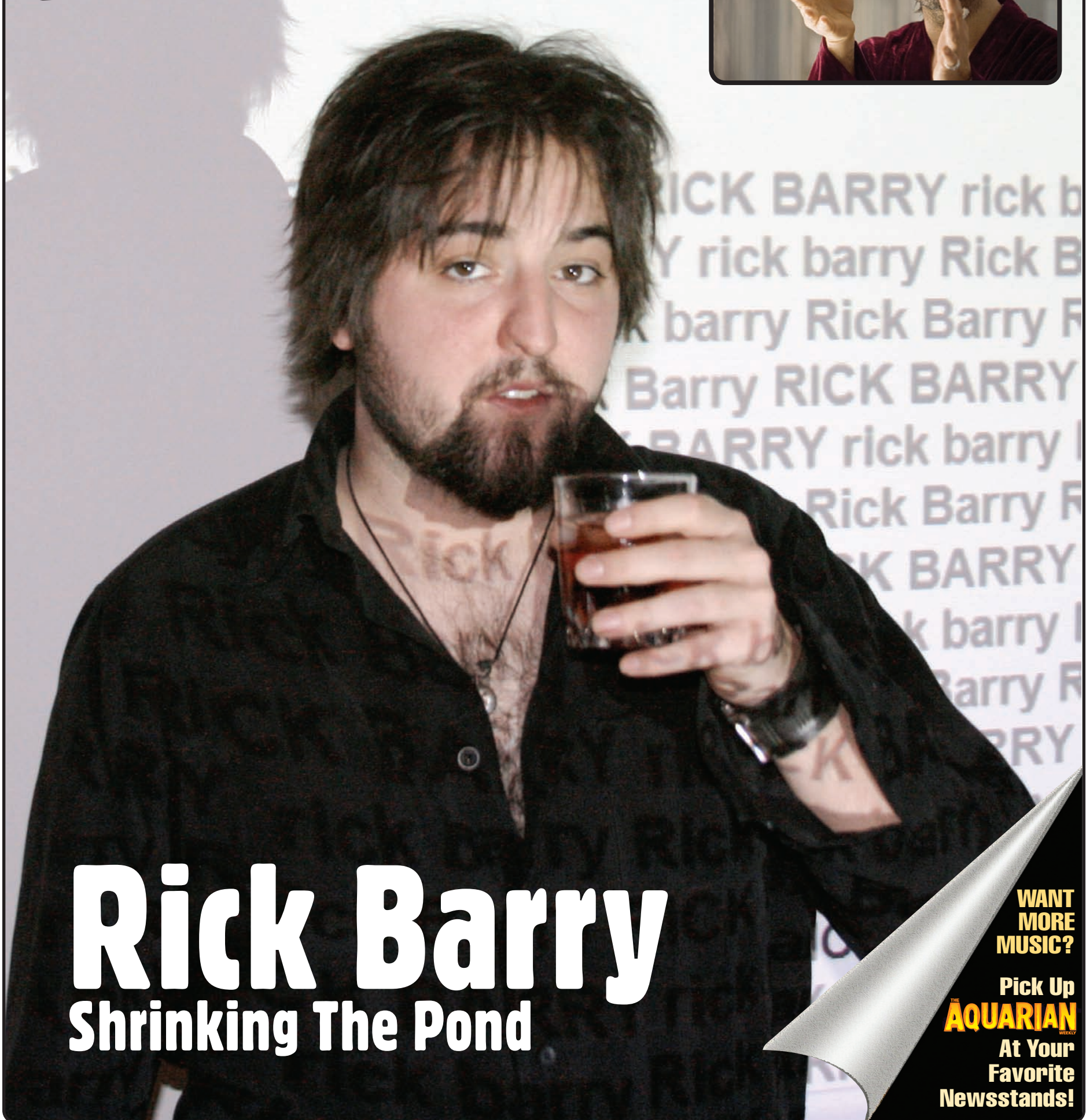


ENTERTAINMENT NIGHTLIFE GUIDE FOR NEW JERSEY AND NEW YORK

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Rick Barry
Shrinking The Pond

