

Jack Shannon Scott Interview

Contributed by Wendy Clark and Amy English
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This story originally appeared in RUKUS magazine, in the July 1998 issue. Wendy Clark was the interviewer, Amy English wrote and edited the final story. I hope seeing this brings a smile to your face. What was the Question?an interview with Jack Shannon Scott

Shannon Scott, part bohemian, part renaissance man, splits his time between St. Louis and New Orleans. He also splits his time between band, family, and pub. The music is as likable as he is. The mention of the family brings a smile to his face. The pub, located at Menard and Lami in Soulard, is a haven of sorts and a work in progress as much as Shannon is himself. He sat down with our interviewer and between singing along with the jukebox and greeting folks coming and going he managed to answer a few questions for us.

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As opposed to this side? (standing behind the bar at that time) It seems like I'm always on this side anyway.(laughs) It's a strain, I'd say if I had no other obligation it would probably be a breeze. Especially when you got a pretty good crew of people working for me that I can totally trust, you know, and that's kind of a rare opportunity. I can go to bed at night and not have to stay here until 1:30 in the morning, so I can get some sleep and keep sane, and still get some paperwork done.

What caused the inception of this, whose idea was it, how did it happen?

Tim and I had a CD coming out, for Bonebag, and what we wanted to do was have an office, like a pseudo independent record company: Haggis Records. We were gonna have an office space, have a computer, phone line, and a fax machine, and we were gonna take like 1000 CD's and send them to everyone we could possibly find who would take it. That was our game plan, but we couldn't find office space in Soulard. There was nothing available. Then we found this place, and the rent was \$900 a month and just six months prior it had shut down as a functioning bar. We're thinking, okay yeah.

It was my idea, and I was just stupid and we didn't check up on anything before we got into it. So, bad mistake #1. If you think your going to open a business: research. If you need a liquor license, find out that you'll spend three months petitioning the neighborhood. What was the question again? Anyway, I looked in here and saw the bar and figured 'I can run a bar'. We can rent out the extra space. We can have the record company upstairs, have the bar down here to make the money just to pay the rent so the record company could operate for free, and we could practice in the basement or rent it out as practice rooms, or use the attic. There's all sorts of possibility for revenue, and we'll be able to push our CD.

It was always about the CD. We signed our lease and we incorporated as Kennealy's Pub, that was my choice. It kind of rolls off the tongue. It's as good as Kennedy's, it's (with Irish accent) Kennealy's Pub. As soon as we decided to start running as a business, people started telling us we had to do this and do that, get this and get that. At first it just seemed like little chores, but when you start having to petition everyone within a 350 foot radius-registered voters and property owners. most the people who own property here don't even live in St. Louis. Took us three months.

That gets into my next question. Any other problems you came across?

Incorporation, taxes, this license and that license, blah, blah, blah. The one thing that they say is that you have to have your building inspected, and we were trying to get open for Mardi Gras 1997, so we call the inspector. We figure with two really hard weeks of work, painting and cleaning, and all the lighting fixtures, maybe some new floorings, some work in the bathrooms and this place could be opened for \$20,000. So the inspectors come in here and nothing passes to the extent that we gut the back half of the building, build a fire staircase, handicap access. And they are very hard core on that, so it takes it from a \$20,000 or \$30,000 process to a \$180,000, including payroll, materials, all new electric, new heating and cooling. It's an incredible amount of work we put into it. It was supposed to be a quick project and I was supposed to be living in New Orleans by now. I thought shit, you know, push the CD and nothing'll happen there and I'll just go back home.

{mospagebreak title=Dreams..}Are you glad you did it?

It was a great learning experience. I got to re-associate myself with some old friends and met some really great new ones, and I wouldn't trade that for anything. Plus, this place looks really great. I heard somebody say "you can't get anywhere on good intentions alone", you know? just because you're cool, doesn't get you shit. Cool doesn't get you people. You can be cool as hell and people won't know you're there.

