

EMMYLOU HARRIS ■ TOM RUSH ■ KOKO TAYLOR ■ T.J. WHEELER
 PAUL BRADY ■ TONY TRISCHKA A ■ RICHARD SHINDELL ■ LES SAMPOU
 KATE CAMPBELL ■ CATIE CURTIS ■ ANNI CLARK ■ LUTHER "GUITAR JR." JOHNSON

Greg Brown,
 Emmylou Harris
 headline three-
 day folk music
 festival on
 UMass campus
 next weekend

By **STEPHEN IDE**
 The Patriot Ledger

With a grumbling baritone voice hinting at Tom Waits or Leon Redbone, Greg Brown sings of regret, love, hope or simple down-home themes of canning fruit, fishing or playing with his children. By their honest nature, you might think they were autobiographical songs.

"Fooled ya!" joked Brown, contacted by phone at his home in the Hacklebarney section of southeastern Iowa. The 54-year-old guitarist and singer-songwriter admits that elements of his life do creep into his music, a blend of folk, blues and rockabilly, but many times, he's just singing a song with its own story.

"I like what Tom Waits said about this stuff," he said. "'Just because something's true doesn't mean it's interesting.'"

Brown will join dozens of other musicians at the 6th annual Boston Folk Festival at the University of Massachusetts in Boston on Sept. 19-21.

In the lineup this year are other well-known folk and country acts, from 11-time Grammy winner Emmylou Harris to folk icon Tom Rush, blues greats Koko Taylor, Luther "Guitar Jr." Johnson, T.J. Wheeler and Paul Brady, along with ban-

jo great Tony Trischka and singer-songwriters Richard Shindell, Norwell native Les Sampou, Kate Campbell, Catie Curtis, Anni Clark and more.

For Brown, Boston is like an old friend. In the early '80s, the budding musician carried his record to WGBH in Boston, where Dick Pleasants was hosting his folk show.

"The next thing I knew, I was on the air," Brown said. "I always appreciated that."

Brown's popularity grew and he developed a reputation as a songwriter whose music was steeped in rural Americana. His career got a huge boost when he began performing on Garrison Keillor's popular radio program "A Prairie Home Companion" around 1981. As a musician, it was his first big break.

"I was kind of stumbling along," Brown said of his early



Anni Clark

JUST GOOD FOLK



Greg Brown



Kate Campbell

Next weekend will be packed with folk music favorites

■ FESTIVAL

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career. "I was making a living finally, but I was doing a lot of stuff for the Iowa Arts Council, singing for schools, hospitals, things like that, and I had some college gigs in the Midwest. I was getting by. But before I started doing that show, I think it would have been really hard for me to go tour around the country."

Now Brown, who has more than a dozen albums to his credit, not only tours nationwide but he has been nominated for several Grammy Awards.

Willie Nelson, Carlos Santana, Michael Johnson, Shawn Colvin, Mary Chapin Carpenter and many others have performed his songs. And he has earned the respect of fans and his peers for his playful, clever turn of phrase, honest lyrics, entrancing musical groove and wry stage humor.

"I'm a big fan of people like Mose Allison, Randy Newman. Those kind of writers," he said. "Sometimes it's a better way to get at things for me, with a little irony, and certainly with humor. That's just the way I live my life, too. If

EVENT PREVIEW

BOSTON FOLK FESTIVAL

7:30-9 p.m. Friday, Sept. 19 and 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Sept. 20 and 21. Tickets for Friday are \$10; Saturday and Sunday \$60. Single-day tickets, Saturday or Sunday, are \$35. \$10 for children (unlimited days); kids under 6 are free. For information, call 617-287-6911 or WUMB-FM 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at 617-287-6900 or see www.wumb.org/folkfest.

I couldn't laugh, I couldn't live."

Brown's latest release is a CD/DVD compilation put together by Bob Feldman of Red House Records, Brown's label for 20 years. The CD, a retrospective, includes many of the songs for which Brown has become known, from the tribute of "The Train Carrying Jimmie Rodgers Home" to the story of everyday angst in "The Worrisome Years" to the loss of the family farmer in "Our Little Town."

The DVD contains a documentary of Brown, filmed in the early '90s, showing several members of Brown's family, his father, uncle and a childhood friend, along with jams and concert footage.

Though Brown approved the "rough

cut" of the documentary, he says he never saw the final version. He admits it was good seeing images of family and friends and his father, who died three years ago.

Family is important to Brown. Married for almost a year in November to folk singer Iris DeMent, Brown is the father of three grown daughters and is protective when it comes to talking about his family to the media.

But family, along with life in general, has influenced his music all of his life. His father was a preacher, who took his young son from town to town early in life. Brown says he still loves the sound of gospel music.

"The spirit of gospel music I think permeates what I do," he said. "If I hear a choir singing a good old gospel song, that makes me about as happy as anything. That passion that's in those old hymns, regardless of a person's theo-

gy, it just really moves me.

"Those old songs, they're about longing, they're about hope. They're about regrets. I just love those old hymns and gospel tunes. I think that's deeply imbued in what I do still."

In a special treat at the folk festival, Dave Zollo will join Brown on piano,

Brown said. Zollo is the head of Trailer Records, a label which put out Brown's album "Over and Under" and for which Brown is recording an album of traditional folk songs to be released in February.

For Brown, known for establishing an almost trance-like rhythm in his songs, one of the most important things about performing for people is to move them in some way, literally and figuratively.

"I hope they're feeling it," he said. "I hope it makes them shake their butt, tap their feet, you know, move around a little bit and feel some emotion."

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Emmylou Harris will perform at the Boston Folk Festival next weekend at UMass Boston.