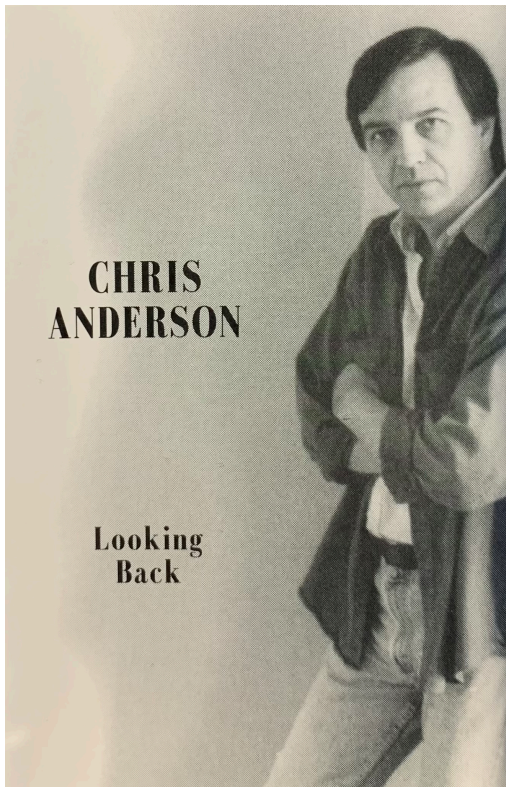




Sixes Music™

## Liner Notes for “*Looking Back*”

(photo by the late and very great Benita Keller. Miss her.)



The music on this studio album was recorded over eight weeks during May and June of 1993. As far as I am concerned, it has stood the test of time. It remains a work of which I am especially proud. An unusual set of circumstances made it possible.

I was coming up on my 40<sup>th</sup> birthday. I had been pursuing the Classical Guitar for about twenty years at that point, and had received some regional recognition for my Classical Guitar efforts. Prior to concentrating on the classical instrument and its music, I was a “Folk Musician”. My music making started at the age of seven and by my late teen years, I was an accomplished multi-instrumentalist performer that could do a very strong coffeehouse set at the snap of a finger.

A little more than a year before this project came together, I suffered a serious injury to my left hand. In its aftermath, I doubted that I would ever recover my guitar playing skills. As luck would have it, the right doctor and the best physical therapist crossed my path exactly when I needed them. They had a highly motivated patient, and after several months of physical therapy, getting my playing back to my old skill level with a guitar seemed to be a realistic goal.

Coincidentally, I also found myself with six months of spare time and some extra money. Working was not a pressing matter for the first time in my adult life. To ease back into making music, my good friend Steve Wright and I were playing together regularly. He’s a master potter and a percussionist. I had made him aware of drums made from clay, and he ran with the idea. In short order, he was producing clay hand drums with a superb sound. They fit like a glove into my preference for music made from acoustic instruments.

I was also sitting in from time to time with musicians in the local club scene. Classical music didn't really excite them. But I am fairly flexible when it comes to style if the end result is musical, and I appreciated being part of a group of talented, supportive musicians. The concept for the album had been brewing in my head for years, and it just seemed the stars were all aligning to make it happen.

Even though my efforts had been devoted to classical music for years, I have always kept my first music loves very close to my heart. The process of learning to play for me was quite natural with no forced, formal structure. It fit into what is referred to as “the oral tradition”, or what one of Pete Seeger's family called “the folk process.” I learned directly from other players, or from listening intently to recordings of other folk musicians. A key element of the genre is putting your own spin on the material. Lyrics are changed, verses are added or subtracted, keys, tempos and even chord progressions are changed to suit the player, etc. "Covers" are not the desired result. More often than not, all that happened sitting on a porch, or around a kitchen table, with two or more people just trading songs.

For this album, I wanted to produce a retrospective of my early musical years, recasting some of my own favorite tunes in a personal way. At the time, the album was intentionally contrary to the accepted norms of making a recording for the popular audience. There were no slick effects added in production, no editing out, and no punching in. There are 58 separate tracks on the album. Only 3 of them required 2nd takes, and one of those was because something accidentally dropped during recording.

I came into the studio with a very clear conception of the end result in mind and recorded the main instrumental part and vocals. The other musicians were given a “scratch tape” of the song before they arrived and recorded their accompanying track. All of it was recorded in analog, and the project was mastered in Digital Audio Tape. Most of all, I wanted the album to build like a good live performance and have an overall sound that mimicked a group of people in a room playing live music.

