

# Chris Reddy

by Brian M. Owens

Whether Chris Reddy is playing electric guitar with a band, unleashing his Acoustic Loops From Hell act on an unsuspecting audience, or recording clever pop tunes in his home studio, you can pretty much guarantee that he's pushing the musical envelope. His latest album, 2 Sides 2 Every Story, displays a potpourri of tones & flavors and touches down on everything from Eric Johnson inspired sweeping arpeggios to hypnotic looping effects to beautifully orchestrated chordal melodies. I talked with Reddy at length one late spring morning and he outlined his ongoing musical journey...

**METRONOME: Where are you from?**

Chris Reddy: I grew up in Leominster, MA.

**METRONOME: Did you grow up in a musical family?**

No, actually a lot of music was played, but I don't come from a history of musicians like some people, although my grandfather was a drummer back in the day during the 1930s and 40s. They used to do the big band thing and my grandfather was a drummer. I didn't have anybody to really look up to in terms of teaching me the instrument.

**METRONOME: How old were you when you picked up the guitar?**

My mother got me interested in guitar lessons when I was eight years old. She would walk me down to Metro Music in Leominster and I started taking lessons from Johnny Moore, who regretfully passed away just a few weeks back. Johnny was a good friend of mine. I always credit him with being one of the guys who really got me interested in acoustic music early on. He was patient, had a great sense of humor, and he was brilliant. He could write out tunes that you would hear on the radio right in front of you. Then I took lessons from another guy for a couple of years. He was up off of Granite Street. That was short lived because by that point I was already starting to get interested in electric guitar and playing in bands. It grew from there by playing songs by ear and learning them off the radio.

**METRONOME: What were some of your first band experiences?**

Mark Venterea, who is a drummer from Leominster, was with me in our first band Exius. Mark and I started the band in seventh grade and recruited John Phillips in junior high. We played all through high school and kept the band going through to this day. We don't play as much any more, but we still play together about once or twice a year. That band Exius turned in to Transit after we graduated high school. Transit was a prominent original band for awhile. We did a lot of Boston gigs during the eighties. After a couple of CDs, we came close to getting some folks to represent us and try to get us signed, but as it typically happens in the music industry, deals fell apart. People were looking for all of the publishing for all of the material we wrote.

**METRONOME: Those were all the same guys from Exius?**

Yeah, we stayed together. When we became Transit we added Nathan Linsky on keyboards. We stayed as that lineup for twenty plus years. I did other projects on the side too. I played with a guy named John Coco in a band called



Scared of Horses. When I joined them we became The Love Dogs for a while, but there was another band with that name. All through that time I was working in high tech. In 1985, I started with Apollo computer and stayed with that company when they became Hewlett Packard and even when it became Celestica and was a contract manufacturing company. I left high tech when I realized I wanted to do the solo acoustic thing.

**METRONOME: What year was that?**

I started doing solo acoustic gigs back around 2001.

**METRONOME: Was that the official breakup of Transit as well?**

No. Transit was still playing the club circuit. What was happening was a lot of the clubs we were playing were closing down and rehearsal space was getting expensive. I moved to Worcester in 2003 and at that point I had gigs that I could do solo acoustic. I did something a little bit different from a lot of guys at that time. I was doing live looping. I was using a Boss Phrase sampler and literally creating arrangements of songs and my own original stuff. People say to this day it was a lot different than what other guys were doing on acoustic, although a lot more acoustic artists in the area are doing more looping now which I think is great. I started with the idea when I saw it for the first time when I went skiing in 2001 out at Steamboat. I saw a guy live looping.

**METRONOME: That was the early days for that type of thing?**

It was. When I saw a guy doing it at an

outside ski bar called Slope Side, I was trying to figure out why one guy sounded like three people up on stage. I went up and talked with him extensively during his break and he showed me what was going on. He was using it very minimally. He was using it just for solos. He wasn't using it for arrangements. I basically picked up a pedal right after I got back from the trip and worked with it for about eight to ten months before I brought it out to a gig.

**METRONOME: What kind of pedal did you buy?**

I use a Boss Phrase sampler which is pretty much the standard out there. It's a work horse. I've had it ever since. I use it religiously. I started second and third loops and sometimes four or five in a song where I'm building soundscapes as I'm playing and trying to make it as invisible as possible. It works. It's fun. That's why I call it "Acoustic Loops From Hell." Plus I use it in conjunction with an old Boss ME-50 to get different guitar tones, choruses and delays. I've also worked-in a very cool distorted effect for the acoustic guitar that doesn't sound like the typical acoustic plugged in to a distortion box. It has a much clearer tone which can be played over the loops.

