

JOEL SMOKER

The Human Condition

By Denise Torenbeek

Joel Smoker has been a troubadour of the untrod path for most of his life, traversing the back tracks of Australia for decades, originally as a toddler when his parents played a major role in establishing the United Aboriginal Mission at Fitzroy Crossing back in the 1950s.

The family then moved to Halls Creek for his schooling, returning to Fitzroy Crossing in his teens. As a result, a love of remote locations found its way deep into his psyche, and he has seldom wandered far from its embrace. He taught art techniques to teachers all over northern WA from a base at Kununarra for a decade or so and later returning to Perth. Every holiday would find him 'gone bush' with camera and art materials, or his guitar and the medium of song, to record anything and everything that took his fancy.

The Human Condition is the fifth Joel Smoker CD and with this release he has enlisted veteran muso and producer Ian (Simmo) Simpson to helm the work. Ian was a member of Slim Dusty's band for many years, and several other primarily bluegrass outfits before returning to the west coast. Other players on the

record are Fred Kuhl on bass (unforgettable from the halcyon days of the Sensitive New Age Cowpersons), Dave Clarke on fiddle, mandolin and harp and Brendan Leggo on drums and percussion. Ian sings harmony vocals also.

On his first offering *Out On Highway One*, Joel's songs explored the themes of leaving home and the revelations of the world beyond a wide eyed innocence. *Outback*, the second, took Joel back to his roots with stories of rural Australia and *The Flesh and The Spirit* explored the inner sanctum of emotional questing be it for love or meaning. With his *Smile* album he revised the passage of time and how it has no favourites with age claiming us all.

The Human Condition is a departure in theme, whereby Joel assumes the role of the jester and holds a mirror to life's vignettes and vagaries. Joel takes up the story.

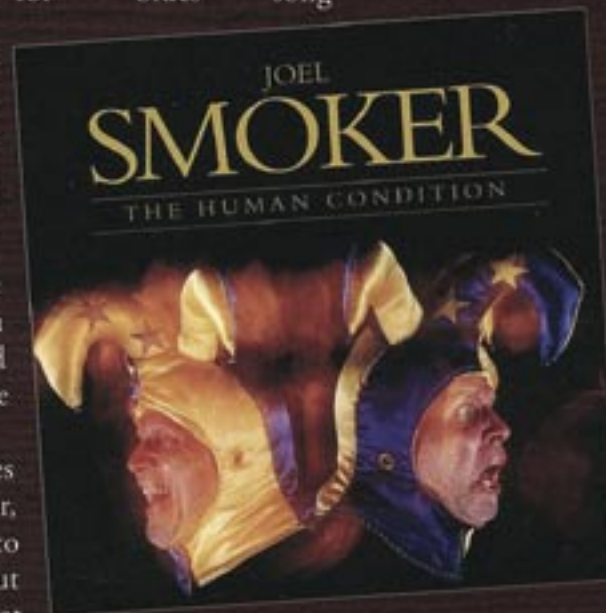
"The idea of the jester comes from the medieval jester, a clown whose job was to entertain his employer but also to tell him things that no one else could, particularly things the king didn't want to hear. He was able to do this by re-enacting events in a comical way so the king got the message. The set of songs that I have chosen for *The Human Condition* all say something about who we are as fallible human beings and the problems we encounter. Some of the songs are humorous, some are serious."

"'Jivin at the Juju Bar' is a lighter song that tells a story about one night at the Juju Bar. It ends with a calamitous event which could be seen as metaphor for

where we're going if we don't take care. There is a point to all my songs. I hope they make people ask questions. I'm not interested in easy answers."

"'I'm So Busy' captures the essence of our busy lives and how we communicate with each other. 'Calling On the Tom Tom' is a talking blues that examines how the mobile phone has become such an integral part of our daily lives. 'She's Gone' is a country blues song

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about a theme central to most blues songs, the story of a man who has lost his woman. The question is What is he going to do about it? 'The Queen of the Desert' is a story-telling song about a beautiful girl who grew up in the outback. 'Plain Old Me' runs through a range of options that the singer could be, before he finally settles on who he is."

Mr Smoker has a Way Out West exhibition at The Gallery in Ellenbrook, Perth until July 8th featuring his artwork and to complement that he has released

a book of 45 plates of pastels and paintings. (see Book Reviews) Joel and his wife Lexie originally bought a house and 1 1/2 acre block in the hills out of Perth at Stoneville when they returned to Perth. They

have an adjoining B&B called Gwen's Retreat and Joel has added a Ceramics Studio and kiln room where he produces ceramics for exhibition. "My most recent exhibition was at the Mundaring Arts Centre in October of last year. We have also built a separate display space/drawing studio and office building. I also exhibit and sell photographs, both as postcards and photographic prints. I released a book of my landscape photographs of the Kimberley a few years ago titled *The Kimberley Series*. Aside from this I am also a full time Art teacher -the thing that teenagers teach you is to be flexible. I am currently working on a new series of large pastel drawings, titled *Big Wide Land*. My wife and I are planning a trip to Central Australia to build up this collection of drawings. I will also be producing a set of new photographic postcards of the Pilbara this year." How could anyone lack for inspiration with a schedule and locations like that?!