

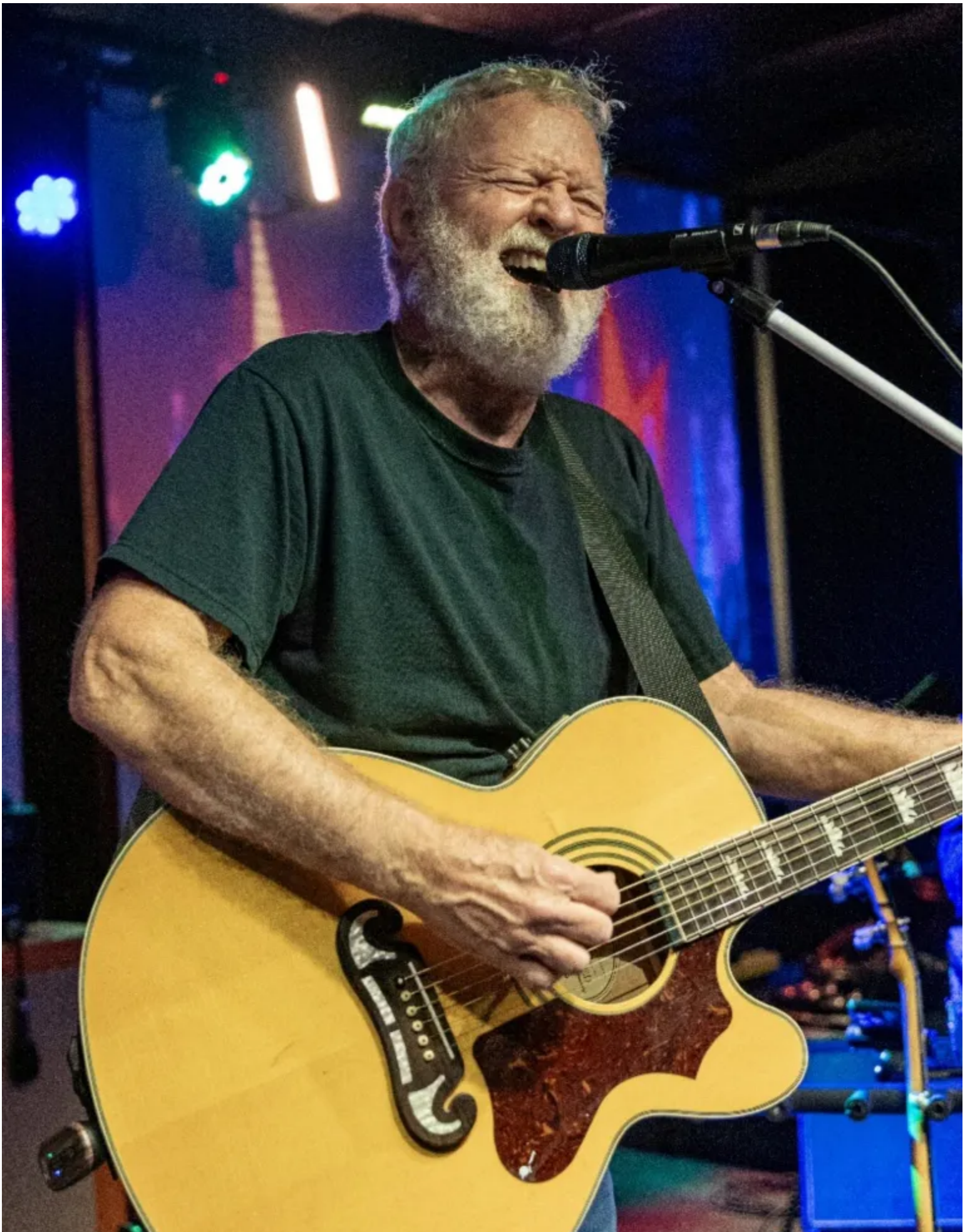
ARTS

Springfield musician Jack Bryson Bowden releases 52 songs in a year

Bowden's #WeeklyRelease series helped him grow in confidence and as a songwriter



by Jeff Kessinger
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Springfield-area musician Jack Bryson Bowden wrapped up his #WeeklyRelease series in early February. He recorded and released a song every week as part of a 2025 New Year's resolution. (Photo provided by Jack Bryson Bowden)



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Springfield-area musician Jack Bryson Bowden wrote his first song when he was in eighth grade. He's written plenty of songs in the years since, but they mostly live in his brain and on the page.

