

Dave Sammarco

by Brian M. Owens

With the swagger of a country gentleman and the musical chops to back it up, Dave Sammarco proves to be the real deal when it comes to writing and performing music. He's got a flair for turning the norm into something special that resonates with folks of all ages, color and creed. On his most recent album, *One Kind Face*, those traits resonate loudly song after glorious song. We tracked Dave down and queried him about his musical journey and he weighed in with a fascinating, life's worth of stories...

METRONOME: How long have you been playing music?

Dave Sammarco: Since I was about six years old. I was very fortunate to have my Dad teach me some basic chords on his classical guitar. I dabbled with guitar between ages 6 and 12. I recall like it was yesterday when Dad brought me home my first guitar. It was a Junior size, classical six string. I can still smell the wood in the kitchen. He picked it up brand new for me from his Uncle Johnny from East Boston.

My Great Uncle Johnny also made mandolins, fiddles, banjos and acoustic guitars in his basement shop. It was Uncle Johnny who introduced me to Bluegrass. He could play dueling banjos to the T. He played until age 97. I really miss him.

I started playing harmonica, when I was around 12 years old. We had a neighbor from Missouri, who played harp. I asked if he could teach me how to play it. He proceeded to throw me a beat up Hohner Blues harp in the key of C and said play it 'til it sounds alright. That was one of the best lessons I ever had. Still got that harp.

From age 12 to 19, I played mostly Blues harmonica. As my playing improved, I started going to Blues Jams and sitting in with full bands up and down the East coast. I picked the acoustic guitar back up at around age 19 and started teaching myself to play harmonica and guitar at the same time. Then I added singing into the mix. It took a while, but now, through lots of practice and by God's Graces, it comes second nature.

METRONOME: What got you in to it initially?

My Father was a huge influence musically for me. He sang, played piano and guitar. On guitar, he would play old folk songs, like the "Crawdad Song," "Michael Row Your Boat Ashore," "Skip To My Lou," "Billy Boy," "Aunt Roadie," "Amazing Grace" and

others. He taught me the same, all played with basic chords. Thank God for basic chords. I do believe in 3 chords and the truth.

Just look at Bob Dylan's song "Long Time Gone" or Merle Haggard's "Bottle Let Me Down!" Some great songs were written with just two, three and four chords.

What really got me into music was my Father's love for it, his support around it, his taking the time to teach me, and all the great tunes I was hearing on the radio. I really loved listening to the radio as a kid growing up. My whole family dug music.

METRONOME: I understand you grew up in a very supportive household. Can you

tell us about that?

My Father's immense love for music carried over to me. He was a very busy man, but always had time to lend me an ear, give advice or show me some new chords, or critique a song. He was very supportive.

Through the years, my wife Nicole has been the biggest supporter of my music. I find myself asking her some of the same questions, I used to ask Dad. She offers excellent advice and has truly been the wind beneath my wings.

METRONOME: What came first, the vocals or the guitar?

Vocals came first. I recall singing Church Hymns at Sunday Mass with Mom, Dad and

my younger sister. We would also sing at campfire sing-a-longs. The order of things are as follows: singing, guitar, harmonica, guitar and harmonica, singing harmonica and guitar playing solo shows, singing and playing guitar in full band formats with an occasional solo show, respectively.

METRONOME: When did the songwriting kick in for you?

The songwriting kicked in for me in the way of writing poems in the margin of my school books while in high school. Then writing in notebooks. Serious structured songwriting started at about 25 years old.

METRONOME: Nashville has been an inspiration to you. What is it about the city that moves you musically?

Nashville has been such a great teacher to me in regards to singing, performing and writing. Most of the record labels and music publishers and people I met during my trips were very supportive in regards to offering advice and viable criticism. What I learned from them has been invaluable and priceless.

On my first trip down, I pulled into Shonies Motel on Demonbreun Street, a few blocks away from lower Broadway, Tootsies, Robert's Western World and Jack's BBQ, etc. I had been driving about 19 hours straight, was beyond tired and famished, but found myself playing a set of music on Tootsie's stage 2 hours later. How are you going to sleep your very first Night in Nashville Tennessee?

