

# NOW WE'RE TALKIN

By Helen Marketti

## Interview with Chris Hillman of The Byrds

Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductee, Chris Hillman has enjoyed a music career spanning over 50 years. Beginning in folk music and bluegrass with the tables turning in the 60s counter-culture era when he became the bass player for The Byrds then returned to country-rock roots in The Flying Burrito Brothers with Gram Parsons. Later, he would form the Desert Rose Band and continue with the country and bluegrass sound. His recently published memoir, "Time Between, My Life as a Byrd, Burrito Brother and Beyond", (BMG Books, 2020) takes the reader on a journey from his childhood through the twists and turns of his life and musical career. Suffering the tragic loss of his father, earning his high school diploma and relocating to Los Angeles with his mother and sister, Chris lived through many rough days but always seemed to have music as his outlet and friend.

"My parents loved music. I remember they would often go dancing," recalls Chris. "Between 1955 and 1959 is when rock and roll came about and everything was smokin'. There was excitement. Chuck Berry, Fats Domino, Little Richard, Elvis Presley and The Everly Brothers. Everything was off the charts. Oddly enough, I still wasn't interested in playing the guitar. I was more enamored with the music. Chuck Berry captured the teen experience well. He caught it in his lyrics. It grabbed me."

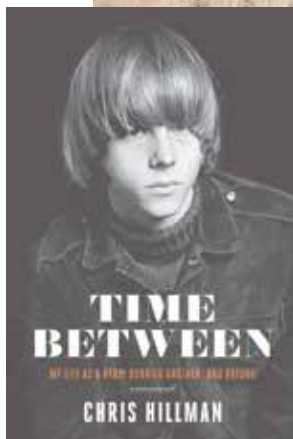
"When I was 14 years old, I started becoming interested in folk music. For a few years, rock and roll seemed to have gone to sleep. You started hearing more of Frankie Avalon, Fabian and Pat Boone and while that was fine, it wasn't my style. Then I

heard The Kingston Trio with their hit, Tom Dooley. By then, the late 50s was more of a bohemian vibe on college campuses where folk music and jazz were the big choices at the time. My sister attended the University of Colorado and she brought home some great albums such as Lead Belly, The Weavers, Pete Seeger and Woody Guthrie. I loved it. There is a beauty about folk songs. The stories they tell, the guitar music that accompanies those stories is really beautiful."

Chris continues, "Then of course, The Beatles hit in 1964. I had heard about them, that there was this band from England who were really tearing it up. When I watched them, it was as though they came right out of the TV and grabbed me. And there it was again, that excitement. They were uplifting. We needed them as a healing force since America had lost President Kennedy a few months earlier. I remember shortly after seeing The Beatles on Ed Sullivan that many guitar players decided it was time to plug-in." (laughs)

Chris remembers when he joined The Byrds which is detailed in his book. "When I first walked into the studio, I didn't even know them. I thought they were an established rock band and here they had one old, tired amplifier sitting in the corner of the room and Roger McGuinn had his guitar plugged into it. Gene Clark was playing an acoustic guitar. I asked if I could plug my bass into the amp, too. We had no equipment!

When The Byrds first started, we were trying to be like The Beat-



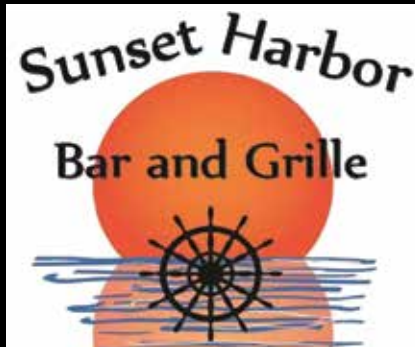
les but eventually we developed our own sound and style. I feel our sound was totally unique. We were lucky to be able to record Mr. Tambourine Man. Bob Dylan loved our version. It started everything for us. It was a wonderful experience."

"The 60s was a wonderful time. I traded my surf board for a guitar. Our generation was post WW II. It was a good time for us. 1963 to 1969 was wonderful. The happiness changed in 1969 and I have my version as to why. I was with The Byrds when we played The Monterey Pop Festival (1967). I consider it THE best rock festival ever. It was three days of music and joy. Everything was positive. There was a wonderful diversity of music from Otis Redding to Jimi Hendrix to The Mamas & The Papas. Then in a matter of a year and a half, I am playing at the Altamont Speedway at a free concert put on by The Rolling Stones. At that event, a young man was killed. Later that summer, the Manson murders happened. It was as though someone turned the light off and it got very dark which signaled the 60s were over. The only positive thing that happened that year was the moon landing. Looking back, everyone was trying to change things. Perhaps we were stepping all over tradition but each generation has their events," he said.

Chris explains why he decided to write a memoir at this time. "Initially, I thought I would write something for my kids so they would have a history of what I had done with my career. I have grandkids now, so I wanted to release a memoir so they would have something as they grow older. Plus, I wanted to clear up some inaccuracies that have been written about The Byrds and The Flying Burrito Brothers. I want readers and fans to come away with the message that perseverance is important. Never surrender, go after your goals. Stay with it."

Chris Hillman will be playing at Memorial Hall in Cincinnati, Ohio on September 7, 2021.

[www.chrishillman.com](http://www.chrishillman.com)  
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From left to right: David Crosby, Gene Clark, Michael Clarke, Chris Hillman, and Jim McGuinn