded like before it was polluted in the 1970s and 80s. The Kenny Rogers phenomenon paved the way for the Kenny Chesney spandex twang made popular by record companies and radio outlets. There was a time when an artist sold 50,000 copies of a record and everyone threw a party. Now, no one cares unless you press a million CDs. Ameripolitan ends with the Merle Haggard, George Jones, Willie Nelson, Johnny Cash, and Waylon Jennings sound. It's the deep baritone voice of Vern Gosdin. These are songs that still have the human element.

SCENE: One of my ex-fiancés was a deep voiced country singer and said people preferred little tinny voices that sounded like someone getting their nuts strangled.

DW: (laughing) Now they're back to wanting that deep sound but by the time they overproduce the album, there's nothing left to provoke emotion.

SCENE: I still blame pop country for Faron Young's suicide. What is the worst of new country? What turns you off about the modern Nashville sound?

DW: The formula seems to be distorted guitar, drum machines, a fiddle that sounds more like a whistle, and an autotune system that makes all the singing sound robotic. The virtuosity of the players is completely compromised by the technology. Musicianship is buried. It seems the music is neutralized to the point where the commercials between the music evoke more emotion than the songs themselves. It all becomes white noise.

SCENE: In turning away from the country trends, how do you avoid going retro or getting hung up in folksy traditional music that revels in nostalgia?

DW: That's the biggest dilemma of doing this music. I do write about current events and issues that have meaning for me. I try to cover topics I find important rather than cribbing slang from the 1950s. I avoid dated lingo like daddy-o and turtle dovin'. I mean, what the hell is turtle dovein'?

SCENE: It's when you cozy up to someone like two little love birds. It's in the "12 Days of Christmas." (singing) "Two turtle doves and a partridge in a pear tree."

DW: You're right! Still that doesn't speak to my experience. I work to find meaning in the day to day aspects of life.

SCENE: You cover some modern ground in reworking "Truckin' Queen," a cross-dressing theme not commonly covered in country and "Yankee Doodle Jean" deals with the female trucker, so there is a little something for the feminists.

DW: "Truckin' Queen" is based on a true story. In 1997 there was a guy in Oklahoma City who played an endless loop on Channel 19 of himself saying "I've got my nightgown on and my silky underwear." The FCC tracked him down and confiscated his mic, but two years later he resurfaced.

SCENE: You write about the trucking life in the spirit of Dave Dudley and Red Sovine with maybe a touch of Cledus Maggard. What is the allure of that subject matter?

DW: I grew up when CB was king. There was an appreciation of the open road and the usefulness of the citizens band radio. Cell phones are great to keep in touch with the ones you love, but the CB is a useful tool to avoid some hazardous situations. Back then, Conway Twitty was big, the movie *Convoy* was popular, and the show *BJ & the Bear* was on TV.

SCENE: What the hell was happening on BJ & the Bear? At the end of each show the monkey would walk away with chicks in hot pants. What was supposed to happen between a monkey and human women?

DW: (laughing) I don't want to think about it.

SCENE: You are putting out Trucking Sessions Vol. 2. Volume 1 seemed more dreamy and romantic, like a trucker inching his way home. Volume 2 is more resigned and deals with the day to day life on the road. Did you consciously attempt to say something new with this record?

DW: I'm not sure I thought it out to that degree, I just wrote songs that were pertinent to me. Now that you mention it, on the first record, I was on a truck stop tour so I was just getting a taste of the lifestyle. That may account for the more romantic feel. On this recent record, I've been living the life for ten years. I've gotten my commercial driver's license and learned first hand what is expected on the road. Drivers will stop and expect you to halt an eighteen wheeler on a dime. Maybe that speaks to the more realistic perspective of the new album.

SCENE: "Truckin' Man" alludes to the pull of the rig when you are stuck in a "pencil pushin'" employment situation. Have you ever worked a straightforward soul draining 9 to 5 job?

DW: In Nashville, I lied to the people at Sears. I told them I had a degree from San Jacinto College and convinced them I could do their accounting. I am just about as bad at math as anyone can get. I used one finger to punch the calculator while other folks were typing at lightening speed without even looking at the machine.

SCENE: (laughing) I once assured a bank I was an expert at processing home mortgage loans. I got out of there before the six month period when the incorrectly processed paperwork would make its way back from the home office. I always erred on behalf of the homeowner.

DW: I remember going through credit card bundles and there was this one account that had charges for nothing but baby stuff, cribs, formula and the like, and I just signed off on it.

Whenever a supervisor walked by, you can bet I was punching on that calculator!

SCENE: I overused the embossing seal to look professional.

DW: It's a good thing I had music to fall back on!

SCENE: What type of songs do you like to hear when you are traveling across the country?

DW: XM Radio is big for truckers. It allows them to stay on one station without fading out from town to town. Willie's Place is a great show that breaks new artists while playing traditional favorites. On Sundays I like to put on *Family Bible* by Conway Twitty.

