

Media Questions for Dr. Kent Gustavson

BOOK INFORMATION

Blind But Now I See: The Biography of Music Legend Doc Watson
by Dr. Kent Gustavson / Published by Sumach-Red Books / 2012
Available in your local independent bookstore, or online.

General / Introductory Questions

1. What makes Doc Watson so important to the history of American music?
2. How did Doc Watson become such a music legend, and not just someone who played music in his spare time?
3. There is a Doc Watson statue in Boone, and a section of Highway 421 there that is named the Doc and Merle Watson Memorial Highway - when did Doc Watson start to get attention in his own home town?
4. Why is Doc so popular everywhere, up North and down South, and with folk, country, and rock fans?
5. When did "Doc" get his famous nickname?
6. What kind of musical and personal legacy did Doc Watson leave behind when he recently passed away (on May 29, 2012)?
7. How will Doc Watson's life and music continue to be celebrated after his passing, and what was his impact on the music world over his 52 years in the music business?

Doc Watson's Music

Ask any questions about songs/albums/styles of Doc Watson's music. Dr. Gustavson is prepared for anything, and is familiar with Doc Watson's entire catalog. If you would like to prepare him in advance, send along a list of songs that will be on the program. Otherwise, surprise him!

Doc Watson's Childhood

1. Where did Doc Watson grow up?
2. What was it like to live in Deep Gap, North Carolina in the 1920's?
3. What did Doc do as a little blind boy while his brothers were out playing and working?
4. Did Doc play instruments from the time he was a small child?
5. Were Doc's parents musicians?
6. What was Doc's earliest musical memory?
7. What was his relationship with his parents and his siblings like?
8. Had Doc's family lived in that area for a long time?
9. When did Doc's ancestors come to the United States?
10. Did Doc grow up in poverty?

Doc Learning to Play Music

1. What was Doc's first instrument?
2. Was Doc's father a good musician? How about his mother?
3. Often we think about Doc Watson as having music all around him all the time. How much music was there really around Doc when he was growing up?
4. When did Doc first see a guitar?
5. When did Doc first pick a guitar up, and try to play it?
6. Tell us about the first banjo Doc had - didn't his father make it for him? Wasn't an old cat involved in that process?
7. What other instruments did Doc play?
8. What kind of music did Doc like to listen to when he was learning music?
9. Who were Doc Watson's greatest music teachers?
10. What did Doc Watson sound like when he played the streets of Boone as a kid?

Doc's Blindness

1. Media reports after Doc Watson's death show that he was sighted at birth, but that he went blind around one year old. Is that correct?
2. What commonly caused blindness in Doc's area of North Carolina?
3. Did Doc's blindness have to do with the poverty of his family?
4. What were Doc's limitations as a child?
5. How did Doc's parents treat him differently, because he was blind?
6. Doc also had a sister who was blind. Are there any stories about the two of them?
7. Talk about the concept Doc Watson had (that you write about in your book) called "Sound Radar".
8. Did blindness make Doc a different sort of musician?
9. Tell us the story from your book about Doc getting off of State Aid to the Blind in North Carolina - that was a big achievement for him personally, wasn't it?
10. The title of your book is "Blind but Now I See." When Doc sang "Amazing Grace" did he think about those words?

Doc's Education

1. Where did Doc go to school?
2. Doc often talked about being abused at school. Is there any truth to that?
3. Was Doc really suspended from school for smoking?
4. What was the day-to-day like at the Raleigh School for the Blind?
5. Doc learned all about music at the Raleigh School. Is that much different than the education he would have gotten in Boone with his siblings?
6. What kind of music did Doc study in Boone?
7. Doc had a friend there, Paul Montgomery, who taught him his first chords on the guitar. Tell us how that happened.
8. Doc talked often about a mortifying experience he had at the Raleigh School that made him not want to perform on stage ever again. Tell us about that.
9. You wrote in your book that Doc continued to read for the rest of his life. How did he do that, exactly, as a blind man?
10. What do you think Doc would have done if he hadn't been blind, and had gone to a regular school like his brothers and sisters?

Doc's Love Life

1. When and how did Doc meet his wife Rosa Lee?
2. Doc was married to Rosa Lee for nearly 66 years when he died. How important was Rosa Lee to Doc's career and to the rest of his life?
3. You've written a few details about Doc and Rosa Lee's relationship in this book that are a bit controversial. Tell us about that, and why?
4. You write in your book that Doc taught Rosa Lee how to play the guitar when they were first courting. Did she continue to play?
5. What was life like for Doc and Rosa Lee after their marriage?
6. Did Doc ever have affairs on the road, or cheat on his wife? (*Answer: no!*)
7. How many children did they have together?
8. By the time Doc died, he must have at least been a great-grandfather. Was he?
9. What was the song Doc most liked to sing to his love, Rosa Lee?
10. Doc and Rosa Lee wrote the song "Your Long Journey" together - what is the story behind that song?

