

JERRY GRANELLI

words by Rinde Eckert

Sandhills Reunion

I am leaving the Sandhills
it's too open

I'm leaving because it isn't
open enough



I'm plenty afraid. I just ain't worried
...Let's just say I know the uses of
fear but I ain't figured out yet what
worry is good for.

I'm
here
amon
worl
the
ing
fere







1)

Rained last night in the Sandhills
Northwest of Broken Bow

It's been that kind of season

And the grass knows it, high as a horse.

Imagine Billy the kid on a dappled mare

Tipping his hat, gliding like a ghost in the blue stem

And Indian grass, the horse invisible under him

Of course he never got this far north

Good thing too

No where to hide in this country

Would've had to ride for days without rest

Or find a gullible rancher would cover for him

Or maybe a girl wouldn't mind company

Even bad news like Billy

Welcome in the Sandhills her skirts rustling like prairie grass

Under the cottonwoods, not another soul around, the posse caught in the
downpour ten miles off, and a lonely gal with the desperado in the grass.

My wife turns in her sleep

While in my mind's eye Billy gets up

Smells the rain coming, says something nice to the woman, polite,

Excuses himself, to glide like a ghost in the tall prairie grass.

The rain will overtake me soon, he thinks

The grass will drink it up

Didn't ask her her name

Nothin' happens wasn't meant to be

The rain puddles in the gravel drive

I rise to shut the window

The dog gives me a look then settles again, resting his head on his paws

Not unwelcome, the rain

Not unwelcome at all

Like a friend, up with me to say it's alright.

Nothin' happens wasn't meant to be.

Like a Ghost in the Grass

And the kid makes it out of the territory,
Finds some lost herd, follows the trampled grass til he sees them, then
gallops in hollering for all he's worth, arms flailing like a crazed turkey,
Scattering them so they make a dozen tracks
A confusion for the posse not knowing which way he took
He finds his way south
Back in the real story where fate can deal with him
As it planned all along

Our Particular Tragedy

2) Take off your clothes, she says to me
You smell like cow-shit and dust
I do and she takes a washcloth to me
There in the kitchen
The smell of her hair
Cuts through the scent of lemons from the soap
I let her wash me, a grown man
Let her bathe me like an infant
As if I hadn't a care in the world
As if I were lost and blissful, overwhelmed by my yet to be lived life
The years of growing stretching out before me like endless hills of grass
She finishes, satisfied, gives me a pat on the stomach, smiles, as if to say,
there, now you're a proper little man.
We both know I'm not so new, that I can't see with those wondering eyes
anymore.
We make love right there in the kitchen,
And I bury my face in her cinnamon hair as she slides down.
We are both of us still too near the door not to hear the calling of our lives
from the sand-hills, the daily auction of our souls on the block,
Our memories as the local currency, the exchange.
Later she will rest her chin on my bold head
Run her hands down my chest as if to say she knows there is no escaping
our particular tragedy, its beauty, its terrible and intoxicating odor



Let's
say I
he us
fear I
ain't
ured
yet w
worry
good f

20 Questions for an Outlaw

3)

You worried Billy?

Mr. Bonney

Mr. Bonney. You worried?

'bout what?

Well, ruin, loneliness

No.

You ain't afraid then?

I don't know about that. I'm plenty afraid. I just ain't worried

You mind explaining that?

Let's just say I know the uses of fear but I ain't figured out yet what worry is good for.

Some people say you're goin' to hell.

I expect they do, some people

Do you believe in God?

Not the way you mean it, probably, no.

Alright, then, do you believe you have a soul?

I once killed a braggart. I knew he didn't have a chance when I looked in his eyes – full of shit, not enough room in there for anything else. But as he took his last breath all that drained out and his soul flooded in. I watched his soul flood in in the last five seconds. Unmistakable.

What about love of your fellowman? Don't you think you have an obligation to your fellowman?