SCENE: One of the lines that hit me from the new album is in a song called "Truck Stop in LaGrange" where you mention purchasing a tape of Ray Price Gold. For everyone who has ever made a pit stop in America's great rest areas, this tape is familiar. Have you ever made any great musical truck stop discoveries?

DW: Looking through truck stop music has always been one of my favorite things. With reissues you don't get the odd cuts and variety found on tapes. I remember collecting 8-tracks. There would be the standard record and then an 8-track issue that featured a few songs just for the car. When I was touring in the Suburban, we would glue classic cassette covers to the dashboard.

SCENE: I liked truck stop tapes because there was always some odd Boxcar Willie song that didn't exist in the universe at large. Once I found a recording by Hot Tuna called "Shake That Fat." It was my favorite song about a jiggy lady shimmying to the delight of skinny men and I've never found it on any compilation or even on the internet.

DW: Yeah, I know that record! There were these guys standing next to...

SCENE: ...a black car! You create so much road music, do you have any favorite trucker slang?

DW: We got a bear on the comedian.

SCENE: What? You've got a cop on the grassy knoll between the highway lanes?

DW: Yep. I got my sights on a wrapped reefer.

SCENE: What the hell?

DW: That's a tarp rolled tightly over a refrigerator truck.

SCENE: (laughing) I've never heard these. When I traveled around America, I had an outdated 1970s CB Bible, so only the seasoned truckers knew what I was talking about.

DW: I'm still working on a song about lot lizards.

SCENE: Does it say anything about Coke cans on the dashboard?

DW: Huh?

SCENE: If you want a truck stop prostitute to service your vehicle, you have to put a Coke can on your dashboard as a sign.

DW: You learn something new every day.

SCENE: Put it in your song. You are donating money from album sales to St. Christopher's Truckers Development Relief Fund. What does that organization do?

DW: Many truckers have medical problems. The lifestyle is brutal on the body. From shifting your load or sitting still hour upon hour, the sedentary life promotes diabetes and back problems. A lot of independent drivers have to carry their own insurance. Some of these fellows live on a diet of coffee and candy bars just to stay awake.

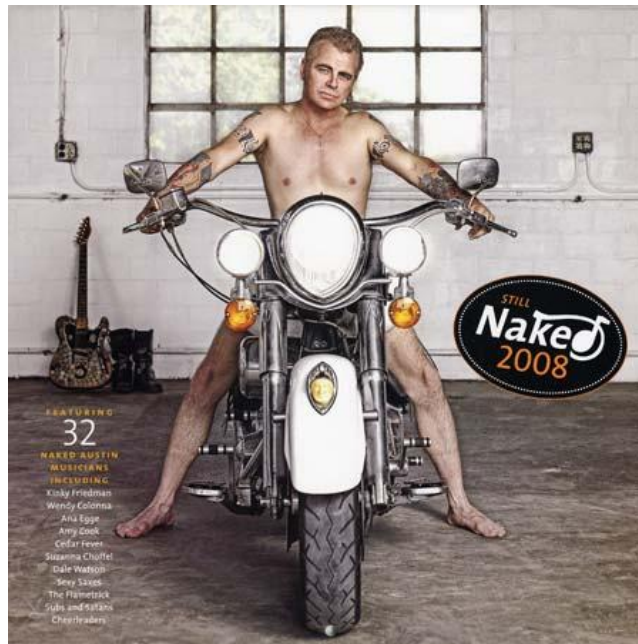
Radio host Dave Nemo has promoted this program that helps fund basics for hard working truckers. From insulin shots to back braces, this organization ensures that the career trucker is taken care of.

SCENE: In other philanthropic ventures, you straddled a motorcycle naked in 2008 for a charity calendar benefiting children of Austin authors, artists, and musicians. It was billed as "favorite pickers without their knickers." Recently I interviewed Gretchen Wilson on her tour bus and we were clamoring about our mutual desire for more male nudity in the media. She said, "Women will show it all, but guys just won't go there." What do you think? Do you feel sensitive to the feminist plight or were you just hankering to show your junk for a good cause?

DW: I ain't bashful. I suppose men are a little more insecure about their manhood. We'll take it off, but it better not be a cold room. Make sure it's warm!

SCENE: Is that the whole story? They just want to make sure it doesn't look small?

DW: There you have it.



SCENE: What have you learned about women from being the father of young girls?

DW: Right before we talked I endured the Disney channel. It's sad that the cartoons and programs are all about the girl trying to get the boy. The media is pushing young women to grow up so quickly. Girls are programmed to get a boyfriend before learning about themselves. This Hannah Montana thing is something else.

SCENE: It might be the crossroads of all evil from your point of view: Girls chasing boys and the "Achy Breaky Heart" Billy Ray Cyrus phenomenon.

DW: That about covers it. Luckily Rachel, my sixteen year old daughter, is focused on the academic side of things. She says she's proud to be a nerd and enjoys the biggest deterrent of this sort of media which is reading.

