



Ask songster and storyteller Pete Huttlinger about his work, not his health

Heart of the Matter

By JON WEISBERGER

NASHVILLE – September 5, 2013 -- What with the glut of recordings out there today, there's a lot of motivation for an artist (or his PR team) to find a good backstory that can help draw in that extra little bit of attention — the attention that might just make all the difference in breaking through. Pete Huttlinger's got a good one: one that involves the words "heart failure" and "stroke," and the occurrence of one while in the middle of recovering from the other. But where some artists would consider the PR angles that follow as an embraceable upside to the tale, the guitarist is a little wary.

"I would prefer to be defined by the music I make, not by the heart pump I carry around," Huttlinger says. "The health stuff, that's not really what I want to wear as my badge of honor.

That's not to say that he's ignoring it. He's put together a "Don't Just Live, Live Well" presentation that has him speaking to audiences around the country. But you get the feeling that given his druthers, he'd rather put every bit of his hard-won energy into performing the music from his recent *McGuire's Landing*. And if he's going to talk about something, he'd rather talk about that music and the story — which is to say, short book — that goes along with it. As a matter of fact, it's a book that has nothing to do with strokes or heart attacks or with his health at all.

"McGuire's Landing" was originally a tune written in 2004 and recorded in a spare arrangement that landed it in the middle of his guitar-only *Santa Rita Connection* back in 2006. "I had the tune," Huttlinger says, "and then I got the concept of the album — to put together a story and a set of songs that would relate to its different episodes. But it was a larger project than I'm used to doing, so it kept taking a back seat, until I got sick and then started my recovery."

Listen to the album — which starts off with a new version of the title track that layers some deliciously restrained strings in behind contemplative guitar and includes, at one point or another, vocals, more strings, banjo, accordion, dobro and keyboards — and it's easy to see why that's so. Still, it's easy for a listener — and for Huttlinger himself — to consider the enforced time off to have had a silver lining, for *McGuire's Landing* stretches notably beyond the simplicity of just a man and his guitar that characterized his earlier recordings.

Huttlinger's not changing his approach to touring — he sandwiches solo appearances between stints accompanying folks like John Oates — but he's excited about being able to bring some of the musicians on the project to his release show at 3rd & Lindsley on Monday.

"I'll probably get Jeff Taylor in on some stuff," Huttlinger says. "And I'll have a string section. In fact, I've been busy making some additional charts just for this gig. This is pretty different stuff, and I'm glad to have it out."