

There are people in Nashville, highly successful people, the average fan or casual music listener has little if any clue about. [Chris Stapleton](#) comes to mind. [Mike Henderson](#) is another. Everyone in Nashville knows and admires them, from Music Row to the East Nashville hepcats, but they're most often flying under the radar.

In spite of his 20 years in [critics' darlings band NRBQ](#), "Big" Al Anderson is not exactly a name the average person is probably familiar with in spite of the fact that he has written numerous hit songs, played umpteen thousand gigs, and made some of the coolest, most idiosyncratic records of the past 30 years.

Anderson has written an amazing and varied string of hits for mainstream Nashville acts; here are just a smattering of the most recognizable: "Every Little Thing" (Carlene Carter), "Poor Me" (Joe Diffie), "The Cowboy In Me" (Tim McGraw), "Trip Around the Sun" (Jimmy Buffett), "Powerful Thing" (Trisha Yearwood), and the Mavericks' signature hit "All You Ever Do Is Bring Me Down."



Anderson, who lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico these days is -- if he's thought of at all -- thought of as a Nashville songwriter and picker, although his real musical identity and roots lie in Louisville, Kentucky, where NRBQ was based for so long.

August 21, he is set to release his latest project, the eponymous *World Famous Headliners*, Anderson's first recordings since his departure from NRBQ in 1994. The PR unabashedly describes *World Famous Headliners* as "Nashville's premier rock band," and after hearing the album, that description is hard to quibble with.

Joining Anderson on Telecasters are Shawn Camp, another big-time Nashville songwriter, as well as former sideman for Guy Clark and John Prine, and Pat McLaughlin, Subdude Tommy Malone's Tinytown partner in crime in and the writer of dozens of Nashville hits.

The three pickers and singers are joined by drummer Greg Morrow (Dixie Chicks, Joe Cocker, Johnny Cash) and bassist Michael Rhodes (Bob Seger, J.J. Cale, John Fogerty).

Together, these five battle-hardened veterans lay down a barrage of god-a'mighty licks, slap-your-face grooves, and unforgettable, can't-get-it-out-of-my-head songs. To these ears, there really isn't another album out there like this one.

From opener "Give Your Love To Me" through the disturbing churn of "[Party Til the Money's Gone](#)" and the chilling soul-ripping "I Bleed," the album breaks the sound barrier the second it takes off and refuses to land quietly.

We caught up with Anderson at his songwriting gig at Nashville's Big Yellow Dog Publishing Company.

**Rocks Off: Is this a real band, or is this just a one-off project?**

Al Anderson: Well, it's a real band as far as I'm concerned. We plan to tour and support the album, and I believe we will eventually make another record. Does that qualify us as a real band?

**RO: It's such a supergroup lineup, how did you put it together?**

AA: Well, Shawn, Pat and I all write for Big Yellow Dog. And we do a lot of co-writing as just part of our day-to-day schedule. And I have to give a lot of the credit to Carla Wallace at Big Yellow Dog because she really pushed us to do this thing. She's been very supportive of this project from its inception.

**RO: The liner notes credit the song writing to World Famous Headliners. Are these songs all three-way co-writes?**

AA: Not exactly. Some Shawn and I wrote together, Pat and I wrote some, a few the three of us wrote, and there's a couple they wrote with other writers.

**RO: Do you like co-writing? Some do, some don't.**

AA: I really like it, especially with the right people. There's a perspective thing when you have another person working with the same idea.

**RO: Before the music begins on track one, someone screams, "Come on, don't be pussies." Who said that?**

AA: I'd rather not say who said that ... uh, you know ... well, maybe I said it.

**RO: That seems like such a chance to take, leaving "come on, don't be pussies" there at the very beginning of the album. What was that actually all about?**

AA: We did this whole thing live in the studio for the most part. You can see the recording set up if you look at a few of the Youtubes that are out there from the sessions. Anyway, we'd just done a take on "Give Your Love To Me" and we thought it needed to be beefed up just a bit, a bit more muscle.

So that was just me hollering something stupid to get us all going harder on the second take. And that's the one that ended up on the record. So we just left that part in there.

**RO: Very few people in Nashville would have the balls to do that.**

AA: Yeah, well...

**RO: I like everything on the album, but one standout is "Can I." What are your thoughts on that one?**

AA: That's one of the coolest grooves we found, and I'm not quite sure how we found it. But, yeah, we all thought that one was very cool. And lots of people seem to be digging it.

**RO: "I Bleed" is another one that seems almost universal, like one of those songs about a feeling everyone has had.**

AA: Thanks. Yeah, that's another one we're pretty proud of. And it is one of [those r'n'b-soul things](#) that has a cool little groove in it.

**RO: So what about a tour?**



AA: I'm sure we'll be playing some dates after the album drops. We've already played some dates in Florida. But I'm not sure when we'll try to put together an actual tour.

**RO: What are the odds of Houston being on that tour?**

AA: I really don't know. I don't think I've ever played Houston but twice. The last time I was there was at Rockefeller's. But I hope we can do Houston and Austin, maybe Dallas. I'd love to play Houston again.

**RO: This has been one of those "bucket list" interviews. Another guy on that list is Dave Edmunds. I know he's covered some of your songs. What's your take on Dave?**

AA [laughs]: I was in a pharmacy in Nashville getting some things and I heard "[Never Take the Place of You](#)" playing over the store's system. And I thought, 'You know, I sound pretty good.' And then I realized it wasn't my version, it was Dave's.

He's such a perfectionist, there's a place where I'm slightly out of tune on my guitar. And on his version, he's slightly out of tune at exactly the same place. That's mind-blowing attention to detail. That's why he's such a great producer.

**RO: I got to interview Vince Gill a year ago. Since then, he's been let go by MCA and he's been quoted as saying that Nashville has shown him the door. What's your view of that?**

AA: It's just par for the course, really. That's what Nashville does. Look at Merle Haggard, George Jones, the same thing happened to them. So it's not all that surprising that it's happened to Vince. If you look at it another way, he's free to do anything he wants now.

**RO: You wrote "[Next Big Thing](#)" with Vince, and there's that smoking video of you guys playing it live. If the powers in Nashville were paying attention at all, they had to see that as a huge middle finger being waved in their faces.**

AA: We didn't mean it as a middle-finger thing. That's just the truth, the reality of the business and Nashville.