Ain't never met my fellow man. Don't even know what he looks like.

It's a figure of speech.

Well then, no. I guess I don't feel no obligation to any figure of speech. But I guarantee you if some figure of speech was to kick my dog I'd know what I was obliged to do for him.

Do you think you're above the law?

Nope.

But you do break the law.

Yessir. I apparently do.

Do you think the law is unjust? You think you should be allowed to carry on as you do?

I don't think about the justice of it at all.

They're hanging you tomorrow.

That would appear to be so.

Aren't you afraid for your soul?

My soul is not likely to be affected one way or the other. It's my neck that's goin' to be in trouble.

Do you think you're a dangerous man?

Never killed a woman or a child. Never whipped a horse or robbed a blind man. I just took things as they come. I suppose that makes me dangerous, that last part.

You're not ashamed of what you've done?

No. I guess not.

You know you're famous?

I guess so.

You like being famous?

I get a kick out of it, yeah.

You think people'll remember you after you die?

Well I'm dyin' young, ain't I. Got a lot of unfinished business. Never made it past the feeling I was untouchable or immortal. Never got realistic about myself, you know, never got old enough to feel like lookin' back. Didn't have to watch myself get slow and weak. Nope. I'm dyin' as strong and as untroubled as a young man can be. And even dead I'm gonna look twenty-one and pretty as hell. People'll remember that.

Nolan

4)

Nolan could roll a cigarette with one hand.

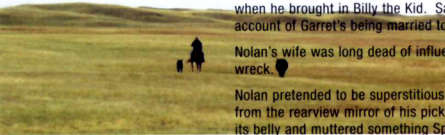
He had a deep scar on his left forearm he claimed was a bullet wound.

Married a superstitious French woman he met in Nogales when he was twenty-one and drinking a lot. Brought her back up north along with this half Mexican kid they'd more or less adopted.

Nolan claimed to be the great grandson of Pat Garrett, the lawman made famous when he brought in Billy the Kid. Said that made him one eighth Mexican on account of Garret's being married to a Mexican woman.

Nolan's wife was long dead of influenza and the kid had died at thirty in a car wreck.

Nolan pretended to be superstitious. Used to finger this Kachina doll hanging from the rearview mirror of his pickup before he could drive anywhere - rubbed its belly and muttered something Spanish. But the truth is he wasn't afraid of anything. Said he'd gone dead when his wife died. Her name was Jeanette but everybody called her June. They had only argued twice and he regretted both of them.



He never talked about the kid, but his grief went deep as a well.

Nolan had been sheriff for thirty years before he killed a man. A drunk with a gun in a suicidal rage wounded a bartender and scared the hell out of several people before Nolan got there, tried talking him into dropping the rifle, then shot him when the drunk leveled it at him. Hit the poor bugger square in the head from fifty paces; dropped like a rag doll.

I asked him once was it guilt made him quit.

He smiled and shook his head.

No, he said, I remembered the stories they told about Pat Garrett, how he could kill a man in the middle of a joke then come back and finish the punch line like he had just stopped to spit. Standing over that poor idiot, half his head all over the sidewalk I could see how a man might get that way, in control, absolutely sure of himself. It's a dangerous thing that kind of certainty. I believe doubt is what keeps us sane. Without it a man becomes a monster. Standing over that dead drunk crazy fool, I hadn't a shred of doubt that I'd done the right thing, and that scared me like nothin' ever had.

River of Glass

5) I am leaving the Sandhills because...
I am leaving the Sandhills because it's too open.
I'm leaving because it isn't open enough.
I've heard...
I've heard they're building a big bridge in the East.
I've heard they're looking for fearless workmen:
Indians, climbers, anyone fool enough to tether himself to some girder,
High above the glassy river.
Hammer rivets home, or worse.
Rope up and drop like a gray spider.
Leather gloves, hands all stiff from the cold,
Swinging down 100, 200 feet
To check how the work is holding under the new stresses, the higher winds



Then replace the popped rivets, hope for the best.
That's what I end up doing – swing man.
I am leaving the Sandhills because...
I am leaving the Sandhills because it's too open.
I'm leaving because it isn't open enough.