All the tracks were recorded at a studio in Funkstown, MD. It was owned by a talented musician that I went to high school with, Mike Sokol. Mike also has always had a strong computer/tech background. Among many of the excellent features of his enterprise at the time was his excellent collection of wonderful old-school microphones. He also mixed the tracks in a way that I have come to really appreciate. I was very fortunate to have his help at the time.

The process of digitalizing the remaining tapes and preparing "Looking Back" for a re-release has been amusing at times. Every digital service out there starts with "genre classifications" (of which there are dozens and dozens) all of which split Music into smaller and smaller little boxes, which make it easier for modern music marketers to push a product into the marketplace. None of the pre-packaged labels seem to fit “Looking Back”. I am calling it “Acoustic Roots”.

You can come up with your own classification if you like. I am just happy more of you might get the opportunity to listen to it. In 1993, most of my friends and acquaintances were listening to other styles of music. Today, many of them are wide open to music of all types, including folk rooted acoustic oriented styles. My suspicion is that it will be received with a broader enthusiasm now than it was originally.

Here’s the rundown on the musicians and the songs on the album.

**Chris Anderson** – Vocals, Acoustic Steel String Guitars, Mandolin, Electric Guitar, Electric Bass

**George Rohrer** – Acoustic & Electric Bass, Vocals

**Steve Wright** – Percussion

**Ted Rashka** – Piano, Vocals

**Mort Feldman** – Clarinet

**Pete Wright** – Harmonica

***Come On In My Kitchen*** – (Chris – vocals & acoustic guitar) - This is an iconic tune from one of the most significant early American blues artists, the legendary Robert Johnson. Unlike some of the other players that have covered his tunes, I made no attempt to mimic his Guitar God licks, or his playing style. My arrangement focuses on the melody, which I think brings an emphasis to his unusually gifted story telling talents.

***Stealin’*** – (Chris – vocals, mandolin, acoustic guitar /// George – acoustic bass, vocals /// Steve – clay bongos) – I frankly don’t remember who I heard this one from for the first time. Here it’s imagined with a Jug Band's looseness.

***Sportin’ Life Blues*** – (Chris – vocals, acoustic guitar /// George – acoustic bass /// Steve – udu /// Pete – harmonica) - I have known this tune for a very long time, but I don’t recall how I learned the song or who I heard

it from first. I recently learned that the song is attributed to Brownie McGee, and that it has also been covered by Eric Clapton in a duo with JJ Cale, among others. My version shares the lyrics of the first verse of the others and then go their own way. Its chord progression is also much simpler than McGee's. I love the story and it fit with my years as a pool shooter in the local bars.

***Pallet On Your Floor*** – (Chris – vocals, acoustic guitar /// George – acoustic bass /// Steve – clay bongos) - This is another tune that many in the folk scene have played. I heard it first on a recording by Mississippi John Hurt. I reworked it in my coffeehouse days using an unusual chord progression to feature my guitar skills, and it became one of my signature tunes. The story reflects a sense of bravado that was characteristic of the persona adopted by many of the itinerant southern musicians from the time period of its origin. It was a risky, hand to mouth lifestyle. "Pallet on your floor" is any place in an available corner of a room where you could lay down and sleep.

***Come Back Baby*** – (Chris – vocals, acoustic guitar /// George – acoustic bass /// Steve – clay bongos /// Pete – harmonica) - Dave van Ronk, the "Mayor of Greenwich Village" and an important gatekeeper of its 1960's coffeehouse scene, was a big early influence on me. I fell in love with his guitar playing while hearing one of his recordings. This song is attributed to Walter Davis who included it on a recording in 1940. Hot Tuna has also recently put a version up on YouTube. My version has a set of lyrics that is substantially different from Van Ronk's & Hot Tuna's, both of which follow Davis's quite closely. I also up the tempo and give it a little more drive than the slow, brooding versions that are more faithful to Davis's original recording, which I heard for the first time quite recently.

***Brownsville*** – (Chris – vocals, mandolin) - Most people in the USA associate the mandolin almost exclusively with Bluegrass. In fact, there were a few early black blues players that used it as well, among them Sleepy John Estes, to whom this song is attributed. The first time I heard Estes play on record, he really caught my ear's full attention. It was so distinctive. I had also heard this song on one of Ry Cooder's early recordings. He's widely respected and usually thought of as a Guitar Hero, but he also occasionally breaks out other instruments including the mandolin. I had the opportunity to hear Cooder do this song live in concert as an opening act for Arlo Guthrie. Ry amped it up with a very in-your-face, full band ensemble approach. I was convinced it would work in the bare bones setting that I present in this version.

