

# DANACOOPER

**Dana Cooper's** new CD *The Conjurer* strikes a powerful balance between a lived-in, natural artistry and a passionate desire to speak one's truth. Finding that balance between craft and art takes experience, and this is where Cooper's lifelong commitment to his work shows: Having started performing more than 40 years ago at age 16, he owns an expert craftsman's skilled hand and a dedicated artist's constant desire to tap deeper into his own experience.

Cooper's talent has been obvious from the beginning. Signed with Elektra Records in 1973, that talent has taken him around the world, performing regularly to enthusiastic audiences in Europe and nearly every state in the Union. Always a critic's favorite, he's never rested on his laurels, as *The Conjurer* makes clear.

Often accorded the accolade of a 'songwriter's songwriter,' his songs have been covered by numerous recording artists, many acclaimed songwriters themselves, including Maura O'Connell, Claire Lynch, Pierce Pettis and Susan Werner. He has been a featured performer on many prestigious TV and radio programs, including *Austin City Limits* and *Mountain Stage*, and he is a much-anticipated annual regular on the main stage at the esteemed Kerrville Music Festival. His worldwide audience includes hotbeds of Americana music in Europe, where Cooper has performed at the Belfast Songwriters Festival and tours regularly in Sweden and Denmark, often with support from the well-regarded Danish band The Sentimentals.

Working for the first time with co-producer Thomm Jutz on *The Conjurer* provided Cooper a creative boost. A guitarist in Nanci Griffith's touring band, Jutz also has worked with Mary Gauthier, Pat McLaughlin, David Olney and Steve Young, among others. Working in Jutz's TJ Studios in Mt. Juliet, Tenn., Cooper went for a rawer, more organic sound than on past recordings.

His bandmates in the studio also rose to the occasion. The lineup includes a rhythm section featuring Griffith's longtime drummer, Pat McInerney, and bassist Dave Roe, who played with Johnny Cash for the last decade of his career. Jutz joined Cooper on guitar, drawing the singer to describe his co-producer's playing "as remarkable, restrained and tasteful," high praise considering Cooper's own considerable six-string skills. The exemplary multi-instrumentalist Fats Kaplin played fiddle, mandolin and steel guitar, while percussion wizard Kirby Shelstad plays the tablas, giving Cooper's venerable song "Jesse James" a darker texture than in its pre-

vious version. Grammy award winning singer songwriter Kim Carnes who co-wrote the opening song, "Enough", joins those singing harmony with Cooper on the album.

As the album's eclectic nature suggests, Cooper long ago stopped trying to fit into categories. Ostensibly an acoustic singer-songwriter presenting contemporary adult songs, Cooper draws on folk, blues, rock, reggae, pop and country. *The Conjurer* features some of the bluest, rawest music of Cooper's career, as well as some of the sunniest and most tender. He ties it all together through sheer force of his creative vision, his expressive voice and his distinctively rhythmic guitar style.

Cooper has not just been doing it that way; he's been succeeding at it. A popular speaker and mentor at songwriting workshops, he's become what elders should be: a role model. Having just created the best album of his career, he's still showing others that inspiration and vision aren't about trends, but about tapping into what you do best.

"I've always considered myself an outsider as far as the music industry goes," he says. "I focused on a grassroots career by making albums I liked and that I took to people by playing live. Now that's what everyone says is the new music model, that you build a sustaining career by playing live and sticking to your own vision. If that's the case, then I figure I'm ahead of the game, because I've been doing it that way for more than 30 years."



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