

Kakistocracy — CD Puts a Face on Broken America

Austin, TX: (August 2006) Tommy Spurlock had had enough.

It wasn't just the Iraq War. That was just a symptom. There was something wrong with America. Pedophile priests. Crack-whores and baby-daddies. Gated communities full of SUV moms whacked out on antidepressants. Unlawful combatants caged in Gitmo. W stickers everywhere.

This wasn't the America he had grown up in. The small-town America of Ft. Worth Texas in the '50s and '60s. Where a kid could strap a Sony portable radio to his horse "Paint" and listen to the Beatles. Where it didn't matter what you had as much as who you were.

Tommy used to talk, to rant to his friend and writing partner Luke Powers: Man, this country is seriously sick . . .

Tommy and Luke came from two different worlds, but saw it the same. Tommy rose from the rough side of Ft. Worth, a child of New Deal democrats. He'd left home at 16 and supported himself as a musician (guitar, steel-guitar, anything with strings) ever since. Home was Los Angeles in the 70s and 80s where he'd hung out with *Rick Danko of The Band*, and *Sneaky Pete Kleinow of the Flying Burrito Brothers*. After a stint with country-pop group *Highway 101*, he migrated to Nashville. He produced and played sessions working with *Shania Twain* and *George Jones* one day and *Guy Clark, David Olney* and *John Prine* the next. A classic maverick, Tommy turned a train-car into a recording studio.

It's not a box car, he'd fume, it's a fully customized 1952 *Pullman Porter Sleeper* car!

It also became Tommy's bachelor pad. There was a sushi bar next door and a decent Martini in the *Bar Car Restaurant*.

Meanwhile Luke was living a quiet life across town with his wife and two young children. He had been born to relative privilege in Chattanooga, TN, from a family of Tennessee Republicans who were still voting against FDR. His father was a Federal Magistrate Judge, appointed by (*gasp*) Ronald Reagan. Luke had gone to UNC-Chapel Hill as a Morehead Scholar and then Vanderbilt for a PhD in English. He was a college English professor who wrote songs and whose only connection to the music industry was his friend Brian Ahern (legendary producer of *Emmylou Harris, George Jones, Johnny Cash, etc.*), who had taken an interest in Luke's work..

Ahern introduced Luke to Tommy and a musical odd couple was born.

Luke was a Perot independent sick of both parties. Everything was too big: big government, big business, big oil, big deal. The music business, radio, they were too big too. He had written his dissertation on the English Romantic poet-prophet *William Blake* and was a scholar of the Blues. He found obscurity appealing.

Luke and Tommy had already worked on a couple projects when Tommy told Luke it was time to start writing political songs. He knew what Tommy wanted. Songs that wanted to say *No!* to the American Empire. Luke told Tommy he had the perfect concept for the song cycle. Several years before, when Luke was still drinking, he'd thumbed through an old dictionary at a bar. It had stopped, mysteriously, on the letter K.

His eyes came to rest on the word Kakistocracy. It meant government by the least competent or honest.

Kaki-what? Tommy had asked.

(continues)

Rhymes with ‘democracy,’ Luke had said.

They discussed how the Grand Republic of *George Washington*, *Thomas Jefferson*, and *Abe Lincoln* had become the Kakistocracy of Bush-Cheney, a spinning wheel of special interests, scandals, lobbyists, Ken Lays and Tom Delays.

Gradually Kakistocracy ‘the idea’ gelled into Kakistocracy ‘the project’.

Tommy had moved to Austin and set up a recording studio in Spicewood, one ridge over from his pal Willie Nelson’s ranch. He put together the team: *Jamie Oldaker* on drums (who played with *Eric Clapton* in 70s), *Elana Fremerman* on fiddle and vocals (*Hot Club of Cowtown*, *Bob Dylan*), and Austinites *Rosie Flores*, *Brennen Leigh* and *Jane Bond* on vocals. Tommy even pulled in his old pal *Leon Rausch* (of *Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys*) for “*Crawford Texas*”—a song about taking a ride down to W’s ranch for a little face-time with the President.

The songs don’t point fingers. Luke and Tommy know there’s enough blame to go around for everybody. The songs are slices of life—sometimes sly and satirical, sometimes blunt as the muzzle of an M-16. They aren’t songs to sing around the protest campfires—these are songs to get people up and moving. The songs are peopled by:

- grunts more interested in staying alive than promoting democracy in “*Iraqi Soldier Blues*”, “*Goin’ Down the Road to Baghdad*” and “*Poor Boy*” (all powered by *Jamie Oldaker*’s swamp arab beats);
- military mothers pondering the empty spectacle of death with honor in “*21 Guns*” (*dedicated to war-protester Cindy Sheehan*);
- lost souls of the home front from the Big Lebowski-ish dude of “*Mercury in Retrograde*” to the crack-mother of “*Crystal Time*” (portrayed to trailer-trash perfection by *Brennen Leigh*);

Luke and Tommy poke holes in and fun at overt political issues:

“*400 Years*” sarcastically laments a country that worries more about the pledge of allegiance than if kids are learning to read and write;

“*Mr President*” ponders the fate of a nation led by a born-again Christian ready to lead true believers into the apocalyptic fire.

“*Trumpets Goin’ Round*” portrays the US as a modern day ‘Jericho’- building walls of exclusion-designed to come tumbling down.

The CD is slated for release Sept 12, 2006 under the imprint of *Austin Records*, which has produced Texas talent from Stevie Ray Vaughan to Omar and the Howlers. Kakistocracy is the first release of the revitalized label and hopes to make the country think, and maybe even dance.