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by Ken Shane

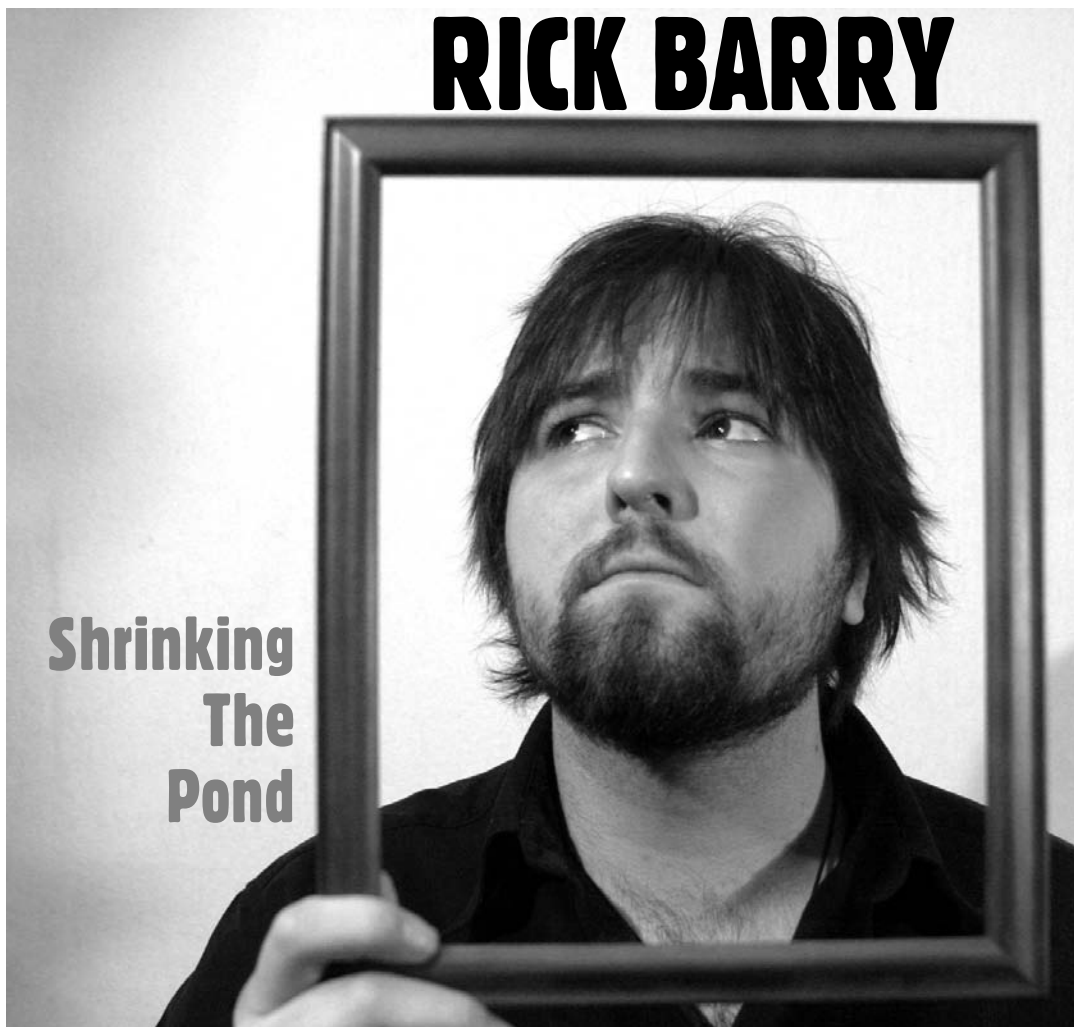
He was pulled off a stage for playing a song that was deemed "not America friendly" last September. Then in November, he won his third Asbury Music Award, this time as "Top Acoustic Act." In between, his song "Courage For A Rainy Day" was posted on Neil Young's website as one of the "Top Songs of the Times." Oh, and he also won the grand prize in the John Lennon Songwriting Contest last year.

So how did the provocative songwriter Rick Barry get into so much trouble and win so much acclaim at such a young age? The Jersey-born and raised Barry says he was "...just like any other kid, singing into their hair brush and ripping guitar solos on a broom. I wanted to be a rock star for as long as I can remember." He put down the broom and picked up a real guitar for the first time in the early '90s. The Seattle music scene had blown up, and in the wake of Kurt Cobain's death, Barry found himself strumming Screaming Trees and Mudhoney tunes. But it wasn't until he got his own acoustic guitar for Christmas, together with a *Bob Dylan's Greatest Hits* CD, that he began to write his own songs.

By Barry's own admission, those early songs were not much more than recycled folk melodies with sophomoric lyrics. It was when he discovered artists like Leonard Cohen, Pedro The Lion, Ani DiFranco and Tom Waits that he began to find his own voice and to write songs that he found tolerable. Despite all of the musical influences, he still cites human emotion as his number one inspiration. "Melancholy, lust, love, heartbreak, all of the hardly bearable frustrations that make us human, that is what inspires my songs the most."