So these are things I'm learning. It's great, it's good for me, it's stretching my brain and maybe, giving me ideas about what I want to do for the rest of my life. Incorporating Louisiana, New Orleans, and the new baby into my life. Trying to find good places for all those, and places I can be happy too. I've had a lot of dreams in the past few months.

Dreams are where reality starts.

That's what I believe. Dreamers are the ones that last the longest, and I'm definitely a dreamer.

When you opened this place, was it out of want for a certain type of venue?

Actually yes, from the get go, when it was a cheap project, I rationalized that we'd need \$3,000 a month. I said to Tim we'd only need 150 people come in and spend \$20 a month, and he realized how little \$3,000 is. So drink prices are really cheap, and hopefully people want to come here.

People like that, they want to hang out here.

Well I hope so, it's been kind of slow, but I don't know. There's been the weather and aftermath of St. Pat's, or maybe a combination of it all. But I've had really good things. People have complained about particulars, but overall they like the bar. You asked if this was what I envisioned and it definitely was not this. This came after a year, it's still very simple, very raw. But much more complex than it would have been. In the initial idea, the building would have been kept the same, we would have painted, probably the same color. The color, Theater Red, was my plan. But it wasn't going to look like this, really. And I don't regret being here this long, definitely, because it turned out that good. The best lesson I learned was the whole "patience is a virtue" thing. It's very hard core. Now I know if you can be patient, you can be anything. It gives you all sorts of strength in other things. It's a sweet place to be, a goal, you know?

(Editor's Note: Amazingly at this point on the t.v. in the background the "Cheers" theme song begins.) How long, exactly did it take?

A year and eight days. All the running around. There's a very helpful thing at City Hall. it's the Business Assistance Center, or something like that. This woman named Lynette, you go up there telling them what you want to do, and they give you these To Do lists. City, State, and Federal things you need to do. Very informative and free.

What did inspire the decor?

Ryan was my biggest inspiration. Really, I didn't realize what it was until we were in New Orleans. We just went to our favorite places: Checkpoint Charlie's and Dragon's Den. These places I had been so many times. Checkpoint Charlie's; cooking right behind the bar, and the music right there, and one person does the whole thing. I wanted to be bartending and hosting Open Mic Night all at the same time. Then Dragon's Den, has that whole opium den thing. Low Tai tables and big cushions and pillows, and you'd drink saki and watch Dave Sharp who was the guitar player for the Alarm. The place was low lit. then there's things like the t.v.'s. I'm a media guy, a visual person and I like t.v.

It's a great touch actually, because tonight we're just sitting here relaxing..

As long as there's not sports on it.

You have "South Park night";

We'll have movie nights, "cause we'll pump it through the PA. Eventually we'll have a video projector. A Sony bad mamma, jamma unit that Tim's got our hooks in. About six foot screen, through the PA and on all the t.v.'s. Classics or even Stripes or Tommy Boy. You can come and chill out and have all the conveniences.

It is very relaxed, very comfortable.

That's one thing we tried to do. We tried not to do anything that bugged us as employees at other places. It helped me design the layout at the bar, the two stations, the space behind the bar.

{mospagebreak title=Promotion is Bullshit}What things do you have planned, what promotions?

I don't want to talk about that stuff. It's all bullshit. No really, the movie stuff will be Monday's. Come, sit, smoke, eat, drink, maybe get somebody to wait on them or they can go to the bar. Tuesday's, an open mic, people really laying their souls bare. Maybe there'll be some moments. This will be the place where we won't be afraid to pull you off the stage if you've been up there too long. Just because there's only three people here, doesn't mean they get to play all night. You get your slot and that's it. Maybe I don't want to listen to you all night. I want the kind of open mic where even people who've only rehearsed in front of the mirror can play. We hope to have a really authentic night, where people can come and not feel stupid, if there really honest. Poetry, any kind of spoken word would be cool.

