

Small Towns

Jim Ratts
and
Runaway Express

Friends In Radioland,

This is why you've received *TWO DISCS* of Small Towns—

In the tray is 'Volume Two - Edited For Radio', ready for airplay.

Hidden in the booklet is 'Volume One' the full theatrical CD release.

It's the complete record. Take it anywhere.

It's road music for any country that has a small town.

We send our greetings from Colorado. — Jim Ratts



*Jim Ratts and Runaway Express bring it all home
on thematic Small Towns album*

By Peter Jones

Colorado's Kansas-born Jim Ratts lived in small towns during his early years—but the musical storyteller has finally finished his long-in-the-works concept album about the classic American Small Town. The result is an evocative road trip across the United States.

"All towns are small towns when you consider the universe," Ratts says on the CD cover art.

The aptly named *Small Towns*, by Jim Ratts and Runaway Express, is a cinematic soundscape that culls Ratts' interpretations of Janis Ian, Jesse Winchester and Steve Earle with the singer's own music; each song—or interwoven musical chapter—taking a distinct tour through the Main Streets and dirt roads of America. A map and a road sign, in the case of Chuck Pyle's "*Little Town Tour*."

They're all here in 17 tracks—quaint hamlets, Old West ghosts and tragic, dying towns.

While some of the songs are well traveled (Bruce Springsteen's "My Hometown"), the CD's highway between lesser-known gems (Janis Ian's "This Old Town" and Iris Dement's "Our Town") gives the album a subtlety that sounds "original," even if most of the material has been around town for a while. The reworking of Steve Fromholz's "Texas Trilogy" is married to Guy Clark's "Texas 1947."

Some of the album's contrasts are more stark than others. The two-lane highway that links the devastating obituary "Oildale" to Ratts' idyllic original "Kansas Skies" is an ironic turn that travels both sides of the small-town paradox, even when coming-of-age is its own death of innocence.

Ratts, born in the farming community of St. John, Kansas, population 2,000, is no stranger when it comes to Americana. His own songs have been recorded by such artists as Sam Bush (the bluegrass chart hit "Howlin' at the Moon") the Dillards and the Kingston Trio, among others. In the 1990s, he was one third of the Wild Jimbos with the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band's Jimmy Ibbotson, the wildest of Jimbos.

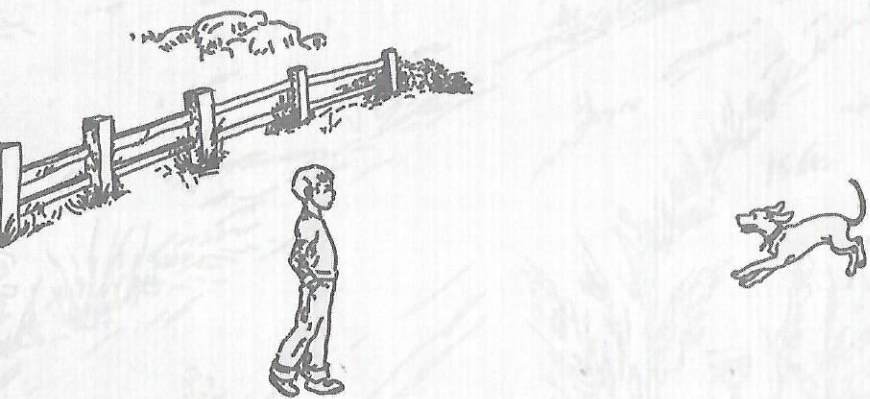
Since the 1980s, Ratts and Runaway Express have been a fixture of the Rocky Mountain region, with 7 years at the Telluride Bluegrass Festival to their credit. The award-winning band has successfully bridged gaps between country, folk, bluegrass and rock—a skillset that has seen Runaway back Doug Kershaw, Michael Martin Murphy, The Coasters, and even Chuck Berry. They've also toured and recorded extensively with John McEuen. Ratts will return to Winfield, Kansas, for the Walnut Valley Music Festival this September performing with his pal Roz Brown.

Small Towns follows Ratts' other ultra-ambitious sound collages—Yeah, Buddy! and Oh, Boy!, his companion tributes to Buddy Holly, and due this fall is "Celebrate Woodstock!, a gigantic ode to the '60s. "Quincy", an early preview of this record, is included here on this Acoustic Rainbow Sampler. Let them know what you think (ratts@runawayexpress.com).

Small Towns is, by far, the most personal and subtle of Ratts' concept works—effectively a collection of interconnected short musical stories, telling tales of equal parts, heartbreak and joy.

No small accomplishment.

