

# — CHRIS VALLILLO — FORGOTTONIA

*“Edgar Lee Masters would be proud” River to River Magazine*

Singer songwriter Chris Vallillo presents his latest project, a theatrical, multi-media show titled *Forgottonia*, an intimate portrait of rural Illinois. Vallillo draws on 35 years of original material to create a show that tells the story of West Central Illinois, an area that, for years, its inhabitants have lovingly referred to with that very name.

The name “Forgottonia” first came to Western Illinois in 1972 when sixteen counties declared the creation of the independent nation of Forgottonia in protest of the lack of tax dollars returning to the region. “The plan was to secede from the Union, declare war on the United

States, immediately surrender, and then apply for foreign aid. It was nothing but political theater, but to everyone’s surprise, the story was picked up by the national media and to everyone’s surprise, it worked!” said Vallillo. “I first came to this region in 1976 as an archaeologist on the first wave of funding to come from that action and was like stepping back in time 40 years. I was just enchanted by the region and it would become the focus of my music for the next 40 years”



A former archaeologist turned musician and folklorist, Vallillo is a multi-instrumentalist who performs masterful fingerstyle and slide guitar that digs deep into the foundations of rural music with a respect for the tradition that doesn’t feel stuck in the past.

*Forgottonia* is a musical journey through the people and places of rural Illinois just as the last vestiges of the old “Forgottonia”, slowly eroded away.

The show combines storytelling and live music with the images of award winning rural photographer Tim Schroll, long known for his striking black and white images of rural Illinois. “Tim is doing visually, what I am trying to do musically” said Vallillo. “It seemed like a perfect combination”. Vallillo shares the history and backstories of these songs that document, reflect, and validate people, places and characters of rural IL, reinforcing these communities’ sense of commitment and worth.

The show premiered on July 20<sup>th</sup>, at the Hainline Theater, at Western Illinois University in Macomb, IL to a full house and received an excellent response. On stage, Vallillo was joined by two outstanding musicians, Don Steirnberg (mandolin) and Marc Edelstein (bass).

*“Forgottonia blends Chris’s masterful musicianship with Tim’s evocative photography, bringing to life the stories and memories of a place and time your audiences will want to visit. A moving and lyrical tribute to both the landscape and the people living there.”*

*Anne Lefter, Director, The Goldfarb Center for Performing Arts, Western Illinois University*