**Jimmie Dale Gilmore Bio**

Raised in the somewhat-fabled West Texas town of Lubbock, home of Buddy Holly, Prairie Dog Town and “world famous sunsets”, Jimmie Dale Gilmore first responded to the honky-tonk brand of country music his father played as a bar-band guitarist. This was before he heard the rock `n’ roll siren call issued by his West Texas brethren, Buddy Holly and Roy Orbison, the folk and deep Delta blues, Bob Dylan or The Beatles.

Five years is a lot of time. A lot of time to think about what was lost and what remains. Jimmie Dale Gilmore’s Dad, Brian Gilmore, died from ALS, the cruel disease that killed Lou Gehrig. Brian Gilmore was not a church-going man, nor was he a singer. Most of his life he was a poor man who listened to the radio at all hours and played guitar—specifically a blue, solid-body Fender electric guitar, perhaps the first in west Texas—at dances and picnics. The elder Gilmore worshipped singers, including Hank Williams and Johnny Cash, and named his son for the Singing Brakeman, Jimmie Rodgers. As a tribute to his father, Jimmie Dale Gilmore has recorded 13 of Brian Gilmore’s favorite songs. The result is Come On Back on Rounder Records.

The songs on the new album have always been at the root of Jimmie Dale Gilmore’s ever-evolving musical sensibility. He explains, “I never fell into any of the categories…I just love what I love and I’ve never discarded anything I loved in favor of something new. I sure didn't toss out my Lefty Frizzell records when I discovered the Beatles.”

“The thing to understand about these songs is that they were monster hits in Lubbock. I know them so well, it was real easy for me to forget that most people have never heard these songs before: To me, Lefty Frizzell is both bigger and better than Sinatra. I’d say to Joe [Ely, the record’s producer], ‘Oh, we can’t do ‘Don’t Let the Stars Get in Your Eyes,’ that song’s been overdone,’ and Joe would set me straight, flat out, he’d say, ‘Nobody knows Slim Willett and sure nobody knows that song.’ So we’d record it.”

Joe Ely was a boyhood buddy of Gilmore in West Texas and is similarly steeped in the music that makes up Come on Back. Over three decades ago, along with Butch Hancock, Ely and Gilmore founded The Flatlanders, a local term for folks who live in the kind of landscape the southwest has to spare. More of a song-swap than a commercial endeavor, the band’s sole recording project in 1973—released only in the short-lived 8-track format—was barely distributed. It has since been recognized as a landmark in progressive, alternative country music. (The record was re-issued by Rounder in 1991 under the title More a Legend Than a Band).

Disillusioned by the poor sales of their first release, the group disbanded, though the friendships continued. But the Flatlanders occasionally reunited for special occasions. Robert Redford had them reconvene for a song on the soundtrack to The Horse Whisperer in 1998. By two years later, the legendary group became a bona fide working band, making two highly acclaimed new albums—Now Again (2002) and Wheels of Fortune (2004).

But following the disbanding of The Flatlanders, Gilmore did not make another record for 16 years. He spent much of the `70s in a Denver ashram, while his songs, especially “Dallas” and “Treat Me Like a Saturday Night,” were establishing his reputation through Joe Ely’s recordings. It wasn’t until 1988 that Gilmore released his first solo album, the Ely-produced Fair & Square, his first attempt to merge his spiritual quest with a recording career.

A second, eponymous album followed a year later, and the next decade saw the full flowering of this late, but glorious, bloomer. Three albums he recorded for Nonesuch/Elektra between 1991 and 1996 elicited global accolades—After Awhile (highlight of the label’s American Explorer series), Spinning Around the Sun and Braver Newer World. Rolling Stone named him Country Artist of the Year two years straight and he received a Grammy nomination for Best Contemporary Folk Artist. Gilmore’s last solo album was One Endless Night, which Rounder released to critical praise in 2000.