"Ever since the songwriting bug hit me, I've been writing songs — sometimes in spurts, sometimes in gushes and sometimes there's a drought," Bowden said on Feb. 3. "I've written hundreds of songs and only recorded a few when I lived in Lubbock, Texas."

And that hasn't sat well with the multi-instrumentalist.

"I feel like I've got all these songs and I haven't recorded them, and there's been something bothering me in my life, something not complete," he said. "It's like an anxiety. And I realized it's these songs that I have in cages in the basement. I need to set them free."

Bowden set 52 of them free over the course of the last year after he made a New Year's resolution to release one song per week. He accomplished his goal in the first week of February with **"Won't You Please Come Home."**

Bowden traveled a winding road to the Ozarks



Jack Bryson Bowden's long-running musical career has taken him across the country and included time playing on a paddlewheel riverboat in North Carolina and at Silver Dollar City. (Photo provided by Jack Bryson Bowden)

Bowden's peripatetic life led him to the Ozarks about 25 years ago. He was born in North Carolina and raised in places like Texas, New York, Virginia, Michigan and even the western Pacific island of Saipan. He grew up listening to his parents singing and harmonizing, and he and his four siblings joined in as they got older. Piano lessons didn't stick, but Bowden messed around on his dad's guitar.

Bowden learned three chords on the mandolin when he was in middle school, and — inspired by an album by The Guess Who — he and a friend made a pact that they would each write a song.

"He didn't write one, but I did," Bowden said.

After graduating from the Fredonia School of Music at the State University of New York at Fredonia, he moved to San Francisco. His journeys took him to New York City and west Texas, where he says he really got

solid in the music business, playing with some good bands and recording a couple of albums.