***I Wonder Why*** – (Chris – vocals, acoustic guitars /// George – acoustic bass /// Mort – clarinet /// Steve – drums with brushes) – I don't write many songs, but when I do, I want them to have a story with a beginning, middle, and ending. It's commonly accepted in these times that songs are a window into the life of the writer. This one actually started as an assignment in one of my college Music Theory classes (c. 1974). "Write a piece based primarily on a chromatic bass line." Later, I added a second section and turned it into a Classical Guitar solo piece in the key of F (a slightly unusual key for guitar) with a distinct 1940's American Songbook feel. Benny Goodman, Duke Ellington, Fats Waller, and Louie Armstrong were favorites of my parents. Their music was frequently on the turntable in our house while I was growing up and remains a source of inspiration for me.

I played the piece as an instrumental frequently in my early classical days. In the mid 80's, I was sitting at a lunch counter and overheard two girls talking. "I have always thought he doesn't really love me. He's still hung up on Jane." The lightbulb went off in my head and as soon as I got home I started writing out the lyrics, "Walking down a lane with a lady love, She's mighty hot but she's not who I'm thinking of." The words rolled off the pen in about 10 minutes.

I met the late Mort Feldman when he came into town as an experienced musical elder. He wound up as a member of a Jump Jive band playing Sax. The band was called "The Blue Comets." It included both Steve and George who play on this album. With some persistent arm twisting on my part, I talked Mort into breaking out his clarinet from the closet and recording his playing on two songs. He claimed he hadn't played clarinet for decades. Mort was in the studio for about ten minutes. I am eternally grateful for his participation and regard it as the highlight of the album.

**Creole Belle** – (Chris – vocals, acoustic guitars /// George – acoustic bass /// Mort – clarinet) This tune came to me from Mississippi John Hurt, who captured my imagination in a very big way at a very young age. I have heard at least a dozen other people take a crack at the tune. None of them suggested the “Creole” quality of the lady who is the subject of the lyric. For me, nothing says New Orleans like a clarinet. My first memories of the instrument come from its use in Dixieland Jazz. My mom and Dad took me to a small club in NYC to hear a Dixieland band when I was 9 or 10 years old. We sat in the front row and I was mesmerized. Mr. Feldman’s playing on the tune is priceless.

**Pretty Polly** - (Chris - vocals, mandolin, acoustic guitar /// Steve - clay bongos) This is a well know standard from the "Old Time" American folk music repertoire. It's been played by countless performers. Its home lies in the heart of the Appalachian mountains, and its origins go back to the British Isles. It is one of what is known as a "Murder Ballad." Often performed on a fiddle or on a banjo played with the old time technique known as "Frailing", I play it here on the mandolin and back myself up on the guitar. Steve's drumming adds a sense of urgency and tension that is very appropriate for the subject matter.

**The Cuckoo** - (Chris - vocals, acoustic guitars /// Steve - clay bongos) The "Cuckoo" is another Appalachian Mountains' ballad that is a standard in the genre. Ramblin' Jack Elliot recorded a version that I found interesting. He used a base line that mimicked a banjo lick that often serves as the foundation for the music. I ramped up the tempo, and played a second guitar using the "Flat Picking" technique associated with Doc Watson, imitating fiddle playing on the guitar.

**Blink Of An Eye** - (Chris - vocals, acoustic guitar, electric guitar /// Ted - piano, vocals /// George - electric bass /// Steve - clay bongos, shaker) This is a tune of mine that shifts the album into a more contemporary "Singer / Songwriter" genre. I wrote it a few months before the project began as I was getting my guitar playing back after recovering from the hand injury. You could say it reflects the viewpoint of someone in the middle of events beyond their control. Ted's piano playing and his great backup vocals add a really distinctive element to the song's texture and the album as a whole.

**Forever That Time** - (Chris - vocals, acoustic guitar, electric guitar, electric bass /// Ted - piano, vocals /// Steve - drums with sticks) I closed the album with another dip in the Singer/Songwriter pool. It was written before my hand injury during a relationship that ended when some lies came to the surface. Musically, I wanted to have something on the album to let people know that although I don't often use an electric guitar, I can if the music calls for one. Thirty years after the fact, I was struck by my bass playing which I don't do very often. I recall that this was one of the last tracks we recorded. I guess George was unavailable and I was likely anxious to wrap things up. I also don't recall where the instrument came from. Maybe Mike had one laying around his studio. In any case, anyone need a bass player? Ring me up.

*Very special thanks to **Craig Harshman** for the use of his Martin Dreadnaught guitar with a big fat sound for backup guitar, and **Ted Black** for the use of his fine piano recorded at his house.*

Chris Anderson  
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