For the next three weeks, I played at various spots such as the Bluebird, Sutler, French Quarter, Exit In, Jack's Guitar Bar, Douglas Corner and a few other venues and occasionally sat in with some well-known players. I ate breakfast at Mac's Meat Plus Three each morning, Jack's BBQ for lunch, and sang a few songs late night at a great little Honkytonk called the Idle Hour. It was a great first time trip. I'm due for another one soon.

METRONOME: Who are some of your favorite musicians?

My favorites are: Jimmy Reed, Lightnin' Hopkins, Muddy Waters, Bonnie Raitt, Gillian Welch, Johnny Cash, Steve Earle, Ryan Adams, Bruce Springsteen, Lucinda Williams, Buddy Miller, Merle Haggard, George Jones, Dwight Yoakam, Patsy Cline, Bob Dylan, The Louvin Brothers, Pearl Jam, Elvis Presley, ZZ Top, Uncle Tupelo, Rolling Stones, Aerosmith, Outlaws, Dire Straits, Ten Years After, Blackfoot, Howlin' Wolf,



Willie Dixon, Cream, Fleetwood Mac, Rory Gallagher, Jimmy Hendrix, Lynyrd Skynyrd, The Byrds, Led Zeppelin, Social Distortion, Nirvana, Soundgarden, Bottle Rockets, Son Volt, Old 97s and The Who. Some might say my musical taste is all-over the place. I just appreciate a great song.

METRONOME: What kind of instruments do you play?

Guitar mostly- acoustic and electric. For acoustic my go to is a Larravee Jumbo with a Fishman pick-up. For electric, it's a Gretsch Tennessee Rose or a Fender Telecaster. For harmonica, usually Hohner blues harps and special 20s. When I'm playing harp, I use a Shure Green Bullet mic played through a Peavey Classic 30 amp.

METRONOME: You have a new album out called One Kind Face. Is this your first full-length release?

One Kind Face is our 6th and most recent release. Here's our other ones. Unless It's Yours (2000), Time Machine (2001), Coulda Been The One (2005), Born with a Broken Heart (2007), Live at The Big "S" (aka Live at Sally O'Brien's) where I ran my Country Western/Americana Show for 10 years called Honky Tonk Night. I also opened up the kitchen there and was their Chef for 2 years.

METRONOME: Where did you record the project?

At Ducky Carlisle's, Ice Station Zebra Studio in Medford, Massachusetts. He also engineered, Time Machine, Coulda Been The One and Born With A Broken Heart. Ducky is a great guy, with a great ear for music, not to mention a fantastic drummer.

METRONOME: Who played on the album with you?

Jimmy Scoppa was on lead guitar. Steve Latt played fiddle & pedal steel. Jeff Allison played drums. Dave Leitch played bass guitar. Scott Baerenwald did backing vocals and myself on lead vocals, acoustic guitar & harmonica.

METRONOME: How did you meet them all?

Jimmy Scoppa had been playing with me since about 2002. I first met him at Finnegan's Wake in Cambridge, MA. After hearing his Telecaster playing, I figured it would be well suited for my style of music. He's one of the all-time best players. His playing is very tasteful, country and clean.

Steve Latt and I met around 2002. He used to sit in with us at Toad in the early days and then joined us full time and played at all the Sally Honky Tonk Night Shows. He's a very talented multi-instrumentalist. He's adept at fiddle, pedal steel, mandolin, banjo and guitar. He would start a song on fiddle, midway switch to banjo, and solo out with pedal steel. He and Jimmy would do these mind-blowing tradeoffs at many shows, but really shined at Sally's. Some of those moments are captured on, Dave Sammarco Band live at the Big S.

Dave Leitch is a bassist who played with us for a number of years. He's a rock solid bassist with a great ear for music, and he's a great singer.

Jeff Allison rocks steady like Charlie Watts. He has great ears, a great sense of rhythm and is a wonderful guy.

