



KEVIN LAMB PHOTO

## WHERE THERE'S A WIL...

BY DAVID MORRISON

The interviews I conduct with the subjects of articles like this are usually formulaic, industry standard affairs. I compile a list of relevant questions to form the basis of a short chinwag, we have said tête-à-tête, and that's that. Simple and obvious, there's rarely any deviation from this process, or any need for it.

In the instance of Wil (Mimnaugh), however, I initially decided to rip up the rulebook, only scribbling down a few inane safety-net questions at the very last second. But why for this particular artist did I opt to buck the trend?

Based on the evidence of the lushly orchestrated folk-rock of Wil's last album, *"By December"* (EMI, 2007), and the inclusion of mutually admired, cool Canadian musicians within its acknowledgements, I had every confidence we'd have plenty to talk about without the need for pointers. And so it transpired, not one "official" question posed for the first 45 minutes of our spirited telephonic confab!

We clicked from the off, conversing like long-lost brothers. Time and again we high-fived down the wire upon the discovery of common interests and attitudes and those areas where our respective worlds have overlapped. Besides, I'm always going to get on just fine with anyone who uses such playful phraseology as "in the history of me having ears."

Of the copious topics crammed into our lengthy exchange, naturally by far the most consuming for Wil was, and remains, his next

album release. Since relocating to Qualicum Beach from Calgary two and a half years ago, much has happened in his career, most significantly that he finds himself without a record label.

"I had a wonderful experience with them, I really did. I have nothing bad to say about them," Wil told me of his tenure at EMI.

"But the *"By December"* record didn't sell enough out of the gates for them to answer to the people that had bought EMI, and they had to houseclean."

While it might have been an amicable parting of ways, Wil had been looking for an escape route for a time, seeking greater artistic independence, tighter control over the way he likes to work. This was partly due to his feeling that *"By December"* evolved into something almost beyond his grasp, the finished product boasting twenty musicians, including its composer, on all but the kitchen sink.

"You know, the last two full-length records, I'm proud of them, but they're not at all how I would make a record!" he began in explanation of his scaled back approach to the next one.

"The last one got close, but then it got way out of control, way too big. There were too many people involved. It was recorded in nine different studios across the country,

mixed in Nashville (and mastered in Portland). It was so insane!"

The next, as yet untitled opus will be a reaction to this experience, the focus firmly on room for the songs to breathe, Wil pointing to *"By December"*'s sweet, gently countrified pop nugget *"Tight Fist"* as an illustration of the overall sparser sound he's aiming to capture throughout.

"I will be in complete control of it," he stated with authority, "and everyone involved will be people that I personally know that have nothing but faith and belief. All the songs are there and they're all stronger than anything I've ever written."

One thing I really like about Wil is that while he obviously and justifiably possesses the self-confidence in his abilities so crucial to making it in the overcrowded singer-songwriter universe, his overarching aims remain simple and realistic. He summed this up succinctly during our highly enjoyable conversation by saying:

"I've always wanted the career of John Prine; I've never been interested in having a career like Coldplay. A career like Bonnie Raitt's is far more interesting than any artists that are mega-massive successful. It's nothing I've ever wished for. I've always wanted to just put out honest records and make a humble and happy living. And that's it."

While Wil may be content to earn a modest crust, his considerable songwriting prowess, musicianship and professionalism may eventually dictate he'll receive greater attention than he'd prefer. He's too good for that not to happen. And having previously worked or toured with such noted homegrown personages as Matthew Good, Colin James, Feist, 54-40's Neil Osborne and Ron Sexsmith, Wil's already a name in the Canadian scene. But I tell you what – in my history of having ears, he can hold a candle to any of them.

Wil is co-headlining Errington Hall with Gerry Barnum on February 14. ~

For more information on Wil please visit:

[www.ibreakstrings.com](http://www.ibreakstrings.com)

[www.myspace.com/wilbreakstrings](http://www.myspace.com/wilbreakstrings)