

These are Green days, indeed.

By Steve Uhler

Photos by John Langford

Pat Green is in a jovial mood today. He's just back from Maui, relaxed, tan and sipping a cup of fresh hazlenut coffee to ward off the chill coming in through the open door to the patio. It's a gray January day in Austin, smack dab in the middle of a bitter cold-snap, and Green's trademark bare feet are, for a change, covered with shoes and socks. "I just wish Hawaii was in Dallas," he says wistfully, "so I could just take a three-or four-hour drive and be there."

The trees outside
may be bare,
but inside
these are
Green days,
indeed.

For starters, the popular Waco-born singer-songwriter has recently found out he's up for two Grammys—Best Country Song and Best Country Vocalist. His first major label release, *Three Days*, has surpassed all expectations.

And for the proverbial icing on the cake, this is rare down time for the Texas traveler, whose live shows are legendary for their party-past-the-encore energy.





Ever
thought
about your
epitaph?

“I dunno,
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10 Questions for Pat Green

FOR THE MOMENT, Pat Green is recharging his batteries at his home in Austin, rehearsing for some upcoming recording sessions and savoring that down time. Green has literally lived on the road for nearly a decade. "Right now, I miss the hell out of it. I love playing for people. It's my life. It gives me energy. It's one of those things. I think it's like medicine: It can be addictive; you can get sucked into the road. When I get off the road for a while, I really appreciate it. I appreciate so much sleeping in bed with my wife, the glimpse of a normal life. And then it's like, 'Now it's time to go.' And that's OK. But being on the road is tricky. At first, it can be like breathing. Too

Which makes for better songwriting collaborators, people or dogs?

Depends on the dog.

such good honky tonk.

Ever thought about your epitaph?

I dunno, *Loved His Wife and Smiled a Lot.*

If you weren't doing music, what would you be doing?

I was gonna open a restaurant once. And my dad says, 'Pat, what do you know how to do?' I said, 'Well, I'm pretty good at entertaining people.' So he says, 'Then why do you want to open a restaurant?' I'd be lost without my music.

What's the first song you recall hearing?

I remember the first song I ever heard on the radio. I was in Oklahoma City visiting some cousins. I was with my parents, sitting in the back seat of a white car with blue seats, and I heard "Luckenbach, Texas." I'll never forget that moment, ever. I thought it was really neat that later in life I got to get married there.

If a fight broke out between Charlie

Robison and Toby Keith, who'd win?

Oh, Charlie Robison. Have you seen him? He's got monkey arms. He can kick Toby Keith's ass from five feet away.

There's a rumor going around that they're thinking of changing *Gruene Hall* to *Green Hall*. Any thoughts?

No way! Absolutely *&%\$# not!

What's your favorite Western?

North to Alaska, John Wayne, Stewart Granger and Fabian. And that cute actress, I forget her name. . . . Besides that, I'm a big Johnny Horton fan, who did the theme song. 'North to Alaska,' 'Sink the Bismark,' 'Battle of New Orleans.'

What's the biggest misconception about Pat Green?

I've heard a lot that I do coke, and I've seen coke once in my life. A security guard pulled out his box of 'training drugs' and showed me.

Blue or green?

Blue. Blue's my favorite color. One thing—I can't stand my name. Don't like it. Patrick Green. It's like, 'You Irish, or what?' My dad's middle name is Earl, and his brother's name is Robert, so I could've been Robert Earl Green.



much and it gets to be like choking."

The Grammy nominations are taken in a genuinely self-deprecating stride. "My gut reaction was 'It's a sham! What are they, crazy? Did they even listen to the record?' I was totally blindsided by it, but thankfully you know. If you get chosen to be honored like that, it's wonderful, great. Even if you lose, you've won."

"I mean, music is never meant to be about competition. There's about a hundred guys here in Austin who deserve a Grammy way more than I do. It's not a thing about who's better."

Green brushes back a stubborn forelock of blonde hair that keeps flopping onto

Hank I, Hank II or Hank III?