Scott Baerenwald started playing with me with me around the same time Asa Brebner did (2000). He played bass and sang on my 2nd, 3rd, and 4th CDs and sang beautiful backups on One Kind Face. I was truly blessed and fortunate to have him and Asa in my corner. Steve Sadler was also remarkable on the latter two as well. Steve Moore also sang some great backups and played fantastic mandolin on Time Machine. Chris Sciuto played rock solid drums on our 2nd, 3rd and 4th CDs.

METRONOME: What made you settle on the name, One Kind Face, for the CD?

As long as you have one kind face to come home to, listen to how your day went, offer their advice and then give you a hug, these two kind faces together, make all the difference to both of them from throwing the towel in.

One kind face can also be a smile from a stranger or a passerby. If someone was down, that one kind face could cheer them up and get them through a bad day. I feel it's a title that many people can relate too especially in times like these in regards to COVID 19. We need more kind faces now

more than ever.

METRONOME: "California Time" is a great song. Did you write it after visiting there?

Yes, I wrote that after my wife and I came back from our first trip to California in 2007. We had a legendary time. Like the song says, we saw things we had never seen before. I met some very interesting people and saw wild vegetation and animals. It was eye opening. We had never been in a desert where it was 98 degrees by day and 62 degrees at night.

METRONOME: "Just Don't Need em Anymore" is a great country stomp. How did that tune come together?

Sometimes when people don't have someone special in their lives, they take on a lot of vices. This song is about a guy who had lots of vices. He then met somebody who fell in love with him, and loved him for who he was. He laid down most all of his vices in trade for a best friend. He still plays horseshoes on Saturday in the summer and enjoys a frosty Miller Lite while doing so though (laughs).

METRONOME: "Make Love To Me Tonight" is an excellent two-stepper. What inspired the writing of that?

I wrote that one at our camp in the White Mountains of N.H. back in 2012 where we were sitting around our camp fire, with a young couple. He said to me, "You feel me dude?" It stuck with me- you feel me, and

you read me. Like CB radio jargon. The next morning I woke up early, got the fire going, sipped a cup of coffee and wrote the song using "you feeling me and you reading me" as part of the lyric while doing a little country rap at the same time.

METRONOME: "Honky Tonk Queen" is a great roadhouse number? Did you have someone in mind when you penned it?

I wrote that one about a friend of mine who was the manager of a club in Nashville. She never used her fists to put guys in their place if they were stepping out of line. She did it with her words, never swearing. She set a dude straight with a quick tongue and a carefully chosen dig. Most bowed down and apologized and didn't get thrown out. She also booked the music there, tended bar and sang. She was a true Honky Tonk Queen. And she sang like nobody's business.

METRONOME: "You Do The Math" is beautifully written. When writing, do ballads come easy for you?

When writing ballads, I dig down deep and let my feelings write the song. I feel ballads are so popular, because they generally touch upon topics many people can relate to in their own lives.

METRONOME: How often do you perform live?

Pre-Covid, we might play from 15 to 30 full band shows a year. I also perform about 6 to 15 shows a year in a solo format.

METRONOME: Who's currently in the band?

It's my honor to have Toby Leith on fiddle, Jim Gildea on bass and vocals, Bob Sweeney on drums and vocals, Wills Wilson on electric and lead guitars, and myself on rhythm, acoustic and electric guitars, harmonica and lead vocals.

METRONOME: Where can folks find out more about you on the internet?

They can find us at: www.davesammarcoband.com or email me at: davidscatering@hotmail.com.

METRONOME: Is there anything you'd like to add before we close out?

I'd like to thank all of our fans, friends and families for their support, coming to our shows from near and far, and dancing all night to our original tunes. There's no greater compliment than that. Thanks to all of the fine musicians for playing with our band over the years. Last but not least, these are the hardest times we humans have ever been faced with. To say it rips me in two is an understatement. Our hearts go out to each and every person who have lost loved ones to this horrible virus, and for every front line worker and first responder. Thank you all for your sacrifices and thank you for keeping us safe. In the meantime, all we can do is keep praying, keep on playing, have respect for each other, do our best to keep each other safe at all times, and do the best we can, one day at a time.



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