



Chris Barron is many things to many people: the voice of the Spin Doctors, the face of the jamband scene, an MTV superstar, an East Village troubadour, the author of some of the 1990s' most enduring radio hits, a father and a teacher. But these days, the Spin Doctors singer is most at home when he's simply playing rock and roll.

"You tend to write yourself into the places you want to play," Barron admits. "There was a time when I was writing bedside songs for the walls of my room, but these days I am writing what I like to call 'bar music for big theaters'—stripped down, honest rock and roll like *The Last Waltz* meets *Exile on Main Street*."

For Barron, the journey from bars to arenas to the bar-like theaters he now finds most comfortable hasn't always been easy, but his songwriting has always been honest. Bursting out of seminal New York watering holes like Nightingale's and Wetlands in the early 1990s, the Spin Doctors helped popularize the neo-jam scene with their funky, infectious brand of rock and roll. The group's marathon high-energy performances—often on bills with Barron's childhood friends Blues Traveler—found the Spin Doctors packing rooms across the country and, in 1992, the band participated in the inaugural H.O.R.D.E. tour. The Spin Doctors' multi-platinum debut *Pocket Full of Kryptonite* became a grassroots success story, spawning ubiquitous hits like "Little Miss Can't Be Wrong," "Jimmy Olsen's Blues" and the chart-topping "Two Princes." The group was nominated for a Grammy, scored the cover of *Rolling Stone* and shared the stage with luminaries like the Rolling Stones. They even appeared on *Sesame Street*.

Even as interpersonal problems threatened to derail the band, the Spin Doctors maintained a loyal following, but, at the height of his career, Barron was diagnosed with an acute form of vocal cord paralysis. Experts gave him a fifty percent chance of ever speaking or singing normally again and, soon after, the Spin Doctors parted ways.

Without a band and uncertain if he'd ever be able to talk—let alone sing—again, Barron soldiered on and returned to his first love, songwriting. As he struggled to save his voice through everything from acupuncture to prescription steroids and extensive vocal training, Barron also began mentoring the next generation of singer/songwriters. He taught classes overseas and unknowingly blossomed into the godfather of the critically acclaimed East Village Anti-Folk scene responsible for the wildly popular *Juno* soundtrack.

"I used to go down to the Sidewalk Café to try out new songs, and I met Adam Green and Kimya Dawson of the Moldy Peaches," Barron reminisces. "I sang on some of their early albums and played guitar with them. At one point they did this series of shows where they pretended to 'fire' a bunch of guitarists. After the gig that I did, Kimya's dad turned around and said, 'Whatever you do, don't lose that guitar player.'"

Thanks to years of hard work and some good luck, Barron's voice eventually recovered, and he slowly returned to New York's vibrant club circuit. Barron also continued writing with his friend Jeff Cohen of the band Pancho's Lament, and before he knew it, found himself with his freshest batch of songs since the mid-1990s.



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“It was just us laying down the songs Jeff and I had been writing,” Barron says of his finest solo album to date, *Pancho and the Kid*. “I recorded it with a bunch of New York session musicians like Boots Ottestad and Espen Noreger of The Getaway People, Teitur, and Jack Petruzzelli of the Fab Faux. I printed copies just to sell at gigs, and they kind of spread around.”

Barron stumbled upon the members of his current band, the Time Bandits, just as organically. While playing a solo gig at a small rock-joint in Amagansett, NY, he met keyboardist Jon Loyd. As luck would have it, Loyd had already been playing the key *Pancho and the Kid* track “Can’t Kick the Habit” with his own band. Barron sat in with Loyd that night, the collaboration worked and the two musicians began gigging around New York with drummer Phil Cimino and bassist Brett Bass. The Time Bandits scored residencies at New York’s Village Lantern and the Bitter End and, almost twenty years after he formed the Spin Doctors just a few blocks north, Barron found himself with another tried-and-true rock band.

“You go and see a lot of solo acts, and they come off as a guy who pays other dudes to play his songs,” Barron says. “But from the start I’ve always said ‘let’s form an identity as a band.’ ”

Yet Barron hasn’t forgotten about his best-known hits. “I love those songs, and we continue to play them,” he assures fans. “The cool thing is that we started goofing around with some of those old songs and I said, ‘don’t listen to the Spin Doctors version and don’t worry about remaking certain parts. Let’s make them our own, but make them recognizable.’ We’re not going to do ‘Little Miss Can’t be Wrong’ as a tango or ‘Two Princes’ as bossa nova.”

Staying true to his honest formula, Barron took the Time Bandits on the road, fleshing out his latest batch of songs in front of live audiences, cramming into small hotel rooms and rediscovering his rock and roll spirit. “At one point I remember thinking, ‘I can’t believe I am in a band where they are making me drink whiskey and watch *The Last Waltz*,” Barron says with a smile.

In addition, he continues to teach songwriting at the Pop Academy in Germany, play the occasional date with his old friends the Spin Doctors and remains the primary caretaker of his young daughter.

“The reason classic-rock became classic is that it was rooted in the music that came before classic-rock,” Barron firmly states. “Bands like The Rolling Stones and The Band were standing on the shoulders of giants—guys who weren’t making any money but they knew how to rock. My former teacher, Arnie Lawrence, used to say that the only time anyone really sings the blues is when a baby cries before it knows it is going to get picked up. After that it’s all show business.”



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