



Photographs L - R: Patrick John Brayer | Chris Darrow "Vanishing West" series | Mark Takeuchi

CHRIS DARROW (1944 – 2020)

Chris Darrow was born on July 30, 1944, the son of artist, cartoonist, and Scripps College professor, Paul Darrow. Chris was raised in the Arbol Verde neighborhood of Claremont and quickly developed an affinity for music, coming of age listening to the sounds of Ritchie Valens and the Everly Brothers on the radio. Exploring his musical curiosities, Darrow visited the local music shop, Claremont's Folk Music Center, where he purchased his first guitar at age 13. Owned and operated by Charles and Dorothy Chase, Darrow described the Folk Music Center as "a godsend to a kid like me who wanted to play guitar and learn about folk music." After high school at the prestigious Webb School and Claremont High, he attended Claremont Men's College and graduated with a degree in Art and then went on to the MFA program at the Claremont Graduate School. A talented and ever-engaged musician, Darrow became proficient on numerous instruments including guitar, bass, fiddle, violin, banjo, Dobro, lap steel, and mandolin. Darrow's early music career saw him playing with bluegrass combo, The Dry City Scat Band, (which also featured a young David Lindley), and fronting rock and roll group, The Floggs.

In 1966, Darrow and Lindley, along with musicians Solomon Feldthouse and Max Buda, formed the psychedelic group, Kaleidoscope. Combining elements of Middle Eastern, country, folk, and blues music filtered through a psychedelic lens, Kaleidoscope released their debut album *Side Trips* in 1967. Championed by the likes of guitarist, Jimmy Page, who claimed Kaleidoscope as his favorite band, the group's diverse nature allowed them to perform with a wide spectrum of acts, including Jimi Hendrix, The Doors, The Byrds, The Grateful Dead, Bo Diddley, and Lightnin' Hopkins. Following the group's 1967 sophomore album, *A Beacon From Mars*, Darrow was set to leave the group, but agreed to stay on to help the band fulfill their residency concert dates in New York City. Performing a week of shows at the trendy Manhattan club, The Scene, Kaleidoscope attracted many artists and musicians to their shows, one of whom being singer-songwriter, Leonard Cohen. So impressed with the band was Cohen, that he invited the group to record on material that would be included on his debut album, *Songs of Leonard Cohen*.

Returning to Los Angeles, Darrow joined the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, whom he became friendly with after seeing them perform in New York. Chris became an official member of the band and recorded two albums with them, 1968's *Rare Junk* and 1969's *Alive!*, also appearing in a cameo with the band in the western musical, *Paint Your Wagon*. Darrow and the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band's Jeff Hanna left the group in late 1969, forming the group, The Corvettes. Together with Hanna, the pair recorded two singles for the Dot record label, produced by Mike Nesmith of the Monkees, and would serve as a backing band for a then up and coming singer, Linda Ronstadt.

Following the disbandment of The Corvettes, Darrow would continue to record as a solo artist and session musician, providing fiddle and violin on James Taylor's 1970 album, *Sweet Baby James*, and releasing his own debut album, *Artist Proof*, in 1972. Darrow would continue to record and release solo and collaborative material over the next four decades and remained a fixture in Claremont's music community, where he acted as a mentor to young artists and musicians.

Chris was also an amazing photographer, documenting various themes as he toured in the 1960s and 70s. Darrow was involved with a number of publications including "Elan" which he art-directed. Claremont Heritage mounted several shows of Chris' photography, including work from his "Vanishing West" and "Indian Summer" Series.

Chris Darrow passed away at the age of 75 at 1:00 am on January 15, 2020, of complications from a stroke.