

FOLK

ERIC BRUTON NEVER FAR AWAY

By Jeff Reid

THE IMAGE OF THE FOLKSINGER, a traveling troubadour, guitar slung across his back, walking down a dusty rural road, is an iconic one. But not for folksinger Eric Bruton. His life and travels, unlike most of us, have mostly been on water, and his songs reflect this. He is a waterman.

"The ocean represents the fullest expression of all that is good in life and all that can take one from life," he explains. "Sea and shore are yin yang in a very real way. Standing on the shore, for me, is like standing at the edge of metaphysical and physical reality."

Although he now resides in Raleigh, Bruton, whose father was a radio announcer, was raised throughout the South. "We always seemed to be heading for his next great break," recalls Bruton. Finally in the late fifties, the family settled at Carolina Beach, NC, his dad taking a job at WKLM in Wilmington. It was here, close to the ocean and relatively close to his mom's family's ancestors, that water and music began to resonate in his life.

"My mother was born and raised on Ocracoke and her family goes back to 1786 there. Every summer we would return to the island for a few weeks. My dad played guitar and his brothers all played and sang -- mostly gospel music."

But Eric was leaning toward American folk music, which at the time was experiencing a revival of sorts with the popularity of the Kingston Trio, Joan Baez and Bob Dylan. "I think I went that way because I saw something of the unsung hero in that music form," he recalls.

Writing his first song while attending New Hanover High School in the early sixties, Eric and his friends were smitten with the idea of being folksingers. "We were all going to make it big some day, but of course only a few really went beyond the borders of Southeastern NC," he recalls with a grin. "I was destined not to be one who made it big, but I still wrote some decent songs."

Joining the Naval Reserve in 1963, Eric spent the next eight and a half years in the service. "I played fairly often at a coffee house in Virginia Beach when I was in the Navy, but several attempts to cross over to R&B and blues went nowhere." Marriage and kids soon came and his music career became a part time passion. "Over the years, I've owned two small businesses and been a seaman most of my adult life," he confesses. Some of his fondest memories came from producing an annual Folk/Americana show here in Wilmington called "The Friends' Midwinter Folk Reunion" in partnership with WHQR for 13 years.

Today, Eric is a captain of a small cruise ship operating in New England, but his music is still in his heart. "I still write songs because it is my art, my passion, my poetry," he admits.

Since 2000, he has recorded four CDs, including his newest release, *Never Far Away*. Inspired by a trip to Wyoming, the collection is a mixture of songs about the West, the Caribbean, the mountains and life in general, but with one central theme. "That trip stayed with me for a long time after returning to North Carolina," he says. "It was then that I understood that there are many places in my heart that will never be any farther away than my heart and mind."



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