Although he's been writing and performing for several years, it wasn't until the last year or so that Barry felt comfortable about making political statements in his work. He feels ashamed now that he listened to those who advised him to stay politically neutral so that he would not alienate any of his potential audience, and thus hurt his chances of being a successful songwriter.

Eventually he decided to speak his



mind, and he says that the decision was an easy one. After two years of writer's block, he had written a song called "A Stupid American Song." The lyrics contain the very taboo "c" word, and friends and family told him that no one would listen to a song with that word in it and that he would anger a lot of people. "I simply decided at that moment that I didn't care any more," Barry says. "Attempting to write music for other people is what kept me from writing a decent song for two years and I couldn't live like that any longer."

Barry's first gig in earnest was at The Saint, an Asbury Park landmark that has been an incubator for many national and local artists. It was while playing at The Saint a few years later that Barry played "A Stupid American Song,"

despite management fears that he might offend the audience. But he was determined to finally be himself, and by the time he had finished playing the song, the whole crowd had embraced it. "It's pretty ironic that the fans welcomed me most once I stopped caring what they thought so much. Yet, it's hard to say whether I would have had the strength to continue writing in such a manner without their support," Barry adds.

Scott Stamper, owner of The Saint, says, "Rick Barry has been playing at The Saint for about seven years. When I first saw him, there was a quirkiness that told me that there was something special going on with this artist. I've watched him grow as a performer and as a person. He writes about topical

matters, which I think is important for any present day songwriter. He's a painter of the musical form."

Of course, there are drawbacks to speaking your mind. Last September, Rick was playing a benefit show for a local Elks club (and donating all of his CD sales money from the evening to the Elks veterans fund) when he was pulled off the stage because his award-winning song "Courage For A Rainy Day" was thought to be "not America friendly." The fact is that the song is a tribute to the bravery of our military, while at the same time attacking the corporate interests that generated the Iraq War and the war profiteers who are gaining from the sacrifice of our brave soldiers. After Barry issued a press release defending his song and his performance of it, he began to get mail through his MySpace site (myspace.com/rickbarryband). Most of it was supportive, but there were also hateful and insulting e-mails that cost Rick a few nights of sleep. One man said that Barry was "nearly as bad as the terrorists." "Can you imagine that? Just for playing a song?" Barry asks.

The future looks bright for the young songwriter. Recently he has joined forces with eight-time Asbury Music Award winners Days Awake for a series of shows. "Over the past few years, the members of Days Awake and I have shared a mutual admiration and appreciation for each other's music," Barry explains. "When the opportunity was presented to me to perform my songs with them it was just sort of a dream come true."

Days Awake guitarist Dom Lacquaniti adds, "Rick came along at a very vulnerable time for our band. He helped

us out in a time of need and that's what real friends are about. He has given us the inspiration to move forward and we're all excited about working with him in the future."

Since he's been a fixture on the Asbury Park music scene for a few years now, Barry has some very definite thoughts on the state of the local scene. Until recently he didn't find much of a sense of community, but things have started to change for the better. He says that over the last year or so, local artists have worked hard to create a community. New bands like Status Green and Woodfish, and songwriters like Anthony Fiumano have emerged to join existing artists like April Smith, Maybe Pete, Divine Sign and the aforementioned Days Awake in striving toward a common goal. They've been sharing stages, swapping gigs, going out to each other's shows and dropping each other's names in *East Coast Rocker* stories. Barry says that "all of this is to fight our common enemies: DWI laws, plasma screen tvs, and my personal favorite, eminent domain."

A tour of Ireland and the U.K., and another west coast tour are on Barry's agenda. He would also like to record a new rock and roll album as well as a new folk album. Since he has set the fall of 2008 as a target date to have all of these projects finished, you can imagine that it's a very busy time for him.

Barry has released two albums, 2005's *Small Town Politics*, which is a rock and roll album recorded with a full band, and last year's *Declaration Of Codependence* (AERIA Records), a collection of solo acoustic songs that he recorded in a friend's living room when he was at a low point in his life. There are no overdubs or second takes, and only minimal mixing in an effort to "maintain a stream of consciousness integrity."

There are some shows coming up that Barry wants you to know about, including two with Days Awake: one at the legendary Bitter End in NYC on Feb. 9 and one at The Wonder Bar in Asbury Park on March 3. He's also been invited to be the first artist to appear at WJB's (90.5 The Night) Songwriters Series.

Asked for any last thoughts, Barry says, "Keep supporting independent music, and thanks for being there and allowing me to be myself."



PHOTOS BY MIKE BLACK



Rick Barry is playing The Bitter End in NYC on Feb. 9 and The Wonder Bar in Asbury Park on March 3. For more, visit rickbarrymusic.com