Check out the "Kansas Skies" video at jimrattskansas.com director's cut (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R56nGZkInhs>)



Singer-songwriter Jim Ratts goes home to 'Small Towns' on his latest 'sound collage' album

By Peter Jones

In the following interview, Ratts, a small town boy, explains why he went home for his newest and most personal collage project yet.

"The small town simplifies a way of looking at an America that is small enough to process," Ratts said of a pet project that has been simmering in his home studio since 1998.

"It's like you have a handful of marbles, and you have this giant map of the United States. When tossed, every place that one of those marbles could possibly land is another story," Ratts said.

How did the concept of "Small Towns" develop?

First and foremost, it's where I come from. Small towns are so very complex. They can be shallow and narrow-minded, or they can be a place where you realize your full potential—since it's not so overwhelming. You can smile and wave at people, as opposed to rolling up your window and driving on by. Big cities require big barriers.

At the Kerrville Folk Festival in 1993, in the middle of the night around a campfire under a big Texas moon, an unknown girl named Iris Dement sang "Our Town," a composition that made the earth move. I introduced myself and said, "I need that song." That was the beginning. I realized I needed to record an entire album of songs that would reflect on the concept. Iris's song was such an inspiration—it reminded me of the fact that having grown up in small towns, I had a lot of things to say about them.

Your artwork for the album seems to be a cut above.

My wife Salli and I began singing together in 1980. Well into our 2nd decade as RunawayExpress we enlisted Greg Carr to design Yeah, Buddy! Greg and Sal developed a great working relationship that yielded two International Bluegrass Music Association nominations for Graphics Design of the Year, both for Steve Martin releases - The Crow and Rare Bird Alert. They won for The Crow, pop-up and all!

You grew up in the farming community of St. John, Kan., where your father lived all his life.

We lived on a farm. So going into the big town was driving into St. John, population 2,000, with a beautiful picturesque square that used to have grand trees and brick buildings that were built in the 1880s. Stafford County Seat. A lot of the town was built on the agrarian nature of that community of farmers. In going back and visiting Dad, who recently passed away at 103, I was continually reminded of those things that were pivotal for defining me in the way I see the world—basic friendliness, foundational faith, openness, and not being threatened by an outside world.

At the same time, your CD is not just about idyllic small-town life. There is a dark side.

"Oildale" segues right into your own song, "Kansas Skies," an evocative contrast.

Yes, my hometown experiences could not have been more positive. That's the whole point. "Kansas Skies" is me reminiscing about an idyllic childhood: "A farm boy cried with the future in his eyes watching Indian summer fade away." I lost my mom at 7—that's what happened. It's like loving a rainbow, but knowing that rainbow will be gone in five minutes. Then you deal with life without that particular rainbow and wait for another. I don't always write songs that nostalgic or sweet, but it's an honest representation of how I felt.

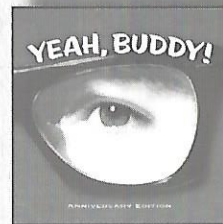
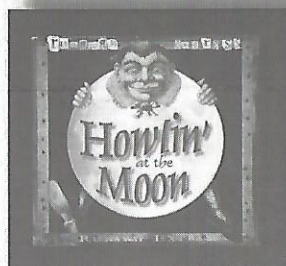
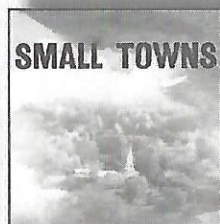
"Small Towns" is a concept album in the era of the mp3 when even the album format, itself, seems almost like a dying small town. You're going against the grain with segues and recurring themes.

I've always been drawn to audio collage—Spanky and Our Gang's *Without Rhyme or Reason* and the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper* around the same time. I've always wanted to incorporate that kind of stuff. I'm not competing in an arena that cares if it's in fashion. There is an archaic concept of just listening to an album all the way through. What I've learned from people who love this record is that they keep coming back to it. It's long enough that if it goes on repeat, you'll get surprises every time. It's a rather good soundtrack for a road trip I've been told.

At the same time, you have acknowledged contemporary listening habits with a remixed radio-ready version.

Yes, people can download the entire 17-track album as a theatrical project. The individual songs—the radio versions—are remastered and remixed to stand alone. Radio stations are going to have a radio-ready disc with each individual track. They'll receive both discs in the same package.

Each one of these songs is like a little vignette. It's a collection of short stories that have intertwining themes. I've always considered this project to be an ear movie.



Recordings are available at runawayexpress.com,
at CD Baby, iTunes, or by sending 20 USD to Runaway Express at
P.O. Box 2333, Englewood, CO 80150, USA

*Also featured on this Acoustic Rainbow sampler is a Ratts Original, "Quincy" (a true story),
which will be featured on "Celebrate Woodstock 2019", coming this Fall.*