**METRONOME: Did the experience of seeing that guy play with the looper prompt you to want to play solo or had you already been playing solo acoustic?**

When I knew I was leaving high tech, I had no intention of going back to that line of work. I wanted to try and do something I've always wanted to do which was play music full time

and find some other odd jobs. My schedule is pretty full. I play a lot, but I try to do it the right way. I make sure my gigs are posted on my web site and I keep up with my email every week. I try to promote it and build a following and I've been lucky. People support me and they've been great to me. I do my own recordings in my house. People seem to appreciate the recordings a lot.

**METRONOME: When you play solo, do you only play an acoustic guitar or do you play electric as well?**

I haven't dabbled with pulling the electric out other than the recordings I do at home. I missed it when Transit wasn't playing enough, but sure enough last Fall, a guy I know from a jam, Ron Wimette asked me if I would be interested in filling in for Jim Perry in the cover band Dr Robert. I said, Boy, I'll have to think about that. Recommitting to a different band with my schedule the way it is? Then I thought about it and said, This is a great band that I really enjoy. This is a great opportunity to play with a great vocal band and do something different. I'm actually playing electric with them. I try not to mix the electric with the acoustic thing. There's really no need to play the electric when I play solo. My Taylor plays almost as good if not better than my electric. I'm doing more lead work than you see most guys playing acoustic.

**METRONOME: What model Taylor do you own?**

I use a couple of different Taylors. The one I use most is an old F series from the early 90s. It has a Fishman pickup system in it. It's beat



up a little, but it sounds great.

**METRANOME: When you play solo, do you bring an acoustic amp or do you plug in to a house PA system?**

I bring a full PA system when I play out. People think I'm crazy, but I lug a full PA to every gig which is two JBL speakers on stands, two Horizon monitors, a Mackie head and all of my outboard gear, plus my effects on the floor. I can set it up in fifteen minutes and take it down in fifteen minutes. It's a lot of lugging of heavy equipment, but once you have a sound that you like, it's tough to get away from it.

**METRANOME: The way you're layering sounds, it seems like you need a full PA system to recreate it. You can't just plug in to a Fender Acoustasonic and get the same sounds...**

Exactly. Actually I have a lot of friends that come to see me that work for Bose and they occasionally say something to me and I ask, "But how does it sound?" They say, "It sounds great!" One of the problems with the Bose systems is that they make them so that they are all dialed in. What they don't factor in is when you're using exciters, loop stations and an ME-50. As I'm going through arrangements and playing and layering sounds, those dial-ins are compensating for that on those systems. Your EQ-ing can get all squirrely. I've tried them. I do my homework with my gear.

**METRANOME: When did you start recording solo? Early on?**

Well no. Transit has always been a band that had done a lot of great studio work. We had recorded in some really fine studios and put out a CD called End of The Line back in the late nineties that people really loved. It took us over four or five years to get that thing done. Part of it was trying to get the financing to finish it and the rest of it was working in studios. Through that I learned that I loved the studio. I also loved working with guys like Jim Lightman at Metropolis Studio, working on a 48-track SSL board and seeing how it's done, or dealing with Joe Cuneo at Downtown Recorders.

I started getting the bug on my own with the digital stuff coming out in the late nineties, so I bought a little Sony 4-track digital recorder and spent four or five months at my home recording every night and came out with the Info Junkie album which was all instrumentals in 2000. Right after that I started working on something else that got airplay down the Cape. That was my second CD Sonification. That was the one that I really started doing vocals again and applying the tricks that I learned from engineers in other studios. I really started to get the hang of recording on the new recorder I bought. I got a Yamaha AW4416. I still have it, using the sixteen tracks and keeping things basic and recording as clean as I can digitally. I love it. I love recording and making stuff. I recorded

another goofy CD after that called Drinking Songs for The Working Stiff which were all drinking songs I wrote from playing out in the bars for a few years.

**METRANOME: When did that album come out?**

That came out in 2006. Sonification came out in 2004.

**METRANOME: Tell me about your new album 2 Sides 2 Every Story.**

My new disc is a blend of all the instruments and stuff that I like, more of the pop edge that I really like doing, and a blend of some of the old stuff that got remastered from Drinking Songs, Sonification, Info Junkie, as well as a live cut from when I opened for Johnny A. down at the Bull Run Restaurant. I love creating music and going out and playing whether it's with the band now, Dr. Robert, or doing a gig with Transit or another project I'm doing called Sonic Sway, a jazz fusion thing playing with Rogers Stevens playing with the loops. We actually opened for Gary Hoey doing that. That was really fun. I also do a thing with Scott Babineau and Brian Chaffee, a Police tribute. We do that a couple of times a year. There's always projects.

