

TEXT BY SHERRI K. OOSTERHOUSE

PHOTOGRAPHY BY WANDA KOCH AND STEVE MOORE

A SLICE OF AMERICANA

CHUCK JOHNSON & CHARLYHORSE



The live music scene in Charlotte can be summarized in two words – vibrant and diverse. If you ask the prolific Chuck Johnson, local musician, song writer and music lover, he would add texture and color, along with three chords and the truth. No one embraces or appreciates the opportunity to entertain more than Johnson, who left his corporate job to finish something he started more than twenty years ago.

ARRANGING THE BAND

Johnson's band was born in the Baltimore area in the early '90s, before a wife and kids and the need for insurance. Time marched on, and playing music to crowds played a backseat to collecting a steady paycheck and raising a family – something he never regretted.

Now at a different stage in life, with adult children and his new best friend and wife, Debby, he had the support to give it another go – this time in Charlotte, surrounded by talented friends and a cadre of musicians who care about the music they make.

"I told my wife, I can live with failing, but I can't live with never trying," said Johnson, in a sincere smooth southern tone.

Johnson first formed a duo with local musician Tom Kuhn, who plays bass guitar, mandolin and back-up vocals and has rocked the local music scene in bands like Red Rocking Chair every Tuesday night at The Comet Grill. From there the duo expanded to a trio when they folded Dale Meyer into the mix as musical director, lead guitar, dobro and back-up vocals. They've played the likes of McGlohon Theater as opening acts and pepper their calendar with

taverns and musical venues like The Double Door.

When opportunities like headlining at the Visulite Theater come knocking, that's when they pull out Charlyhorse.

Chuck Johnson and Charlyhorse includes five members – the trio plus local music icon and NC Music Hall of Famer, Rob Thorne, on drums and hand percussion, and Dennis Johnson, who also plays for Part Time Blues Band, on keyboards and standup bass. They've all played together in some incarnation or another for decades. When they hit the stage, their shared talents strike the perfect chord with Americana music fans.

AMERICANA ROOTS

If you pour country music, bluegrass and rock & roll into a pitcher and stir, the glass will be half full of

a flavorful music called Americana. This contemporary sound incorporates American roots music that the likes of Zac Brown, John Mellencamp and The Avett Brothers have brought to the masses – but has not always been commercially viable. It's the kind of toe tapping, table slapping, head bobbing music that pulls in a wide range of fans – and is the fastest growing genre of music today.

Johnson is the lead vocal, song writer and story teller of the group. He writes songs about growing up in Spartanburg, family, friends and funny encounters throughout his fifty some years, while strumming his rhythmic acoustic guitar. He knits together tales of small town life and travels throughout the south. His two albums are titled *Cotton Ain't King*, and *Snake Box on the Altar*. He's currently in the studio recording a new album with Charlyhorse to be released this summer, with tracks that include *Grey Coat*, *Birmingham* and *Elaina*.

"Chuck writes the music and we arrange it," said Kuhn. "He's the hunter, and we're the cooks."

THE MUSIC BUSINESS

Johnson's quick wit and humor are part of what engages audiences and keeps them coming back. At a recent show, he joked with the crowd about his injured finger, burned by bacon grease and wrapped in blue tape. With his signature black leather fedora (a gift from Ti and Rob Thorne in honor of his seductively southern *Snake Box On the Altar*) bound by a rattlesnake band perched on his head, he composed simple lyrics, strummed a few chords and amused the audience with an improv melody of "blue finger boo boo blues."

"I love being in show business," Johnson said. But it's called a business for a reason. "The business has to be done correctly to support the art." Johnson entrusts and credits much of the business to his wife Debby, who he claims is the best self-taught booking agent around.

"You can love this business, but it won't always love you back," said Johnson.

Since he left his job, he has treated his music like the career he always wanted. Johnson recently served jury duty, and when asked his profession, he replayed a proud moment. He said, "I'm a musician," he grinned, "and I meant it!" *

Visit thecharlyhorse.com for more information about their upcoming album.



Chuck Johnson -
Lead Vocals/Guitar



Tom Kuhn -
Bass/Mandolin/Harmony
Vocals



Rob Thorne - Drums
NC Music Hall of Fame
Inductee



Dale Meyer - Lead Guitar/
Dobro/Harmony Vocals



Dennis Johnson -
Keyboard/Bass/Vocals



Come Jimmy Jam With Us!

In 2013, Charlotte Living suffered a great loss when Jim Oakley lost his battle with cancer. He was co-publisher along with his sister Kathy Buckley, who carries the torch today and continues to print issue after issue of stories about the region where she and her brother shared their deep roots.

Jim was a musician and enthusiastic supporter of Charlotte's live music scene. He enjoyed lasting friendships in the music community, beginning with first grade friend, drummer Rob Thorne. Jim listened with Chuck Johnson when Charlyhorse's first CD arrived, and he loved to play music with his close friend Carl King.

To celebrate Jim's life, local musicians launched the *Jimmy Jam Music Festival* in 2014 – a day of great music to benefit Jim's favorite charity, **The Allegro Foundation**, a champion for children living with disabilities. Mark your calendars now for this year's celebration!

Please Join Us for

The 2nd Annual Jimmy Jam Music Festival

Sunday, May 17, 2015

1pm to 7pm

Rama Swim & Racquet Club

Free admission, donations for Allegro appreciated

Guests can bring a dish and their own beverages in plastic containers

No children under 15 please

Musicians performing at the 2015 Jimmy Jam Music Festival will include **Chuck Johnson & Charlyhorse**, **Mike Strauss Band**, **Carl King & The Undesirables**, **Kevin Walker & The J-Walkers**, **Stolen Hearts with Pam Taylor & Robert Johnson**, **Lenny Federal Band**, **Wink Keziah**, **Bill Miller**, **Shannon Lee**, **Paul Noble**, **Bobby & Marcy Little**, **Maddie Schuler**, **Marta Christmas & ScaldCat**, **Silver Wings**.

Special thanks to festival organizers **Kelly Carl**, **Carl King**, and **Rob and Ti Tiksa Thorne**. The venue is donated and hosted for the second year by **Rama Swim & Racquet Club**, a community swim club celebrating their 50th anniversary. www.ramaclub.com.

Join our email list at www.charlotteliving.com for updates on the Jimmy Jam!