

**The following interview with
BILL DANOFF
was conducted by the Library of Congress
on May 2, 2023**



Bill Danoff

Library of Congress: Here's an impossible question for you: if you had to classify "Take Me Home..." into a genre, what genre would it be? Pop? Modern folk? Country? None of the above?

Bill Danoff: These days I suppose it would be Americana, but when I wrote it, it was definitely Folk. When our record came out, little by little, Country artists covered it and now they claim it as a Country song.

LC: I read that you conceived the song in Maryland but it's set in West Virginia. Did you ever consider placing it in Maryland or any other state?

BD: I did get the idea riding down a country road in Maryland, but it was the idea of country roads anywhere that inspired the song. Driving down that road felt familiar, and I thought that was a feeling everybody could relate to. I repeated "country roads" over and over for a month or so while working on the tune and then the first lines came at once out of the blue--"Almost heaven, West Virginia, Blue Ridge Mountains, Shenandoah River"--all beautiful words. It sounded good to me, and I never seriously thought of changing it.

LC: Can you tell me about your first meeting with John Denver and how did he come to be involved with the song? How much of the song was done by the time John entered the picture?

BD: I met John Denver when I was still in college at Georgetown. Right down the street was one of the best small nightclubs in the country, the Cellar Door. I worked there as a doorman, and then as the lights/sound man which also involved wrangling the acts on and off stage. John Denver was the replacement for Chad Mitchell, founder of the Chad Mitchell Trio, a group I'd always loved and a club favorite.

After shows, the acts and the staff would often get together and hang out when we'd sent the audience home. We had the Mitchell Trio a few times during my time there, so I got to know John and the other guys pretty well although no one had any idea that I sang and wrote songs.

A few years later, I'm singing with Taffy at an M Street club and an old roommate brought John Denver by to see us. He was now a solo act and looking for bookings.

He heard us sing "I Guess He'd Rather Be in Colorado," and he loved it, and asked if he could record it.

We were booked into the Cellar Door together, [our group] Fat City opening for John Denver, solo. I believe it was sold out. During that week John asked if we had any more songs because he was in the middle of doing an album and our "Colorado" song was already on it. So we said we'd get together one evening after the gig. When John came over Taffy and I sang "Country Roads" for him, he basically flipped out. He said, "Wow that's a hit! Did you record that?" and I said, "No, we don't have a record deal." And he said, "Well I got a record deal and I'm doing an album now. Can we do it on my album together, John Denver and Fat City?" I said the song's not quite finished. I had the whole melody, Taffy had harmonies, we had the chorus just the way it is now and the first verse just the way it is now. I had different words in the second verse, and I did not have a lyric for the bridge, the "I hear her voice" part. So, the song pretty much sounded like it does, and John was very enthusiastic. He said, "Well, let's finish it."

So we stayed up all night and we shouted out words 'til we'd written another second verse and filled in the bridge lyric. By 6:30 in the morning, we had the song that you know today. We sang it all together the first time, and we all knew that we had something special. It sounded like a hit to us.

LC: "Country Roads" has had a long endurance—and is now part of the National Recording Registry—to what do you ascribe its great longevity?

BD: People like it when they hear it. Lots of people all over the world. What makes some things instantly likeable is unpredictable, but it happens to all of us.

It's easy to sing. One thing I've noticed of the many times when large groups have been singing the song, they sing the entire song the way it was on the record. I don't even know many songs that I could sing from beginning to end with all the words, but people seem to know this one.

The thought that originally drove me to write the song, that this experience of enjoying driving down the country road, was a universal one and it proved to be correct. Toots Hibbard sings "Almost Heaven, East Jamaica." Iz Kamakawiwo'ole sings "Almost Heaven, West Makaha." People all over seem to like those "country roads" that promise to go to the place you belong.