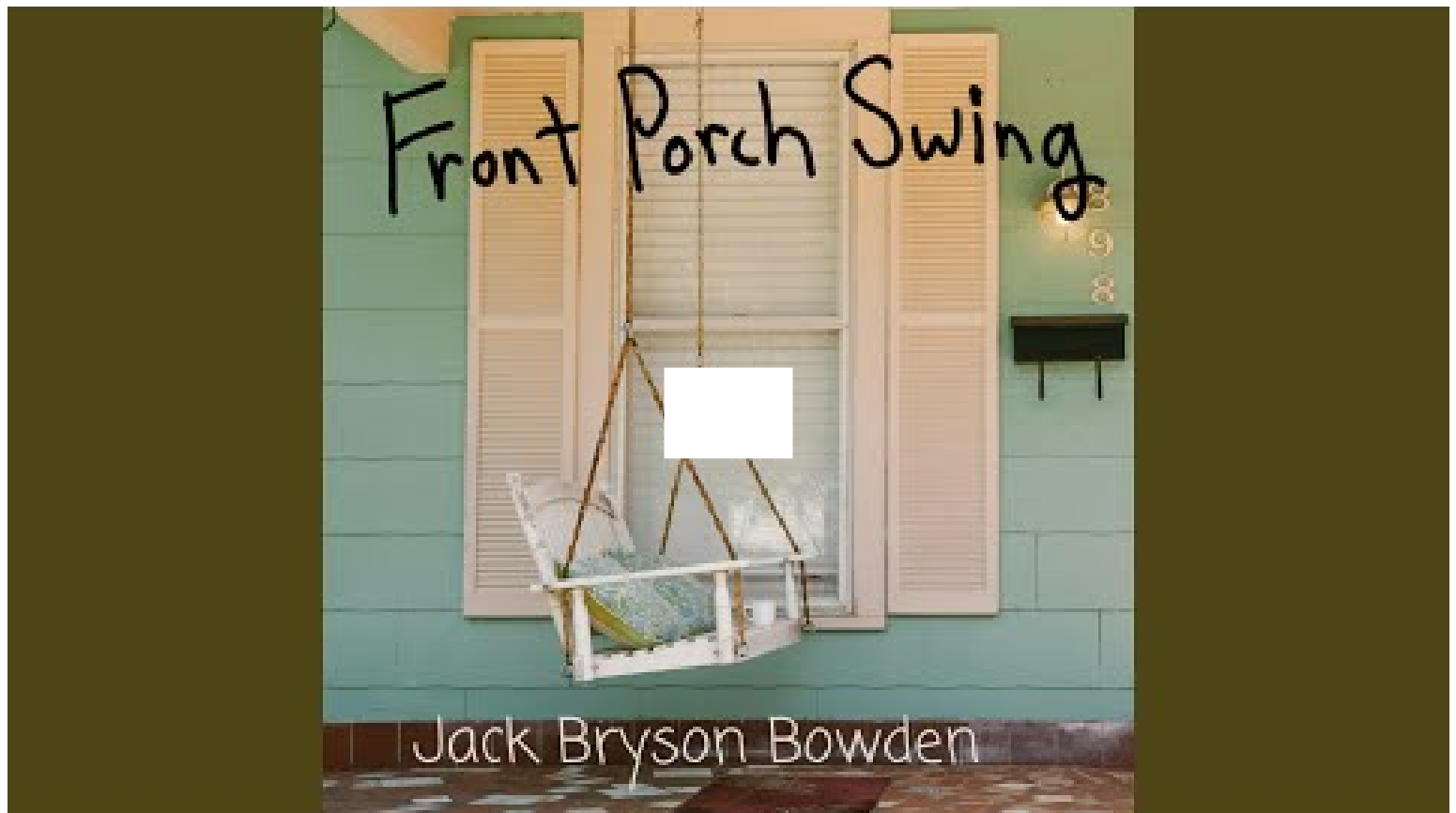
While in New York, Bowden studied banjo under Tony Trischka, who also taught Grammy winner Bela Fleck and is considered by some to be one of the most influential modern banjoists. Bowden's time in Lubbock included playing the famous Sunday jam sessions at Stubb's BBQ, and he met artists like George Thorogood, Emmylou Harris and Lloyd Maines, father of Natalie Maines, lead singer of The Chicks.

After a move back to North Carolina, Bowden won a country music talent hunt by Charlotte radio station WSOC and, as part of his prize, got to open for Loretta Lynn. Bowden later joined the house band at a club called Country City USA before playing on a paddlewheel riverboat, the Henrietta II, on the Cape Fear River for eight years. From there, it was on to the Midwest.

"Once I got to the Ozarks, I played a lot of honky tonks out in the sticks," Bowden said. "Little places where it was required that you smoked cigarettes."

From Bolivar to Warsaw and Climax Springs to Stockton, Bowden played at AmVets posts, Eagles Clubs and little bars. He also taught music at Hermitage and worked at Silver Dollar City. Now he plays the Springfield area as a solo artist and with his roots rock/folkabilly/honky tonk band Kicking Jacksie, alongside Marvin LeJeune, Mike Blehm and Andy Holloway.

#WeeklyRelease songs span a variety of genres



His #WeeklyRelease challenge started in mid-January of 2025 and, truth be told, Bowden thought he had a bit of a head start.

“When I started this project, I had — in the can — five or six songs. I thought I had dozens,” Bowden said. “And the in-the-can songs weren’t finished. They just had some basic guitar and scratch vocals on them.”

Undaunted, Bowden got to work fleshing out existing songs with minor changes and tweaks. He did write three brand new songs for his project and one of them, “Morning Whim-Wham,” won the NewSong Showcase instrumental category at the Walnut Valley Festival in Winfield, Kansas.

