

## MICHAEL PERRY AND THE LONG BEDS

### *Biography*

"First time I ever heard Waylon Jennings," says **Michael Perry**, "was on an 8-track tape in a four-wheel drive truck doing sixty miles an hour down a Wyoming hay meadow. We were running late for Bible study." The songs on *Tiny Pilot* (Perry's latest musical release with his band the Long Beds) are a direct reflection of that experience. Ranging from straight-up twang to churchly harmonies and populated by characters drawn straight from rural and small-town America, they launch from places like the overpass outside Perry's beloved hometown of New Auburn, Wisconsin (population currently 562), a gospel service in a granary, and the kitchen floor of a woman about to drop a world of hurt on her drunken husband. "I was raised by farmers and preachers and tough country women, and I suppose my songs reflect that," says Perry. "Then again, certain wisdoms are available only from whistlers, frauds, and sinners, so I try to slide them a line or two as well."

Raised in a church so austere that hymns were sung with no choir, no accompaniment, and no *church* (the congregation met in a farmhouse and sat on straight-backed wooden chairs) Perry and his brother learned to sit side-by-side and work out harmonies on the fly. Those Sunday mornings instilled in Perry a love of singing "clear and pure" that can be heard throughout *Tiny Pilot* - most especially on the songs, "842 Miles," "If They Give You Wings," and "Sweet Edge of Time." Conversely, anyone introduced to Ol' Waylon by means of a four-wheeling 8-track is bound to shoot for some *boogety-boogety* now and then, as Perry and the Long Beds do on "Undone," "Somewhere South of Sunday," and (in a respectful nod to Ol' Hoss himself) "After Waymore's Blues."

Perry began writing songs in the early 1990s during long nights when he was struggling to survive on prose (he is the author of four books: *Population 485*, *Truck*, *Off Main Street*, and *Coop*). With no arts background (he has a nursing degree) he found himself drawn especially to the work of poets and singer/songwriters. (In interviews Perry tends to list his greatest literary influences as Dylan Thomas and Steve Earle - and not necessarily in that order.) "I remember writing late one night and hearing a Kevin Welch song with the line, 'I whiskey'd up my coffee cup... sittin' here tryin' not to call you up,'" says Perry, "and I was floored by the rhythm and the story in that single line..." He began writing songs as a way to break up all-night typing sessions, and eventually he had enough of them that a musician friend invited him to play a coffee shop. "I'm not saying I was nervous, but I ripped out a sixty-minute set list in thirty-two minutes flat," says Perry. By 2004, he had begun recruiting Long Beds. In 2006, he released his first album, *Headwinded*.

While the music made by Perry and the Long Beds has been variously described as 'country folk,' 'roughneck folk,' 'folk-twang,' and Americana, they prefer the description given by an audience member after a benefit concert in Perry's old high school gym: "You sound just like Gordon Lightfoot... only zippier!" Nice - but there are limits. "Zippy or not," says Perry, "when 'The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald' comes on the radio, we sit down, shut up, and listen."

Michael Perry resides with his family on a small farm in rural Wisconsin.