

# BUDDY

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## Ready to show off his country pluck

Redd Volkaert will showcase his sense of humor and Grammy winning guitar skills at Guitar Show  
by Tom Geddie

**R**EDD VOLKAERT SAYS HE'S TOO DUMB to do anything except play guitar for a living. Don't take what he says too seriously too much of the time, though, because he has one of the world's most self-deprecating senses of humor.

He shares a 2009 Grammy — with Brad Paisley, James Burton, Vince Gill, John Jorgenson, Albert Lee, Brent Mason, and Steve Wariner — for best country instrumental performance for the song “Cluster Pluck,” and he's a two-time winner of “best electric guitarist” in Austin.

He's played with so many people that he had to put the list in writing so he wouldn't forget them all; 10 of these folks are Billy Gibbons, George Jones, Allison Krauss, Rose Maddox, Bill Monroe, Buck Owens, Dolly Parton, Mavis Staples, Merle Travis, and Rhonda Vincent. Most famously, perhaps, for a long time he played lead guitar in Merle Haggard's band.

Today, the Canadian native, Austin-based Volkaert fronts his own group and is part of the country collective Hay Bale.

### Guitar collector

AND HE COLLECTS GUITARS — among his favorites are a 1953 Fender Telecaster, a 1951 Fender Nocaster, a 1958 Fender Esquire and a 1950s-style Hahn Telecaster — which is one of the reasons he'll be at the Dallas International Guitar Festival April 20-22 at Market Hall.

Because, as a middle child, he was tired of hand me downs, Volkaert resisted his first guitar.

“I didn't want to play it at first because it was my brother's,” he said. “I told my dad I wanted to play bass so he would buy me one of my very own, but he said no so I wound up with it. I took lessons once a week when I was ten, but after about a month or two, maybe three, the teacher called my dad and kinda fired me.”

That was because Volkaert was playing by ear instead of

learning to read the music.

“A couple of guys in the neighborhood sat around playing ‘Gloria’ and ‘Wipe Out’ and ‘Walk Don't Run’ and the usual hits of the day.

“By then, my brother was playing drums so we had a rock band with three guitars and a drummer when I was 11 years old. That was a fun thing to do; it was so rewarding as a little kid to copy something and think it sounded just like the guy on the record or the television and go, ‘Wow, I guess I ain't so stupid.’”

Volkaert, who is now in his mid '50s, has been known to practice his own riffs now for as many as 10 hours a day.

He'll stick with it, he said, laughing, “because I'm too dumb to do anything else.”

“There's nothing like playing a gig that's going good,” he said. “It's extra special to be able to play with other people and have that wonderful feeling of it working. That's the biggest payoff.”

Volkaert said he could claim that he plays guitar because he likes to sleep late, but the truth is that the older he gets the earlier he wakes up — 7 or 8 AM

### Sense of humor

HIS SENSE OF HUMOR thrives, though, no matter the hour.

“I've been accused of a pretty twisted one, but everything is funny to me. And I talk to myself a lot,” he said. “A lot of the stuff I think of, it seems like some people don't get it and I'm the only one who does. I've had lots of different people say I have a ‘loopy’ sense of humor, but life's fun. It's way too short to be mad or bitching about it.”

He moved from British Columbia to Alberta to California,

noodled around a bit, slept in his car a few times, wound up in Nashville for eleven years, and eventually made his way to Austin.

“I enjoyed Nashville because, as a kid . . . growing up and getting into country music and loving that old country stuff, I always had dreams of going to Nashville and meeting all these cool steel guitar players and guitar players and watching them

play to see if I could get close to them with my playing. But the older you get, the shittier the new music gets to you.”

When he got to Austin, somebody asked him why.

“All I could say was ‘Nashville.’ I'd always enjoyed the live music scene in Austin, especially the variety: country, blues, swing, jazz, Tejano, salsa, and everything else you can think of,” he said. “At that point, I had enough

of the pop bubble gum music that I hadn't cared for the first time around . . . The crowds in Austin seem to accept people for their musical ability more than their clothes or lack of, hair or lack of, cowboy hats or lack of.”

Volkaert likes that freedom, which also shows up in who he listens to.

“I like everything. I listen to Frank Sinatra and Nat King Cole, Albert King, Jimmie Vaughan,

Eric Johnson, Buddy Whittington, and others,” he said.

“I play the way I do and I do my dead-level best, and if somebody doesn't like it, (screw) 'em; don't let the door hit you in the ass,” he said.

“If there's no crowd at all, then I may be doing something wrong . . . Hopefully I can play the kind of stuff that makes the people I work with really happy;

that's what I'm shooting for as well, to be a good, accurate player.”

Hay Bale has had a regular Sunday night gig for eleven years and The Redd Volkaert Band has a regular Saturday afternoon gig, both at the popular Continental Club. Hay Bale's only rule, basically, is “as long as it's danceable, we'll do it.”

His own band is more of an instrumental group. Volkaert tours with Hay Bale in the summer in the United States and on some European trips; his namesake band is more into the fall festivals.

He still flies to Nashville periodically to record, and does “some guitar clinics here and there.”

In addition to the four Hay Bale CDs and recording with lots of other people, he has recorded five of his own CDs: *Reddhead* (2008), *For the Ladies* (2004), *Twangbangers: 26 Days on the Road* (2002), *No Stranger to a Tele* (2001), and *Telewacker* (1998).

Volkaert played at the Dallas International Guitar Festival last year after being a “tourist” for years.

“I'm an old gear nut. When I can afford it, I collect. I love the history of the old guitars, and I like old cars, too,” he said. ■



brio photography

He shares a 2009 Grammy for instrumental performance for the song “Cluster Pluck”: Redd Volkaert

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