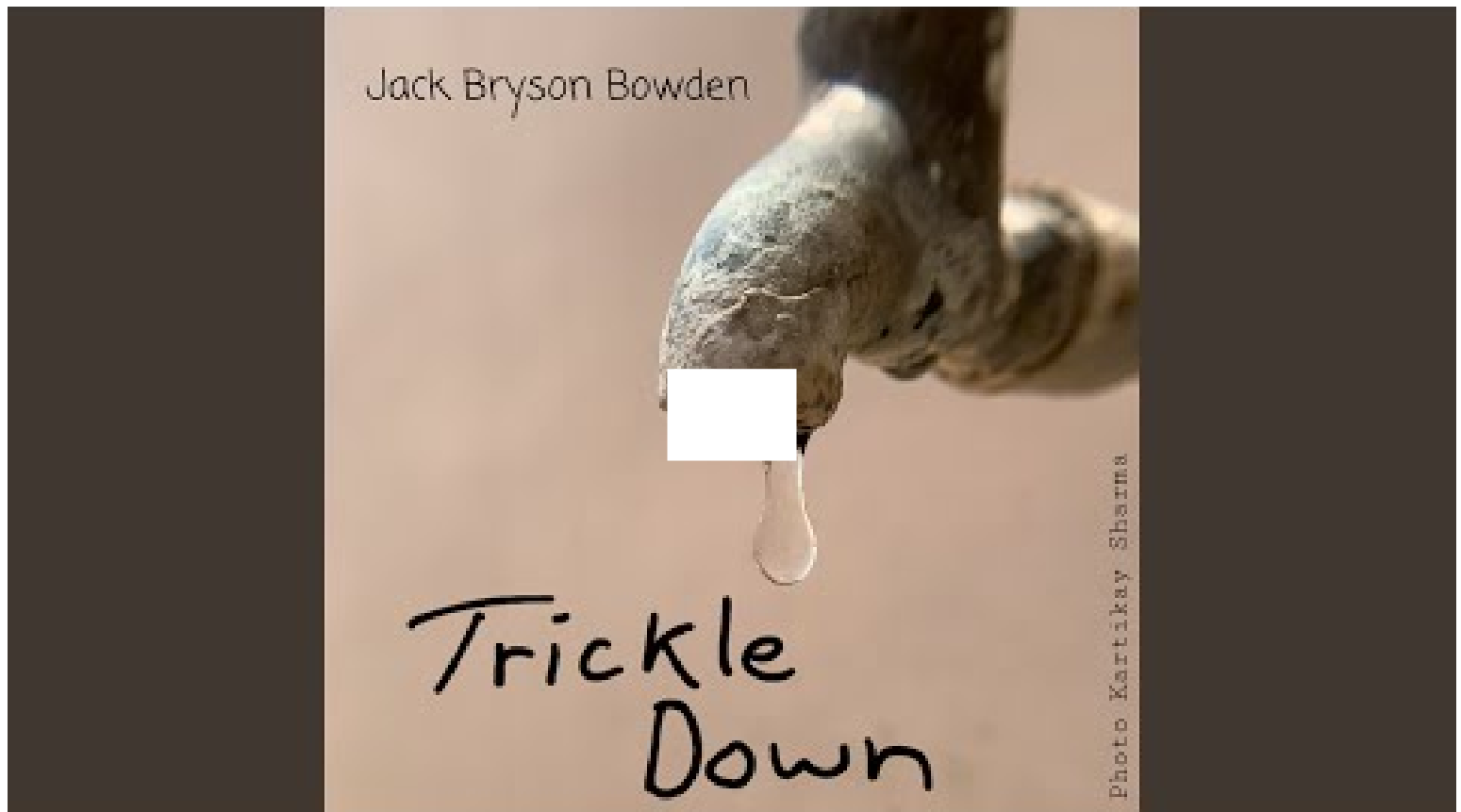
The #WeeklyRelease songs cover a wide variety of styles.

“My influences are anywhere from Harry Belafonte to the Allman Brothers, James Taylor and Earl Scruggs,” Bowden said. “There’s a lot of bluegrass songs and there’s some bluesy songs. There’s really folk songs, some dreamy songs. There’s some bubble gum songs, rockabilly, just a whole bunch of stuff.”