About Come on Back, Jimmie Dale Gilmore recalls, “I recorded the songs as they sprang into my head… Just the other day, I was frettin’ about there being no Roy Acuff songs on the record. I could easily have done an album of songs my Daddy taught me and had ‘em all be Hank Williams songs. That would have been a different, and darker, record. I wasn’t consciously aware that I was choosing more light-hearted songs; maybe I did it that way because my Dad was so brave in the way he faced his illness.”

“I sang Hank Williams’ ‘I’ll Never Get Out of This World Alive’ in a play called Hillbilly Heaven by Kimmie Rhodes and Joe Sears we did in Austin awhile back. Dad drove out from Lubbock to see it and it turned out to be his last road trip before the diagnosis. He loved that song. It says something true and hard to accept in such a simple, kind-hearted way.”

In part because Jimmie Dale Gilmore was so close with his father, Come on Back is a portrait of his own life as well as his Dad’s. He explains, for example, “‘Jimmie the Newsboy’ is a Carter Family song, though I learned it from the Flatt & Scruggs recording. I actually met Earl Scruggs backstage one night in Lubbock in the mid-60s. I have to say he was a great guitar player, though he was best known for the banjo. He gave me some good guitar advice, told me to get myself a Gibson Country & Western guitar. I wore it out entirely. It has a cool, mirror image pick-guard, the same shape above and below the sound hole. There’s a great portrait of it on the record, and there’s a shot of Dad’s Fender too.”

Making the album, Jimmie Dale Gilmore was reminded of lessons he learned about singing early on: “All these songs, the thing about them is that the original recordings were all by great singers. Country music made it OK for a singer to have less than a perfect voice—as long as you had a sound that was identifiable and had a great feeling.” One of his theories about the origin of his own vocal sound arises from a memory of driving across Arizona early in the 1960s listening to a reservation radio station. The program was toggling between old-timey and Indian recordings and Jimmie was astonished to hear voices so much like his grandfather’s in the Native American chants. Brian Gilmore was raised in the Primitive Baptist Church and Jimmie remembers vividly the quavering insistence of the congregation’s shape-note singing.

“There’s Cherokee on both sides of my family, so maybe it’s not surprising that I heard what I heard. I’m sure there’s some connection between shape-note singing and Indian chants, but I don’t know that anyone has looked into it.”

“Marty Robbins’ ‘Don’t Worry `Bout Me’ was probably the biggest song, in terms of popularity, because it was both a country hit and a pop hit. As for ‘Train of Love,’ the Johnny Cash song, well, Dad always loved Johnny and one night he took my sister and me to see Johnny and Elvis on the same bill. Might have been at the Fairpark Coliseum in Beaumont. Sled Allen was Terry’s Dad [Terry Allen was another founding Flatlander] and he was a colorful character; used to bring a lot of musicians and barnstorming baseball teams to what he called the Sled Allen Arena in Lubbock.”

The album’s final song is something of an anomaly. Gilmore recalls, “Dad told my daughter Elyse just before he died that now he guessed his favorite song was ‘Peace in the Valley.’ That song is totally outside of my normal thing and I wasn’t sure I could sing it. I like black gospel music but I’ve never been much of a fan of what they call Sacred Music. Of course, Elvis sang it so beautifully. I was surprised how well it worked for me.”

The record’s title, Come On Back, has nothing to do with any sad fantasy. Instead, the phrase comes from “Pick Me Up on Your Way Down,” the Harlan Howard track that opens the record, and was intended as an invitation to come back to the real country music, “back where you belong.” “Since I’ve been teaching songwriting [at Omega Institute and Esalen], I think I’ve learned probably more than my students have. Teaching forced me to articulate my ideas about songwriting and I think that between teaching and thinking so much about the music that my Dad and I loved, I had a renewed appreciation for these unpretentious songs. They’re short, to the point, economical, like folk art, really. Joe kept saying, ‘We just gotta stay out of the way of these songs,’ and I think he was right.”