I'm paired with a Russian and a very black man from the Sudan,
But I'm the immigrant here, country boy among men of the world.
Me and the African try to learn how to say "good morning" in Russian.
We try it every day and the Russian curses us good-naturedly.
But this stops bein' funny after about a week.
Then we see a man drop carelessly, noiselessly to his death.
And nothing is funny after that.
We work quietly, efficiently; watch out for each other, the danger trumping all the differences between us,
color, language, religion.
Not here, not now, not out at the end of a taut rope paid out over the side of a high bridge, 200 ft. of line
humming under the strain, the weight of a single man.
No nations at the end of a rope, no tribes or philosophies,
No religions in this icy wind,
High above a river of glass.

Concrete is mostly sand, so is glass, molten sand.
I haven't left the sand hills I've just become the grass.
Yellowing with age,
Stiffening in the cold,
This subterranean system of roots - knotted
Fingering, suspended down,
Reaching for the water below.

Your Voice

6)

Your voice is a narrow room surrounded by service elevators
It sounds like rubbed brass finials being carelessly loaded on a flatbed truck
It sounds like the peanut shells crushed under work-boots in bars
Your voice cowers in a corner during storms
It steals watches from exhausted strangers
Something floats in it like dirty ice
It's like vapor on the waters of a flooded town
It sounds like keys being exchanged at a wedding
Plastic swords on the hood of an abandoned Chevy
A gamblers last throw of the dice
A dumpster full of eight track tapes in the rain
A scalded potato dropped in a tin bucket
Like a discarded rubber glove in a corner
Like bamboo sticks someone fingers at a yard sale all the time thinking about
the price of the vinyl placemats
Your voice is like a spade shoved into packed sand
Like decals torn from a foot locker
Your voice smolders like bibles in a burned church
It stares at me through the screen door like a lost cat
Like a bundle of worn magazines
Like little pearls of model cement
It sounds like a whiskbroom on some lawn chair
It's a nettle field
A set of steak knives with those faux scrimshaw handles
A drawer full of bent daguerreotypes
A tarnished dinner bell
Three crayons in a bass wood pencil box: burnt orange, turquoise, and flesh
I hate your voice
I love your voice
It staggers around my bedroom like a blind burglar
It falls to the floor like an empty dress

Just Angels

7) In 1937 the circus came to Grand Island with half-a-dozen lions, a fire-eater, eight clowns, a tight rope walking family, a pair of jugglers, five aerialists, a dog act, and several tons of elephants.

My father remembered the whole thing like it was yesterday:

"We drove down in the morning in the truck, had flapjacks in Broken Bow, waitresses all in pink, calling every of us Honey and Sweetie and such. Got to Grand Island about 11:30.

Circus lasted all afternoon. Everything you could imagine. I was fourteen at that time but I might as well have been six for all the world I'd seen. So everything about it was great, clowns and all. There was one moment though – couple of tumblers on the side in the half dark got to arguing, shoving each other. It was just half a minute and all in Italian or something, but it was comical somehow, these two muscle bound guys in bright blue spangled tights, their chests all puffed out like a couple of crazed sage grouse. Exciting and strange

But it was later, after we were headed home.

He didn't say a word, just pulled into this old place with a neon sign. 'Angels' what it was called, just 'Angels'. Just inside the door of the strip joint he just smiled at me and led me down to a table right next to the piano. "Son," he said, "you're smart enough to know this ain't the Church social but your old enough to see it for what it is. You go ahead and look boy, that would be the natural thing here, but we ain't here for the girls. These gals sure ain't angels and they aren't good lookin' enough for more than curiosity, if the truth be told. But this band here, this drummer, this clarinet player, the sax man. They're all from Chicago." Played in a little place in Chicago my dad took me to one night after a day at the stockyard. There was this big ole black woman with a voice like Bessie Smith. She come out in this sequined white gown, with little chiffon wings pinned to her shoulders and a tinsel halo on a wire fixed to a bun at the back of her head.