There’s also “The Star-Spangled Banner.”

“It was getting late in the week and I needed something, so I did the national anthem, but did it in a jazz style,” Bowden said. “So that was kind of cheating, but not really. I filled up another week with a clean version of a song that didn’t have a clean version. All the other (songs) were totally different and original.”

‘That was exhausting. I’d better get started on the next one’



Keeping the momentum going was one of the many challenges Bowden said he faced during his year of releasing songs weekly. He worked in his home studio nearly every day, though he did plan some breaks to refresh his mind.

“As soon as I finished recording one, it was like, ‘Oh, that was exhausting. I’d better get started on the next one,’” Bowden said. “And usually I would relax for a day. I’d take a day off from recording and go walk the land I have on the Niangua River. It’s the most peaceful thing just to walk out there, to sit and breathe, to listen to the woodpeckers, go down to the river. There’s a rock that I sit on, Thinking Rock. Sometimes it’s Singing Rock, sometimes it’s Other Things Rock. I love to spend time there, and it’s a great place to practice, to write.”

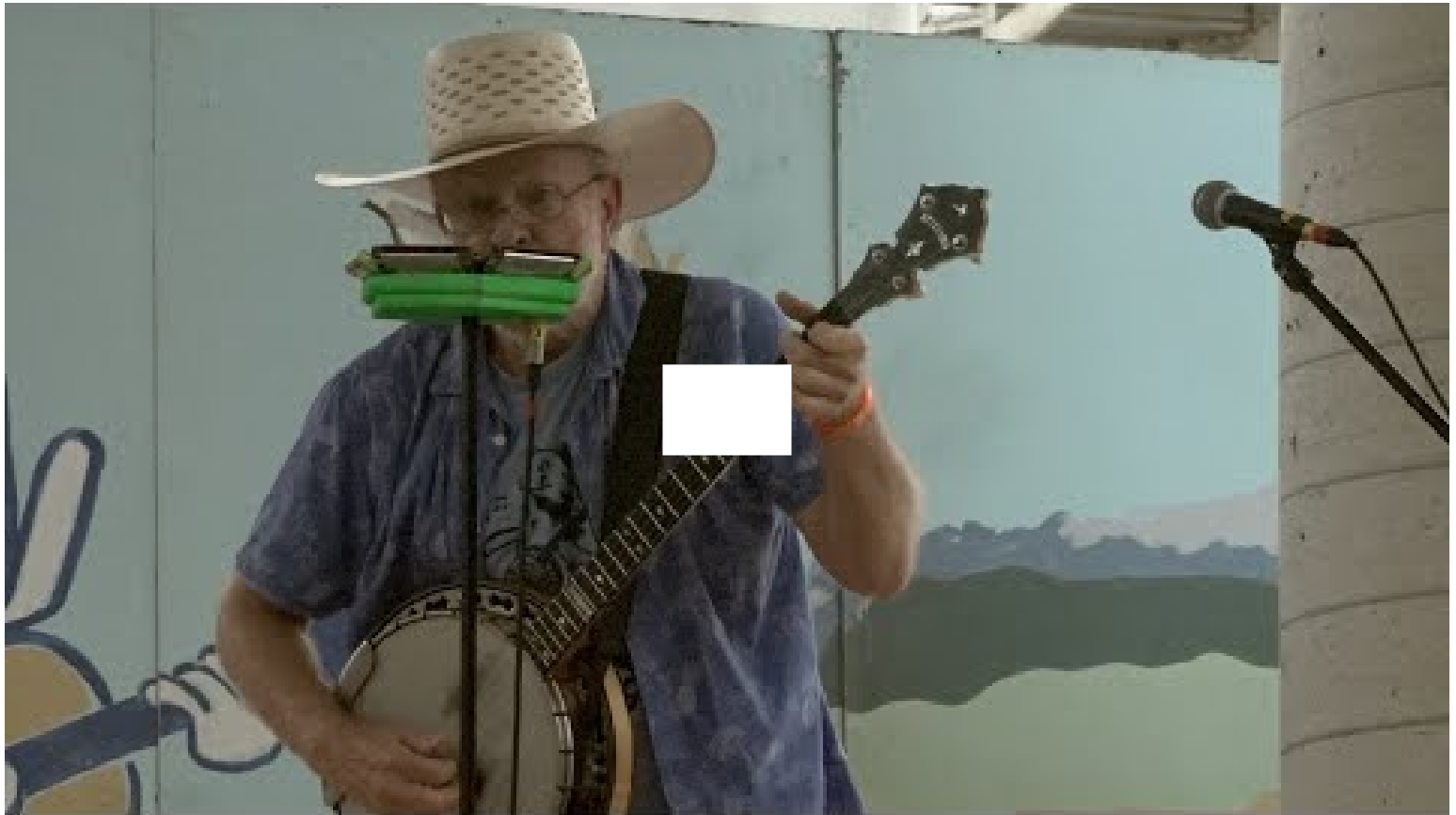
It’s also a lot more spacious than his home studio. There, his console and computer are set up in the room that is also the exercise room, the spare bedroom, his wife’s nail room and, also, the junk room.