I guess I'd be somewhere between Hank II and Hank I. I haven't had a chance to listen much to Hank III. I used to love to listen to Hank, Jr. when he was first comin' into age. All that drinkin' and partyin'. I used to love just listening to that stuff over and over. It's

his brow. "I take issue with Toby Keith when he slams the Grammys because they chose not to nominate him. He's like, 'Well, we sold more records and tickets than anybody else who was nominated this year; I guess that's not important' and blah, blah, blah. Well, he's right. It isn't important."

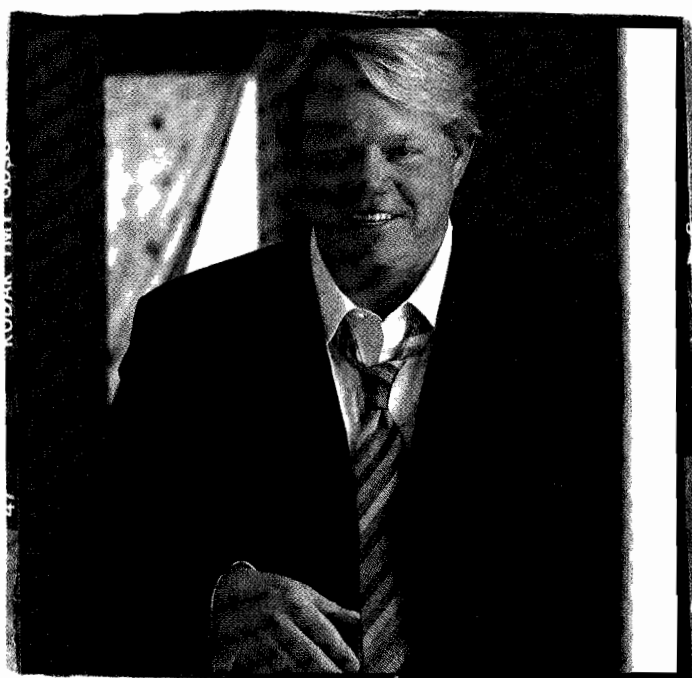
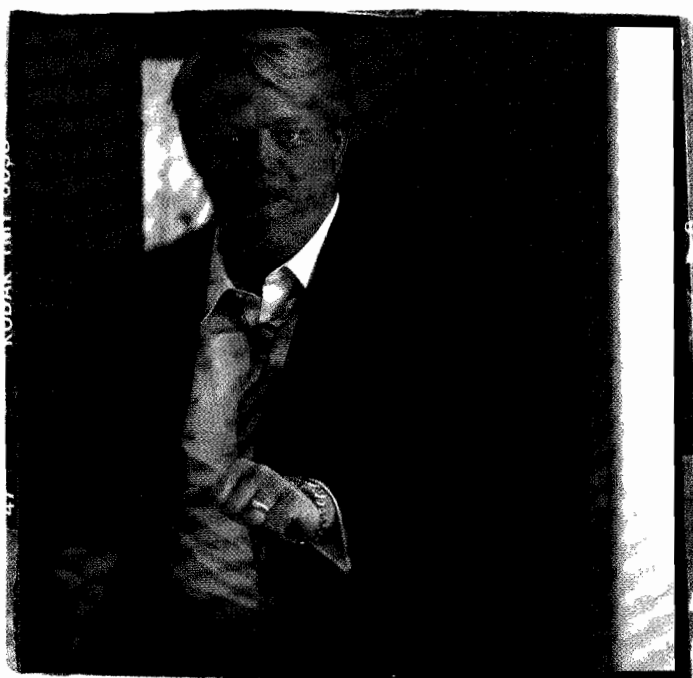
Critics looking for Pat Green's Achilles heel needn't look far; it's there for the world to see. Green's propensity for performing concerts with his feet au naturel is both a savvy marketing eccentricity and an easy target for detractors. "Yeah, they make too big a deal about my goin' barefoot. It's really simple. In the wintertime, there's shoes, in the summertime, there's no shoes. It just makes me feel freer onstage, loosens me up."

