

BILL LESLIE: A MAN OF MUSIC



Bill Leslie gives the expression “one man band” a whole new meaning with his new CD, which he wrote, performed and produced in his home studio.

When WRAL’s Bill Leslie isn’t co-anchoring the morning and afternoon news, he’s usually making music.

“I’ve always got a melody in my head,” Bill said.

Bill’s most recent CD, “Peaceful Journey: A Celebration of North Carolina,” is a multi-track of him playing the Celtic whistle, guitar and keyboard. Along with accompaniment by a cellist, violinist and saxophone player, the CD also has natural sounds woven into the fabric of the music reflecting some of Bill’s favorite North Carolina places.

The CD took him nine months from start to finish, and has sold hundreds through Web sites like www.wral.com, www.billleslie.com and various music and book stores like Wild Birds

Unlimited, Barnes & Noble and Quail Ridge Books in Raleigh.

His love for music started when he wrote a song about his high school girlfriend, Missy. The song drew local interest and was a regional hit. That’s when Bill gravitated toward radio in college and eventually hit the airwaves at night reporting on the day’s news. While at UNC-Chapel Hill, Bill met longtime pal Rick Dees, now an internationally syndicated disc jockey.

The two went on to work together at WTOB radio station in Winston-Salem and then later at WKIX in Raleigh where they also worked with John Tesh and Ken Lowe, now the chief executive officer and president of E.W. Scripps Co., the media company that owns 21 daily newspapers, 10 television stations and four cable networks.

“I was surrounded by a lot of really musical people,” he said.

For the past three years, Bill has been a member of the Celtic



David Schaubert

(left) When Bill Leslie isn't on-air at the WRAL News Desk, he's usually got a melody in his head. (above) Bill enjoys working with his morning and afternoon news co-anchor Lynda Loveland. (right) Music has always been a big part of Bill's life, so much that he built a studio in his home.



Photo Courtesy of Bill Leslie

group Bragh Adair. However, his most recent CD is a creation of his own, written and produced in his home studio.

"I love Celtic music ... I enjoy writing music," he said. In fact, he has written many songs for his church, Cary Presbyterian, where he is also an elder.

Bill can also be found around Cary working out at Beyond Fitness, listening to musicians at Six Strings Café or performing at Cary's Celtic Festival. He has lived in Cary since 1979 and has seen the area explode with growth.

He remembers his first radio assignment in Raleigh, right after graduating from UNC-Chapel Hill, where a plane crashed at the intersection of Maynard Road and Kildaire Farm Road.

"I thought, 'Wow, this is out in the boonies,'" he said laughing.

After this Morganton native fell in love and married Cindy Miller from Cary, he's been living in these parts ever since. He and his wife currently live in Lochmere with their daughter Lauren, son Will and Sparky, the family's 10-year-old Lhasa Apso. They enjoy taking vacations to national parks and eating dinner together every night at the kitchen table, where they play "Headline of the Day" and talk about what's new in each other's lives.

Bill enjoys the slow pace of life in Cary and the different cultures represented in its demographics.

"I have a great appreciation for the richness of life here," he said.

When asked about the priorities in his life, Bill responded jokingly, "Faith, family and music. Oh, I meant to say faith, family, Channel Five and music."

He has worked at the station since 1984 and had other opportunities come along, but Bill said he enjoys working at the station and is content with staying. Reporting the news on a daily basis isn't always glamorous, and it's important to have a sense of humor, he said.

"In this business, we all develop a tough skin," he said. "If you internalize all of the bad stuff, you can become pretty miserable."

Instead of focusing on the tragedy that's often reported in the news, Bill always makes a habit of saying a prayer for those who are hurting.

But there have been times when the bad news has hit close to home.

One of Bill's most memorable moments on air was reporting in 1997 that legendary broadcaster Charles Kuralt had died only a few weeks after Bill had interviewed him.

"I remember breaking down on air," he said.

Another trying moment was when his longtime friend Tom Brothers died in a mountain climbing accident in Idaho and Bill's first encounter with the news was during a broadcast.

"I had read it on air, and it just tore me up," Bill said. "I had my own coping mechanism."

Part of that coping mechanism is the camaraderie among his WRAL coworkers. Bill describes co-anchor Lynda Loveland as funny and great to work with, Mark Roberts as the best storyteller and meteorologists Mike Maze and Elizabeth Gardner as easy to get along with.

Although Bill enjoys broadcasting, it's writing that makes him happiest. Oftentimes Bill heads to the N.C. mountains for silent retreats to recharge. He jokes that it's a place where he can go and not listen to himself talk.

"Sometimes we need to shut down the egos and listen to holy voices," he said.

Although Bill says he'd like to do more creative pieces, his broadcast journalism career has rendered more than 70 accolades. Among those are two Peabody awards, what he considers the highest honor in broadcast journalism.

But Bill isn't set in his profession. He said he's amazed that there's always something new to learn everyday – a new and better way to tell a story.

In his pursuit of finding new and better ways in life, Bill is starting a new band and looking forward to producing a Christmas CD and what he calls a "romantic album" of old love songs.

And so the journey continues for this musical man. In his words, "Life is rich and full these days. I can't complain."

– Danielle Caspar