“And in this little closet is where I have my stuff, so I can squeeze in there and do my recording,” Bowden said. “If I look around, I get claustrophobic because it’s a very small space. And I have to squeeze in there. When I’m playing guitar, I have to clear some stuff out and get situated just right so I don’t bump the walls.”

Bowden said he’s a little surprised he was able to finish his #WeeklyRelease challenge and he’s happy with the songs it produced. They include “Front Porch Swing,” a banjo tune that he added lyrics to on the day he recorded it.

“I like ‘Trickle Down.’ It’s a song about trickle-down economics,” he said. “I re-did it after they passed the ‘Big Farce Bill.’ So I was able to include that in ‘Trickle Down.’ And ‘Keep Rent High and Wages Low.’ I’m proud of the songs that mean something constructive for society. They mean a lot to me, because if I can follow what I’m saying there, it’s good. But I also love the just crazy fun songs, too.”

His year-long song project boosted his confidence



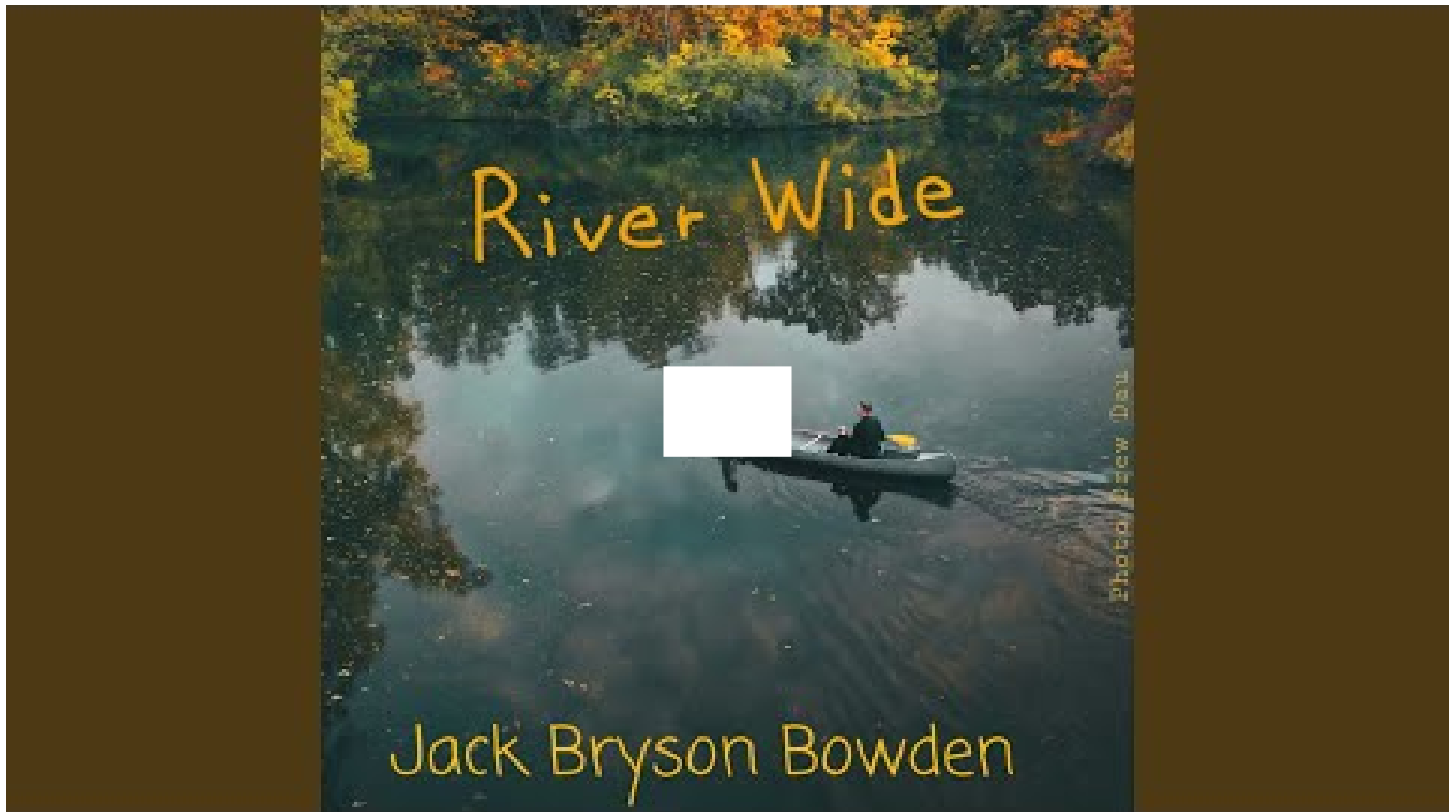
Bowden said he feels like he became a better songwriter in the last year, and it helped him improve work he had already started. “River Wide,” for example, had just one repetitive verse before Bowden wrote five new verses in one sitting.

“I have found some way to turn on an on-switch, and I’m able to produce songs, create songs,” he said. “Before, it was so much of a struggle and now it’s just a process. I just have to turn on the switch, open up the channels and just start writing. And that, to me, is amazing, because I always thought it would just be a struggle.”

His #WeeklyRelease project also built his confidence in his ability to create music and helped him deal with his habit of procrastinating.