Green first gained attention playing for college audiences while still a student at Texas Tech in Lubbock. He started hitting the Texas dancehall circuit, and both his traveling itinerary and his audience grew proportionately. Green carved an effective, if nettlesome, niche for himself among audiences, with his party-all-night stage persona, hook-laden, honky-tonk anthems and, well, that barefoot thing. The gigs started selling out, he started hobnobbing with the likes of Willie and Waylon and the endorsement offers started to come in. In 2001, Green signed a deal with Republic Universal—a major breakthrough. The resulting effort, *Three Days*, became a huge seller, nudged up the charts by the defiant good-time hit single "Carry On."

policy among the suits? "Pat had made such a great career for himself without being backed by a label. He'd made six or seven records—he was already highly successful, a huge star in Texas—only did a major label with the idea that, 'Hey, maybe this thing can get bigger than just Texas.'

"He's the most charismatic person I've ever seen on stage. He has that gift of relating to everyone in the room, even as the rooms keep getting bigger and bigger. His performance is high energy, but that's really just the beginning. He always comes out of the bus and signs autographs until everyone is gone. I've seen him do it dozens and dozens of times. As a man to work with, he's a joy. He's a lionhearted guy."

When asked to describe a typical fan,



Steve Uhler: Have you ever been shocked onstage?

Pat Green: No, I've been hit by a lot of stuff, but I've never been shot. Trace Atkins, he's been shot. Weird question.

SU: No, *shocked*.

PG: Oh, sorry. Yeah, I've been shocked quite a bit, mostly during rainy outdoor festivals. I got a good one at Willie Nelson's Fourth of July Picnic. I was barefoot, jumpin' in the puddles, splashin' around. Then, all of a sudden, ZAP! I was shootin' off my own fireworks.

Pat Green's been shootin' off fireworks in the country music scene for almost a decade, now. The San Antonio-born musi-

But throughout his focused ascent, Pat Green has stayed true to his roots. "Used to be, when I was 21 or 22, and I first started writing, my criteria was pretty much any life experience that I could write down in three-and-a-half minutes. A road trip or a party or whatever else it was I was doing. Things haven't changed that much at all."

Green's longtime songwriting partner and former band member Walt Wilkins has known Green since the old days, and still collaborates with him. "What Pat did with the major labels is like nobody gets to do anymore—I mean new artists. They gave him free reign. They never came into the studio." Why the exceedingly rare hands-off

Green himself seems flummoxed. "I don't know that there is such a thing as a 'typical Pat Green fan.' 'Cause I look at my mother and, you know, she'll have her jam and have fun with everybody else. People don't come to my shows because they want to hear a sermon or be preached to about political issues. I can't take myself very seriously, so I can't expect my crowd to."

"You wanna see a real special guitar?" Green asks, reaching over and picking up a battered old Gibson Jumbo Dreadnaught that has more dings than frets. He knocks off a few bluesy licks before handing it over for inspection. "This was a gift from Ray Wylie Hubbard. I was playin' Gruene Hall,

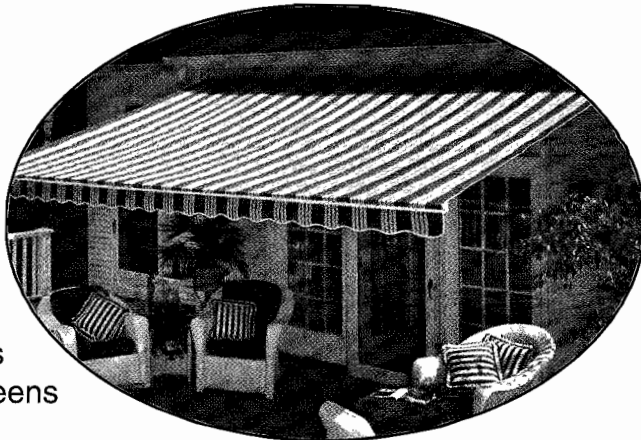
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and he just shows up. I'd played that guitar in a video I was in, and I told him how much I loved it. And he shows up and just gives it to me. Says, 'Here, it's yours.' That blew me away.

"Inside the guitar case was a book by Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*. It's a series of correspondences, letters between an older writer and a young poet. The most profound piece of literature I've ever sunk my teeth in. It's like 80 pages long. It's about the most important things about being a writer—criticism and metaphor and how to decide if you are a writer. You can tell Ray's dug into this book so much; it's got highlights and notations in the margins, and it's cracked where the binding has fallen out."