My dad used to call it "meller drammer". It's an actual term I believe. Wednesday night, we hope to develop a real Jazz Night. Nothing else is popping into my head right now. We won't do a Darts Night, this won't be a Sports Bar. Thursday is relaxation night. Just listening to the jukebox. Good selection, I love the local original, and New Orleans original. Also the Irish Brigade. Friday and Saturday, the live music. We have Michael Schearer. We're hoping to have New Patrons of Husbandry, One Fell Swoop, and I'd like to get New World Spirits- I'd love to hear them acoustically. I think it would be excellent. I bet it would be so powerful. One of my favorite things Andy Schmidt used to do, when they were the Choice, he had an acoustic guitar and he would run it through his distortion pedal and play distorted acoustic and it was cool. That was back when he was just a guitar player and he thought he couldn't sing. What was the question again?

Any special events coming up?

Oh, the Scottish thing. I forget normal people might be interested in something like that. April 6, 1998 at 8pm we'll have what's called Tartan Day. It's a party that started by a Scottish group of guys here in St. Louis, every couple of months they get their bagpipes out and put their kilts on and raise hell and play a lot of sing-alongs. Alec Southerland is in this group, he and his wife, and they're great people, so we offered to do this, well we begged, and said please come, we'd love to have you here in your kilts. We're open and it'll be here. Scottish folk songs and malt whiskey, Scottish country dancing, great food (which they'll be bringing). Celebrating the Scottish-American connection.

Anything else?

I learned something already from Mardi Gras and St. Pat's, for a small business, advertising is smart, promotions are bullshit. To try to promote something in the midst of a big party, drink specials, whatever, it's crap. Our best advertisement was like GET OUT magazine with our name and phone number. We got more calls from that than anything hung in this room here. I got screwed over by a sales rep. I got screwed by a Liquor Rep. so I don't want to hang banners or crap like that in here. This is a Scotch-Irish pub, we have the Scottish flag and the Irish flag painted on the railing, so we'll not have that other stuff in here. Oh, I hadn't seen that.

Stop the tape, go look. (Tape back on) Okay, what was the question?

You also mentioned another group?

Every other Friday, Patty Go Easy, April 3rd and on the 24th. I'm trying to get somebody fresh here. I'd like to have eight different acts rotate in and out. So if you know anyone who could pull off a semi-fucking professional night of music.... let me know.

Who else?

There's this guy, like a one man band he plays alone, with recorded stuff and like he plays six instruments at once (laughs). No really, he's very good and it's this Thursday, his name is Stuart Johnson and he's got this

Leon Redbone kind of voice, this authentic mature voice and he plays guitar really jazzy. And he sings stuff like "Ain't Misbehavin'", and even if it's just background music, he's great. What was the question, again?

What do you feel attracts people to Kennealy's?

What keeps them here? What gets them here? Hmm. Jim Hollaran (owner of McGurk's) said it's more like an Irish Pub than anything he's seen and that's a huge compliment. A pub needs that gentle, walk-in feeling. Simple food, that's what pubs were in the old days. If you wanted to eat, you had whatever the matron of the place cooked that day. We wanted someplace where you could have a Guinness on draft and not pay \$4.75 for it. We could hang out with our friends, we could work with our friends, and that's what we got, what we made. That's a pub to me - family. If you don't like it, you know, get the fuck out.

{mospagebreak title=St Louis Music Scene}About St. Louis music, was there a hole that you saw that needed to be filled?

The only hole was that we needed to be filled was a place where we could play. Seriously. There were some other options in places that we looked at. Big warehouses we could portion off, small bar, dingy, red lights, permanent PA that would always be on. A place where bands could just get up and play. That's what we started looking at. Not filling a hole. Filling a hole in the St. Louis music scene would be like trying to plug Swiss cheese. You know what I mean? There's a lot of holes there. The clubs are just not supported.

What could change that?

People aren't able to open the businesses that they want to open because it's too expensive. There are a lot of good minds out there that could do places that would be as cool as shit. But there's no help. If you could do it for \$30,000, there's a lot of people who could get that. But if you're unproven, not too many can get approved for \$180,000. Luckily I had two partners who could do that. you couldn't do that with strangers, luckily I got to do it with my friends, Tim Layman and Steve Kennealy. And the families have been very supportive of it all. My partners are my friends.