They opened with a thing called 'Elbow Grease Blues' and I never heard anything before or since that thrilled me like that.

So we're here to listen to these fellers play, cause that night in Chicago was a great night – a night when, for a moment we were all one and the same heavenly host, and my soul was the soul of a big fat black woman from Chicago dressed up like God's messenger and hers was the soul of a pimply faced white boy, his mouth hanged open like a cellar door. And these fellers can play like there's no tomorrow. And maybe even in this god forsaken den of iniquity there's a chance you might get a glimpse of what I mean.

And that's why we're here.

Last Light

8)

She knows he's an outlaw
Knows he'll be leaving once his horse is fed and watered, rested
But she's glad of it anyway, this night, this boy
She turns out from under his sleeping arm, gets up and walks to the window
She's forty-five and still a handsome woman
The rain is coming, she thinks, he should be on his way
She parts the linen curtain to take in the bright orange slash of the coming sun,
her arm a soft crescent of reflected light
Every corner of my world is waking up, she thinks, and turns to see me lying there,
not the outlaw kid she dreamt, but the husband she has loved and still does
She smiles as if to say: you are such a sweet disappointment honey.

I lie still, as if asleep
So as not to displace the last light of her wonderful dream
As she turns again to the window and the light of day

I am William Bonney
Called Billy the Kid
I prefer William Bonney
She says goodbye Mr. Bonney
I tip my hat and say, Ma'am
Then look east before I head west
Plan to turn south when I get the chance
When I can throw them off
I catch a fly with my left hand; pluck him up just like that
Prove to myself my hand ain't nervous
I shake him a little so he knows he's been took
Then let him loose cause there ain't no point in killing him.
I don't mind killing, lord knows, but I can't stand the waste of it.
Even an angry man ought to be able to keep his hand steady
Keep his head straight
Know when to relax his grip
Let go

Little White Suit

9)

In 1956, when I was eight, my mother bought me a white suit for the wedding of her sister in Omaha. We were almost late, traffic jam on highway 30, somebody lit a billboard on fire, backed up traffic for a mile and a half. By the time we passed it the fire was out. It was charred black and except for a big lip-sticked smile and the word "ice" there was nothin' left of the ad.

The wedding is formal and I fit right in. It's summer and the day is fine, as I recall. A string quartet plays for her as she walks down the aisle – something stately but not stiff. When she reaches the altar and they stop, the second violinist sees me staring. She puckers up and blows me a kiss. I turn away blushing bright red, a perfect fool in my little white suit, kissed for the very first time by a stranger.

Never to See You



10)

If you love me
Dream of me as you cook or clean
Put me at your hands while arranging flowers
Part me as the pages of a new book
You leaf through before buying
Hold me in your teeth
As a glove
When you free your hands
To fish for car keys
In your purse

Smart Women

11) "No. No," she says to me, "I don't want you to kill it. I just want you to kind of radically discourage it."

If you can't live without smart women you'll have to learn to surprise them, stop them in their tracks, so they look at you and think: "how many toys has he got in there."

Out of the corner of my eye: something like a dog, panicked by a mean child drawing a bead on it with a piece of brick, something like the sharp little teeth of a mean child, his little red hands, his eager brutality

She has the same dream: carrying her clothes she escapes from the house fire to a patch of short wet grass at a safe distance. She watches a man in uniform approach, taking off his heavy coat as if he means to wrap her in it. She is naked except for a pair of green rubber gardening boots. Her skin gray with ash and soot, she carries her clothes utterly unashamed.