**METRANOME: What is the name of the Police tribute band?**

We were calling it Walking On The Moon. There's people that want to see us do that more often. Scott Babineau and I have a love for XTC and we've actually done an XTC tribute night at the Lucky Dog a few years back. We're trying to reestablish doing another one of those nights or playing it as a duo. We both have a great love for the British pop stuff. XTC is probably my favorite band of all time. You can't beat the instrumentation, the arrangements and their pop sensibilities.

**METRANOME: Tell me about some of the newer songs you wrote for 2 Sides 2 Every Story. How does the writing process work for you?**

I usually write songs on acoustic.

**METRANOME: Even your instrumentals?**

Yes.

**METRANOME: What, in your mind, differentiates a song from having lyrics or being just an instrumental?**

I don't know. If the lyrics seem to jump right out when I'm writing something, and it's going to make for a good vocal tune, then I'll proceed and go with vocals. Usually the best tunes are where the music and the vocals come out at the same time. I've always been a firm believer that the chorus should have a good hook or that there should be some sort of hook in the tune that really grabs people. If you can get the hook first, you can write the tune around the hook. If you can't find the hook, usually those tunes fall by the wayside. I can't tell you how many tunes I've thrown in the barrel. Sometimes they get resurrected, sometimes they don't.

Sometimes the tunes get written somewhere else. "Shannon's Fields" was like that. When I went to Ireland, I had that in my head. Going there right after 9/11 and being in Ireland was a very strange experience. The world was very weary of everything. If you listen to the words, it's all about having gone through those two weeks of watching the World Trade Towers come down. I remember being in a bar in Kinvara the day troops were being dropped in to Afghanistan. To be in another country... most people in Ireland were sympathetic and compassionate about what had just happened because they have a lot of relatives in New York, but there were a lot of people who saw us as: Here they go again. It was a very strange time. Those are the types of things that make you write a tune.

**METRANOME: In "Country Bumpkin" I couldn't help but hear a little bit of Eric Johnson's sweeping arpeggios and technique in the song. Are you a fan of his?**

I'm a huge fan of Eric Johnson. Everything he's ever recorded, I have. In Transit, we used to play "Cliffs of Dover." I actually learned it note for note other than a couple of the blistering solos which I did a little improv on (laughs). I've studied him extensively. He's up there in my Top 3 guitar players of all time. I've seen him play so many times live with a tone and clarity. I really appreciate you making that assessment of that song. I'm not trying to emulate him, but it has that feel and that's where I wanted it to go.

**METRANOME: The other guitar influence I heard on the songs "Indigo" and "Info Junkie" was Joe Satriani. Do you like his playing?**

Yeah. I'm also a big fan of George Lynch and guys like Allan Holdsworth and Greg Howe that try to capture something with long, extended lead lines. On "Indigo" that is all one track. Nothing is placed. That was recorded as one thing. There's no cutting and pasting in. "Country Bumpkin" is the same way. There were probably twenty five or thirty guitar tracks done, but they were never spliced. Once the right one came along, that was it. There are some mistakes in "Country Bumpkin" that bother me, but the overall feel of it was what I wanted, so I left those knucklehead things in there. That's what lends itself to those tunes... having an energy to them. I record digitally but act like I'm recording in analog. I don't like splicing. I think that's one of the things that keep it fresh.

**METRANOME: Tell me about the song, "Chaos Theory." How did that one come about?**

That song was on Sonification and I recorded it in my kitchen. I used an old hybrid Fender that I put a Seymour Duncan Super Distortion pickup in. When I played it through the Yamaha, it got real heavy. I'm a big metal



head too. I'm in to the harder stuff that Satriani plays and I'm in to Megadeth and the Lynch Mob. I have that side of me that likes heavier stuff. I think that tune, for an instrumental, has that feel. You could almost put sample lyrics over it and make it a Rob Zombie tune. I'm just trying to show another side of playing. Good guitar players typically like a lot of different genres of music.

**METRANOME: What made you pick the song, "Three of A Perfect Pair" by King Crimson to play live at the Bull Run show?**

Actually, I had seen King Crimson about six or seven years ago when they came to Berklee. Adrian Belew came out on a break and played "Three of A Perfect Pair" playing that type of a line, but singing over it, by himself. I thought it was so impressive because the line is so psychotic in terms of how it's played. I looked him up on YouTube and watched how he played it. As I started learning it, I thought with the looper I could loop the line and make it in to an instrumental and not have to worry about copyright infringements if I wanted to record it. I ended up having to rehearse that thing over and over and over again. When I opened up for Johnny A. at the Bull Run, I played that song.

**METRANOME: What's coming up this summer for you? Do you have a lot of shows lined up?**

Yeah, I'm pretty much booked solid. I go out of the area. I stay in the area. I hit the beach... my gigs vary. I'm so blessed to have a wife that understands how much I love music and allows me to play out as much as I do. I'm fortunate enough to be able to do something I really love.