



Jim Clark: Writer/Musician

Born in Byrdstown, Tennessee, midway between Music City and the Smoky Mountains, Jim Clark grew up on a farm on the Cumberland Plateau surrounded by music – from the unadorned a capella harmonies of the Church of Christ, to the old-time country of his father's guitar and mandolin playing.

Majoring in English at Vanderbilt University, he was much influenced by the legacy of the Fugitives and Agrarians—poets such as Robert Penn Warren, John Crowe Ransom, and Allen Tate, noted for their focus on the connection between literature and the land and their scathing critique of the modern industrial mindset. He continued his education at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, where he received an M.F.A. in creative writing, and the University of Denver, where he received his Ph.D. in modern literature and creative writing. Pursuing a balance between the creative and the scholarly, Clark has published *Notions: A Jim Clark Miscellany*; two books of poems, *Dancing on Canaan's Ruins* and *Handiwork*; written a play, *The Girl with the Faraway Eye*, staged at the Portland Actors Conservatory Theatre, Portland, Oregon; edited *Fable in the Blood: The Selected Poems of Byron Herbert Reece*; and served as an editor of such literary journals as *The Denver Quarterly*, *The Greensboro Review*, and *The Vanderbilt Poetry Review*. *Wilson*, the debut CD by his band, *The Near Myths*, was released in 2005, and a second CD, *Words to Burn*, in 2008.

In 1995, he began combining his talents as a singer and musician with his abilities as a writer and an interpreter of his own work, resulting in a unique multi-disciplinary performance of poetry and stories rooted in the Appalachian foothills and complementary old-time mountain music played on the guitar, banjo, mountain dulcimer, and autoharp. In 2003, this cross-fertilization of genres culminated in his recording a CD, *Buried Land*, featuring poems and music related to the flooding of his parents' Clay County Tennessee family farms in the 1940s by the TVA Dale Hollow Dam project.

Clark is currently the Elizabeth H. Jordan Professor of Southern Literature and Writer-in-Residence at Barton College, in Wilson, North Carolina, where he is Director of The Barton College Creative Writing Symposium and an editor of the literary journal *Crucible*.

Contact: P.O. Box 7861, Wilson, NC 27895. Telephone: (252) 399-6450. E-mail: jclark@barton.edu
FAX: (252) 399-6571. Home Page: <http://home.roadrunner.com/~clarkja/>

About Jim Clark's Music & Poetry

"Integrity and warmth emanate from Jim Clark's lyrics, sung, spoken, written. It comes as no surprise that his book, *Handiwork*, emerges in the top ten best sellers that St. Andrews College Press has had in its thirty years of presenting quality and variety. When you hear him, you'll agree, I'm sure."

—Ronald H. Bayes, Founding Editor
St. Andrews College Press

"Born of a yearning bone-deep, these poems and songs give us transport: to the homeplace, to voices from our past, to what matters most in the terrain of the heart. 'His sweet high-lonesome tenor/filling softly the space between us,' Jim Clark writes of his father singing, as we can say of these poems and songs, filling the space, indeed, with deep delight."

—Jeff Daniel Marion, Poet

"Troubadours once carried news from village to village. In these poems and songs, Jim Clark delivers news of his native Tennessee and of the way his travels have granted the past a special grace. But the real news here is of that waiting and eternal village, the human heart."

—Al Maginnes, Poet

"Listening to Jim Clark perform is to enter the white-hot core of Southern Appalachian music and literature. There is no one else in the region with such a wide range of artistic talent."

—Ron Rash, Poet & Fiction Writer

"Let me put it this way: Jim Clark's poems and music are treasures. I love to hear him perform."

—Shelby Stephenson, Poet & Musician
Editor, *Pembroke Magazine*

"What a joy to be able to listen to Jim Clark's music and poetry. These songs that you may know – "Shady Grove," "Sweet Sunny South," "Barbara Allen" – are interspersed with Jim's poetry that paints word pictures of his family and tells us where he comes from. The songs may be familiar, but the instrumental arrangements are original, interesting, and beautiful. Jim's fine guitar and banjo picking, mountain dulcimer playing, and, of course, his downright good singing are enhanced by fiddle, mouth harp, mandolin, and pennywhistle, with lovely harmonies. This is not background music. You will want to hear every word and every note."

—Betty Smith, Ballad Singer & Musicologist

"'Buried Land' is a great title. The Dale Hollow Dam story and the South in general. I don't hear a false note on it. This is not authentic old-timey music and it is not some poseur trying to occupy the territory. The poems link the concerns, the realities of this new world that is eliminating all precious moments, and the South of our imaginations and memories. 'That world is gone forever and I can't go home.'"

—Tom House, Singer-Songwriter/Poet

"Operating out of a long and honorable tradition, Jim Clark is a 21st century balladeer, sage, and minstrel man. His narratives are compelling and instructional, but also entertaining. He doesn't do 'readings' or 'concerts'— he does performances that move easily back and forth between genres. And in so doing he re-captures evocatively the rural and mountain worlds that seem so quickly to have disappeared from our presence."

—Alex Albright
English Department, East Carolina University

"Jim Clark's interest in music has helped shape his poetry. He's a very good guitar player and vocalist, and these abilities, I think, bring resonance to his lines. He's a very solid kind of poet. I always look forward to seeing him on a program because I know I'll be entertained as well as enlightened."

—Fred Chappell, Poet & Writer
North Carolina State Poet Laureate