Spun Like a Spur

12) Jim has a head full of crockery bits
His hair hangs over his eyes
Tender foot beer in a Mexican glass
Someone is troubling the parson

Spun like a spur on the boot of St. Michael
One beauty wrestles another
Sic transit gloria mundi on Monday
Rest of the week is for dancin'

Spun like a spur on the boot of St. Michael
One beauty wrestles another
Sic transit gloria mundi on Monday
Rest of the week is for dancin'

...among men of the world..
...danger trumping
...all the
...differences
...between us...
...No nations at
...the end of a rope

Tracks 1 & 6 composed by Jerry Granelli, Christian Kögel and J. Anthony Granelli
(Alexis Music/SOCAN, GEMA, BMI)

Tracks 2 & 7 composed by David Mott (SOCAN)

Tracks 3 & 8 composed by J. Anthony Granelli (BMI)

Track 4 composed by François Houle (Tatterdemalion Music/SOCAN)

Track 5 composed by Jeff Reilly (SOCAN)

Track 9 composed by Christoph Both (SOCAN)

Track 10 composed by Jerry Granelli (Alexis Music/SOCAN)

Track 11 composed by Chrisitan Kögel (GEMA)

Track 12 composed by Rinde Eckert and Christian Kögel (Last Land Music/BMI, GEMA)

About this work:

Sometimes when you start a project you can almost hear or see the unknown. It's a feeling, a sound, a taste. A fine line between not knowing, letting the work grow and one's vision. *Sandhills Reunion* was one of those things for me. Although it turned out to have twists and turns, surprises and SHOCKS, it fit together the way I knew it could.

In a way, I think this piece started in the 70's - in collaborations with Allen Ginsberg, Anne Waldman and other poets. I hope this goes to the next step. This is an audio play, a coming together of the spoken word with music, to create another form.

Granelli 2004

MY THANKS..... Lee Townsend, Rinde Eckert - for these words, Jeff Reilly for so many details, Shawn Pierce, the Septet for the writing and improvising and Tony Reif for doing this project and for keeping Songlines alive.

This recording was made possible through the assistance of the Canada Music Fund and the Music Section of the Canada Council for the Arts.

- 1) Like a Ghost in the Grass 4:05
 - 2) Our Particular Tragedy 3:43
 - 3) 20 Questions for an Outlaw 4:36
 - 4) Nolan 7:03
 - 5) River of Glass 6:57
 - 6) Your Voice 6:10
 - 7) Just Angels 3:04
 - 8) Last Light 5:32
 - 9) Little White Suit 1:17
 - 10) Never to See You 1:50
 - 11) Smart Women 2:16
 - 12) Spun Like a Spur 1:09
- total time 47:57



I'm the immigrant
here country boy
among the
world
the going
all nces
between



No nations at the
end of a rope

JERRY GRANELLI

Sandhills Reunion

words by Rinde Eckert

Rinde Eckert – *voice*
François Houle – *clarinet*
Jeff Reilly – *bass clarinet*
David Mott – *baritone saxophone*
Christoph Both – *cello*
Christian Kögel – *electric and acoustic guitars*
J. Anthony Granelli – *bass, lap steel guitar*
Jerry Granelli – *drums, samples*

- 1) Like a Ghost in the Grass 4:05
- 2) Our Particular Tragedy 3:43
- 3) 20 Questions for an Outlaw 4:36
- 4) Nolan 7:03
- 5) River of Glass 6:57
- 6) Your Voice 6:10
- 7) Just Angels 3:04
- 8) Last Light 5:32
- 9) Little White Suit 1:17
- 10) Never to See You 1:50
- 11) Smart Women 2:16
- 12) Spun Like a Spur 1:09

Produced by Lee Townsend



Canadian Council
for the Arts

Conseil des Arts
du Canada

SONGLINES

SGL SA1553-2

Printed in Canada

© 2004 Songlines Recordings, 3036 W. 6th Ave,
Vancouver BC V6K 1X3, Canada
www.songlines.com