Pat Green has certainly taken more than his share of knocks, both from sniping critics and envious peers. He's defended himself so many times, he must feel like a one-man Alamo. "I used to get defensive, yeah. Charlie Robison, he got a few digs in. And some other guys have taken their shots. . . ." Green is nonchalant about the subject, even beneficent.

"I don't really have anything against them. It's not my style. If you don't like my music, I can understand that. There's plenty out there that I think is crap. I think critical commentary is fine," he shrugs. "If somebody wants to say 'These lyrics are not what I consider to be from the deep end of the pool,' that's OK. Maybe it wasn't meant to be. Maybe this other stuff over here is. But if you don't listen to both of 'em . . .," his voice trails off, until he inadvertently quotes the title of one of his most popular songs ". . . who's to say?"

The next morning, Green drops in to visit the "Sam & Bob Morning Show" at Austin's KVET, planting a playful kiss on the heads of the co-hosts before settling into the studio chair, simultaneously sipping some coffee, ruffling his own hair and slipping off his sandals. He's a little late (the fog has



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caused more than one accident on the roadway) but immediately eases into friendly banter with the hosts, both longtime friends and supporters. The conversation is unguarded and informal, interrupted only by commercial breaks and the occasional station employee with a guitar or photo to be signed.

The banter veers inevitably to the subject of the Grammys—"I'm up against Cash. I'm gonna be there holdin' up a sign, WIN, JOHNNY"; then to the new record (planned for May release); the Superbowl—"I was actually pullin' for Oakland. . . ." and . . . Toby Keith. The subject of Toby Keith seems to follow Green this week like Marley's ghost. Green actually seems to enjoy the controversy.

"Toby's a big ole boy. We were sittin' with Willie in Willie's bus in Nashville. Admittedly, we'd had a little of that Whiskey River. The only thing I remember clearly is Toby sayin' 'So which of my songs do you like?' It kind of freaked me out. I'd never heard anybody say, 'Tell me about how much you like me,' y' know? And there was what you call an awkward silence. And Willie was just sittin' back havin' a great time, pourin' gasoline on the fire."

The gossip is good natured; Pat Green seems incapable of genuine maliciousness, no matter how hard the two co-hosts prod him. Callers fawn over him; the lady who sold him his pet Chihuahua, Moose, calls in to say hi; a fan thanks Green for providing the soundtrack for a nonstop road trip from Dallas to California.

After he steps out of the studio, the inevitable troublemaker calls in, too late to ask if he's ever heard about peaking too early in his career. Pat Green is already out the door, on his way to another rehearsal, another gig, another tour. Like the song says, for Pat Green, the road does go on forever. Barefoot or not. ★

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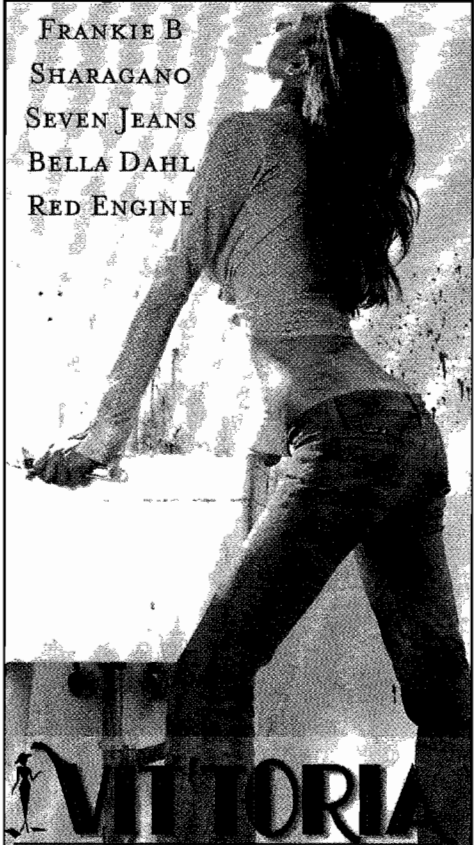
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