

SOUTHERN BAYWATCH

by Ruth Christie

Making Beautiful Music Together

The Bay's own Mike Aiken and Smithfield Music are at it again. When this issue hits the docks (September 29), Smithfield Music's Aiken and Friends Fest Americana/Roots Festival will be in high gear ramping up for fun in Smithfield, VA, September 30-October 1. Of the sixth annual event, Mike says, "The two-day fest is growing and just gets bigger and better... from the educational seminars to the caliber of the lineup. We brought in old and new friends; the talent is great!" An Americana, country, and roots national recording artist, Mike founded the festival.

Mike says, "The festival idea all started when I began sailing my boat out of Norfolk, spending winters in the Bahamas, Caribbean, and Maine. The Bay was a good stopping point. On one slow sail up the east coast up from the Bahamas, I started thinking about how special the middle Atlantic is in terms of music, sailing, and maritime songs. We have musicians from all over the country. What a great place for a festival. We held the first one in Urbanna, VA, and the rest have been in Smithfield."

He adds, "A while ago, we rode out a hurricane in Smithfield; we wandered around town and got to talking with a

couple, Jim and Elaine Abicht of Smithfield Music, a nonprofit that brings top-tier entertainment to Smithfield Little Theatre. After the first festival, they contacted us to see if we'd move the event to Smithfield; it's a good fit. I like their mission; they bring great entertainment and benefit youth music education." He says, "I made

sure people could get to the festival by boat, and Smithfield has such a nice, protected harbor and marina. We've got people coming from Maine to Florida."

This year's festival at the Smithfield Little Theater will feature Steve Williams and Sherrie Austin on Friday and the Ray Wylie Hubbard Band, Mike Aiken Band, Patty Reese Band, Caleb Hawley Trio, Muckrakes, Sherrie Austin, Win Winslow, and Americana Lovebirds on Saturday. Mike says, "It's becoming a sailing destination for all types of sailors. October is

one of the best sailing months on the Bay, and snowbirders are gathering for the trek south."

Mike has found a way to combine his three greatest passions: music, sailing, and adventure. At age eight, his love affair with the sea was kindled when a family friend introduced him to sailing. Around the same time, he began developing his natural musical ability, learning to play acoustic and electric guitars.



» Mike Aiken at the beach.

Mike and his wife Amy live on a 42-foot cutter, *Ocean Girl*. They are licensed USCG captains with more than 30,000 offshore miles each. They have made two transatlantic crossings, outfitted several boats of their own for offshore cruising, and have supervised/consulted for many others. Mike also founded the Breeze-way Blowout Benefit concert to expose at-risk kids to the Bay and sailing. The Aikens are affiliated with Town Point YC in Norfolk and had sailed with the late Lane Briggs. Mike says, "By happenstance and luck, I drifted into Lane's marina one December. He was a good friend of mine and a sailing buddy."

Mike says, "I come from those back roads, with dirt under my boots. Now I live on the water with a country point of view. I write all my songs from the heart." Mike's mix of country and "roots rock" with a Caribbean flair strikes the right chord with sailors. Some of his previous recordings were made at sea onboard a converted 1941 Navy tugboat. He adds, "When writing and picking the music, I think of the folks and fans who have supported me along the way. I choose the covers to reflect who I am and who my listeners are."

Mike is also a contributing writer for *Singer and Musician Magazine* and a music producer for *Raceline TV*. His six-string dexterity earned him a Takamine endorsement and the creation of his signature guitar, the 'Travelin Bone.' His philanthropic activities include sponsoring the Great Chesapeake Bay Schooner Race, benefiting the area's environmental interests, as well as founder of the Aiken and Friends Music Festival. For "Almost Christmas," his new holiday CD this year, Mike generated an organic, rootsy, and cozy feel, a "six-pack of Christmas cheer that blends three standards and three originals." Sailors will especially like the "Christmas Schooner" and "Christmas Island" tracks, as well as his "Song of the Chesapeake" CD that benefits the Chesapeake Bay Foundation. He adds, "I am one of the lucky ones. With my music, boat, and friends, I am ready for wherever the winds blow."

Look for Mike and Amy at the Henri Lloyd booth at the U.S. Sailboat Show in Annapolis. Learn more about Mike and the festival by visiting mikeaiken-music.com and aikenandfriendsfest.com.

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