SCENE: Reading is so great for girls. It teaches them to pay attention to the pictures in their heads rather than what they are being sold. One of your albums I love best is *Every Song I Write Is For You* dedicated to the girlfriend you lost to an auto accident. In the documentary *Crazy Again* you discuss your road to recovery from that life-altering event. What can you share with people who are struggling to overcome grief and loss?

DW: Don't try to do it alone. On one hand you need to keep your mind busy, but you can't resort to dwelling on your grief. I've seen people who won't even talk about the sad times in their life. They're just gone and they refuse to touch on the topic. I tend to think the other option is better. Talk, talk, talk. Go to grief counseling. Maybe that means therapy or maybe that means spending time with a close friend sharing your feelings over a beer.

Some people who don't understand grief might come up and ask you, "Aren't you over it yet?" No one gets over it, but you learn to live with the pain. Sometimes you feel guilty when you stop crying or spend a whole day not thinking of the person you lost, but time is your friend.

SCENE: I believe that. Don't commit a 10-63 (that's trucker slang for suicide). One of my favorite songs from that record is "Your Love I'm Gonna Miss." As a woman, I like the way it honors the little stuff, like getting ready for work and being appreciated for the downtime moments. What are some of your favorite songs to sing?

DW: That is one of my favorite songs I've ever written. I wanted to make a video of that song, but the record company talked to some twenty year old girl in Huston who worked for a magazine that dictated radio playlists across the southwest and she didn't like the sad songs. She picked some tune that had lyrics about Texas and the label went with that instead of the deeper choices. I would have loved to do a video for "Your Love I'm Gonna Miss" because it connects with people.

SCENE: Right! It says life is not eternal so love this very moment in time because it may not come around again.

DW: That's exactly what it's about. Country music used to be a grown person's genre. Now people get nervous if anyone has silver or white hair.

SCENE: Unless they're picking up a lifetime achievement award and being hustled off stage. You've been through your share of relationships and now you have a neat lady in your life, have you learned any essential truths about love along the way?

DW: I suppose the classic definition of insanity holds true. Insanity is when you keep making the same mistakes over and over. The mistakes are just that: missteps. There's nothing so bad that you can't recover from as long as you've got your health. As long as those you care about are doing OK, the rest is small potatoes.

SCENE: What sort of projects are you looking forward to?

DW: I'd like to put out an acoustic album of roots music experimenting with upright bass, drums, and a straightforward production. I'm looking forward to bringing more of that simplicity that makes music heartfelt.

SCENE: Who are the modern players you like to perform with?

DW: Dwight Yoakum is great about going against that manufactured sound. I've had the pleasure of opening for Willie Nelson, Merle Haggard, Johnny Paycheck, and Alison Krauss. There have been quite a few bluegrass acts over the years who were allowed a revival because of that movie [*Oh Brother Where Art Thou?*]

SCENE: You have mentioned affection for Wisconsin in other interviews. Flatter us some more by describing what you like about the dairy belt.

DW: It is one of my favorite places in the states to tour. The people are similar to fans in Europe where they seem to know their roots music.

SCENE: I know, in Europe they love all things quintessentially American. They are up on our fashions, classic country, and vintage westerns. They know Audie Murphy!

DW: We have an Audie Murphy museum right here in Texas. Ask the average Texan teen who he is and they'll have no idea.

In Wisconsin people will yell out songs off my albums or call out hits from traditional performers and challenge the band. It's a pleasure to play for an informed audience. It's similar to Europe in that way.

SCENE: You have an upcoming stint at Oneida in Green Bay. What sorts of people make up the casino crowd?

DW: It's a wide open spectrum. You have the pierced nose kids and the grey hairs with two inch glasses like me! Oneida Casino is really interesting in the acts they book. There seems to be a sense of musical integrity in their line up.

SCENE: Do you gamble?

DW: I do, but not too much. I allow myself a little but know my limit.

SCENE: I'm a casino whore but I stop at fifty bucks. I gamble with my life and my heart. Good country & western music tackles the big themes: love, work, heartache, and death. What stories do you think still need to be told in your music?

DW: In Galway, Ireland I wrote ten songs for the perfect date album. You start with dinner for two and it moves on from there. It's a theme record in the spirit of Johnny Cash or Marty Robbins. It's a collection of mood music to set a tone.

SCENE: I'd buy that!

DW: I hate homogenized music without any feeling. I remember when you'd set your radio to a few dials: blues, rock, and country. You could count on radio stations to evoke a feeling with the songs they played. These days there's too much rap in my country.

SCENE: Like Trace Adkins singing "Honkytonk Badonkadonk."

DW: That about kills it. In *People I've Known, Places I've Been* or the trucking music, I try to cover a theme while staying true to the sound I love.

SCENE: Well I can't wait to see you shake up those old timers on the one-armed bandits with some familiar favorites!

DW: Well, drop on by and say hello!

Wisconsin fans can drop on by and say hello to The Titanium Fox from August 9th to the 15th in Oneida Casino's main gambling lounge. Dale Watson's music will be accentuated by the cries of winning and losing, which is pretty much what the songs are about anyway.