



DETROIT

PUTTING DOWN ROOTS WITH KID ROCK

"THE MOTIF IS MY OWN LITTLE STABLE OF MUSICIANS. IT'S AN ESSENTIAL SONGWRITER'S TOOL AS WELL AS A PERFORMANCE TOOL."

Some keyboardists just play the parts. Others pull up their music by the roots. For Jimmie "Bones" Trombly, who's backed Kid Rock on piano, organ, harmonica, and vocals for the past 15 years, roots music is more than an influence—it's a force of gravity that anchors his entire musical identity.

As a longtime member of Kid Rock's backing band, Twisted Brown Trucker, Bones shares a deep love of primal music with his boss. "The music we have in common is just the earliest, rawest form of whatever genre, whether it be blues or soul or Rock & Roll," he says. "Same thing with country music: the whole outlaw circle, Waylon Jennings and Merle Haggard, Hank Williams Sr. and Jr. That's what we both definitely gravitate toward, and that's been the glue that matched us up."

Jimmie has a long history in the Detroit music scene, including a stint with cult favorites Robert Bradley's Blackwater Surprise before joining Kid Rock. As a young player, Jimmie wasn't so much trained in keyboards as steeped in them. "I never really had proper piano lessons," he admits. "I learned from guys that played Hammond B3 and kick bass pedals in gospel churches, or with organ trios in clubs. My first teacher really trained my ear. He wouldn't even put sheet music in front of me—he'd bring in a cassette tape and say, 'Okay, try and emulate this the best you can.'"

Bones still uses the same immersive approach to learning, most recently before recording the latest Kid Rock album, *Rebel Soul*. "I did a lot of shedding with Ray Charles and dug deep into the records he did in the '50s. I didn't learn the songs just to play them—I basically tried to get into them almost like a method actor. It's kind of like learning a language: You either speak with an accent, or you speak fluently."

Onstage with Kid Rock, Jimmie is a dynamic player. "I can't stop moving," he laughs. "I'm kind of anchored between the Hammond B3 and a big old upright piano, so I'm not running around, but I'm pretty busy with the multi-keyboards. And there's some stuff where I'm playing piano or organ at the same time, and doing backup vocals or harmonica simultaneously. So I guess it's pretty visual, like watching one of those little wind-up monkeys with a cymbal on its back!"

And that piano? "It's the shell of my old 1917 upright grand with a Yamaha CP33 inside it," Jimmie confides. "I've also used a CP5 on some back-line shows—it's a really cool piano. I really like the CP because of how the samples sound, and the keyboard feels very much like a piano. I don't like a real light action, and I love how it fights back."

He uses a Motif XF8 onstage as well. "I play it on songs where I've got to build layers, and I might split the keyboard in different areas to have a string patch going here and a horn up in this octave, and maybe a sample off one of the records," he explains. "And when I'm not on the road, I use it for demoing and building tracks. The Motif is my own little stable of musicians—I'll play all the bass parts, do drum loops and whatnot. It's an essential songwriter's tool as well as a performance tool."

Some of the most memorable gigs Jimmie has played with Kid Rock have been for U.S. troops in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other war zones. "It's not that different as far as the show goes, or even the appreciation," he reflects. "It's just the thought that when you're performing for the troops, you're bringing *home* to them. You have to perform during the day, because at night the lighting is a target for anybody that wants to bomb you. It feels pretty profound to go over there and perform for these men and women that are risking their lives so we can have a country where you can just leisurely go to a concert and enjoy yourself."

Wherever he's playing, Jimmie knows how fortunate he is to make music for a living. "I get paid to do what most people only dream of, and I can support my family doing it," he says. "Though there's a funny story about that. My parents were very concerned about my career path, because no parent wants their kid to grow up in obscurity and struggle and do something where it's a crapshoot if you make it. So not long ago my folks and I are having dinner and I'm like 'Well the real estate market's just horrible right now, and there's so many people out of work and losing their jobs, and it's getting worse every day.' And it gets kind of quiet, and then I say, 'Good thing I play in a rock-and-roll band, isn't it?'"