“Probably the most significant benefit from doing this project is that the seemingly impossible has become business as usual,” Bowden said. “I’ve learned that my roadblocks on this journey are not caused by availability of resources or any other external elements, but instead are caused by the limits that I put on myself. Sometimes you just have to stop procrastinating and jump in, even if the water is cold.”

‘I want to record more of my solo songs — just not once every week’



Bowden said he has no plans to release 52 songs in 2026, though Kicking Jacksie has an album's worth of songs he'd like the band to record. In the meantime, he's planning on entering his song "River Wide" in NPR's Tiny Desk Contest and continuing to play around the Springfield area.

"The band is bound to be playing," he said. "We're playing for Queen City Shout, and I'm doing a solo for that. We'll be at **MoonTown Sound** again, and I play at Lindberg's Tavern with the Wild Bob's Musical Book Club."

Both Bowden's solo work and songs by Kicking Jacksie are on most major streaming services — including Apple Music, Amazon Music and Tidal — as well as YouTube.

"I've got some more songs in the works ... and I want to keep recording some more of my solo songs — just not once every week, please," Bowden said, laughing.



Jeff Kessinger

Jeff Kessinger is the Reader Engagement Editor for the Springfield Daily Citizen, and the voice of its daily newsletter SGF A.M. He covered sports in southwest Missouri for the better part of 20 years, from young athletes to the pros. The Springfield native and Missouri State University alumnus is thrilled to be doing journalism in the Queen City, helping connect the community with important information. He and wife Jamie daily try to keep a tent on the circus that is a blended family of five kids and four cats. **More by Jeff Kessinger**

