

# Trapper enjoys successful detour from rock to Dixieland jazz

By CHRIS KOCHER  
Press & Sun-Bulletin

Folk wisdom and fortune cookies say that a change is as good as a rest – but even Chris Trapper’s friends and colleagues were puzzled at first by his detour into the land of Dixieland jazz.

Trapper, the singer-songwriter for the indie band The Push Stars, felt a little burned out on rock ‘n’ roll after a year of touring and promoting the band’s 2004 release, *Paint The Town*. So in 2005, he harkened back to the days before rock was king.

The result: The delightful *Gone Again*, Trapper’s second solo CD, which he recorded with Boston’s popular Wolverine Jazz Band. Trapper, 38, describes it as “two styles of music meeting half-way” – a cross-pollination of brass, banjo, clarinet and guitar that creates something fresh and alive.

Still, he admits that the idea can be a hard sell.

“Someone approached me after the first show (with The Wolverine Jazz Band in Boston) and said, ‘Wow, this is really great – I thought it would be like Kenny G.’ Not that there’s anything wrong with that,” Trapper said.

“That’s when it suddenly hit me – just saying something’s jazz immediately implies that station most people flip by on the radio dial. It’s too weird for them, or too dark, or too complex.”

But that realm of Miles Davis is quite different from Dixieland jazz, which has an exuberance and attention to melodies that Trapper finds irresistible. Before he asked them to appear on *Gone Again*, he had long been a “groupie” of The Wolverine Jazz Band – musicians who have been playing together for decades.

“I would come home from a rock

tour and didn’t want to rush out to the clubs to see the local Boston shoe-gazer band scene – I would go see this Dixieland jazz band,” he said. “So this record really came out of a love for what they do.”

The album displays Trapper’s keen pop sensibilities, creating a sound that sometimes evokes the best of Tin Pan Alley from the 1930s and ‘40s.

The tone is set with the opening song, *All Time Favorite*, a tale of suspected infidelity that marches along like a New Orleans Mardi Gras parade. Troubled souls and jaunty arrangements make for strange bedfellows, but Trapper’s charming vocals and the swirling jazz instrumentals blunt the sharpest edges.

*Nowhere* and *Away We Go* both deal with journeys gone wrong. The former, spiced with Mexican-style trumpet blasts, tells of a trip south of the border that ends up in a mugging; the latter, a love song about getting trapped on a desert island, floats along on clarinet and horns like a gentle South Pacific breeze.

The spoken-word verses of *Boston Girl* are a fun travelogue of bad dates and weird encounters with the opposite sex, winding up in Beantown with love found “in your own back yard” – literally.

Trapper and his jazz collaborators recorded together live in one marathon session, with no computer technology to hide behind. He believes the technique, which mimics album production from 50 years ago, brings a certain warmth and “pulse” to the proceedings.

“Too many records today all sound perfect because you can use computers and Pro Tools and that stuff. But what they lack is that feeling of, ‘Did humans ever play this, or what? It sounds great, but where did it come from?’” Trapper said.

Dixieland jazz is hardly Trapper’s first foray into old-time music: During high school in Buffalo, he was one-fourth of a barbershop quartet – striped vest, boater hat and all – that

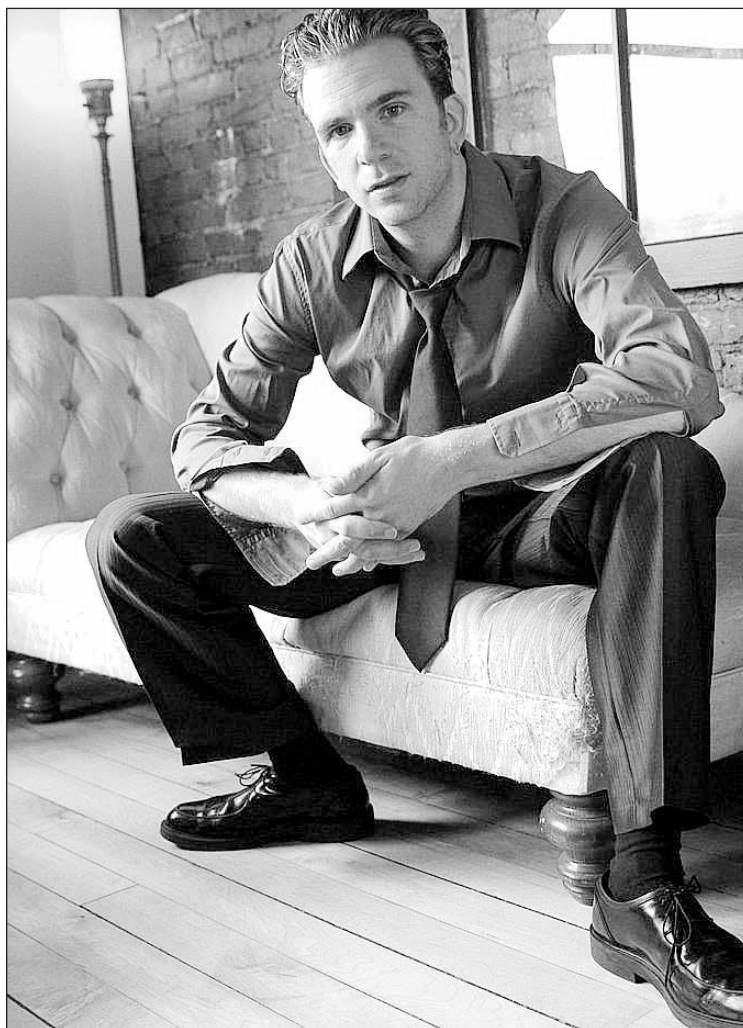


Photo By Liz Linder

Singer/songwriter Chris Trapper of The Push Stars is taking a break from rock and is bringing his jazz stylings to Oxford this weekend.

would sing at the local Pizza Hut for tips.

“It was kind of a mixed blessing, because to all the people in chorus class, it was a cool thing. To anyone outside of that bubble, you’re going to get your ass kicked on a regular basis,” he said.

He formed The Push Stars in 1996, and the trio cut two albums for Capitol Records before severing ties after a label shake-up. The group went indie for two critically acclaimed follow-up CDs and built a fan base through nationwide touring. The band is currently on hiatus, however, with bassist Dan McLoughlin and drummer Ryan MacMillan also pursuing other projects.

“Fortunately, our band is such that we’ve really encouraged each other to branch off and try new things, and we love playing music together,” Trapper said. “We’re still doing private shows – we’re just not out to market the band name now, because we spent 10 years doing that.”

One of Trapper’s goals in 2006 is to tour with The Wolverine Jazz Band, as costs and schedules allow. (At Friday’s Night Eagle Café performance, it’ll be Trapper and his guitar, just like his early days in the Boston coffeehouse scene.)

He also cuts demos for about 40 songs each year, culling the best of them for consideration on future CDs. It’s a prolific output, but Trapper always has one goal in mind: “I’ve never really been worried about writing a hit song or that kind of thing. It’s been more about trying to write stuff that can move people.”

## IF YOU GO

**WHAT:** Chris Trapper

**WHEN:** 8 p.m. Friday

**WHERE:** Night Eagle Cafe, 6 Lafayette Place, Oxford

**TICKETS:** \$15

**MORE INFORMATION:**

[www.christrapper.com](http://www.christrapper.com);

[www.nighteaglecafe.org](http://www.nighteaglecafe.org)