Doc's Early Music Career

1. When was the first time Doc played music in public?
2. What kind of music did Doc play when he first started out?
3. When did people first start thinking of Doc Watson as a great musician?
4. What was it like for Doc when he played long square dances?
5. Is it true that Doc played on the same stage as Earl Scruggs in the 1940's?
6. Describe Doc Watson's early playing style, and how that changed over time.
7. How did Doc learn new songs?
8. Doc's first real band was Williams and the Rail-Riders. Tell us about them.
9. Why did Doc only own an electric guitar in the 1950's?
10. Why didn't Doc become a big star as a young man? Was it because of his blindness, or something else?

Doc's Spirituality

1. Doc was a very spiritual man. Was he religious, and how?
2. Did he go to church every week as a boy, and what was that like?
3. What was his family like - were they very religious?
4. Talk to us about the time that Doc confronted a relative about the "sinfulness" of playing music for a dance.
5. Why did Doc's father prevent his children from going to dances?
6. Tell us about Doc's gospel music, and about his all-gospel recording, *On Praying Ground*.
7. After his son's death, Doc had a dream with clear religious overtones. Tell us about that dream.
8. What did you find out from Peter Rowan about Doc's spiritual beliefs?
9. There is an incredible YouTube clip in which Doc Watson is witnessing to his audience. What did he tell the audience, and what did this mean to him?
10. Before his son Merle's death, Doc asked him "if he was right with the Lord." How important was Merle's answer, "Yes, Dad, I am," to Doc, and why?

The “Discovery” of Doc Watson

1. In the book, you detail the discovery of Doc Watson in great detail. Where did you find that information, and how does it impact the “legend” surrounding Doc?
2. Tell us about Ralph Rinzler, who ultimately found Doc Watson in North Carolina.
3. Who was Clarence Ashley, and why was Ralph Rinzler interested in him?
4. When did Ralph Rinzler first meet Clarence Ashley, and why was that important to Doc Watson’s eventual discovery?
5. How did Doc Watson know Clarence Ashley?
6. Tell us about the recording session where Ralph Rinzler first met Doc.
7. When did Ralph Rinzler first start thinking of Doc Watson as a great guitar player?
8. Describe the recordings of those first sessions with Clarence Ashley and Doc.
9. What was the next step? Did Doc make any money?
10. How long did it take for Doc Watson to become well-known?

Merle Watson

1. Did Merle Watson start playing guitar as a young boy?
2. Describe Merle as a boy. What was he like?
3. When did he learn to play guitar, and did his dad teach him?
4. What did his playing add to Doc’s set on stage?
5. What kind of person was Merle? What was his personality like?
6. How did Merle help his dad stay on the road for so many years?
7. How did the road affect Merle personally?
8. How did Merle Watson really die? There’s still controversy surrounding his death even 25 years later.
9. What does Merle’s life and death tell us about that whole era of music and culture?
10. What is Merle Watson’s legacy?

Doc’s Guitar

1. When did Doc first see a guitar being played?
2. When did Doc first hear a guitar on the radio?
3. When did Doc start playing the guitar?
4. Who were his favorite guitarists, and why?
5. What style did Doc play when he started out, and how did that change over time?
6. What guitars did Doc learn on?
7. Tell us about “Ol’ Hoss” - the guitar that accompanied Doc on more gigs than any other guitar - made by Gallagher.
8. What did it mean for a guitarist to get a compliment, or a correction, from Doc?
9. What did Doc do, specifically, that was so different from others.
10. What influence did Doc’s guitar playing really have - on all kinds of music?

About the Book: Blind but Now I See

1. How many interviews did you do in putting the book together?
2. Did you enjoy the process of writing the book?
3. How long did it take to do all of the research for the book?
4. How do you decide what details to include, and what not to include?
5. What has been so “controversial” about this Doc Watson biography?
6. Why have no biographies of Doc Watson surfaced before now? Why is your biography the first?
7. What has this book’s impact been? Have you gotten good feedback?
8. What do Doc Watson’s friends and relatives think about the book?
9. What is your favorite part of the book - that you might be most proud of?
10. There are a ton of pictures and illustrations in the book - tell us about them.

About the Author: Dr. Kent Gustavson

1. As a young PhD from New York, why were you interested in Doc Watson as the subject for this book?
2. You took six years to write this book. Why so long?
3. What was your process? How did you go about researching and writing this book?
4. What is your background in traditional music?
5. When did you first hear Doc Watson, on record, and live?
6. You grew up in the midwest. Where does your interest in southern Appalachian music come from?
7. What was your reaction to the news that Doc Watson had died at age 89?
8. You have taught many subjects at the university level. How did you end up as a professor of leadership, writing, and German when your PhD is in music?
9. You have released a number of recordings. Do you plan to return to recording and performing, or do you intend to continue writing and teaching?
10. What is your next project? What are you currently working on?

These pages have only a list of *suggested* questions, and you should feel free to ask anything. Dr. Gustavson is a skilled media guest, and will be happy to discuss any topics you would like.