

Episode Title: Remembering John Prine (with guest Fiona Prine)

Episode Summary: In this week's episode, Sid Evans, Editor-in-Chief of Southern Living Magazine, talks to philanthropist and member of the National Council of the Arts Fiona Prine about the legacy of her late husband and influential singer/songwriter John Prine. As this month marks what would've been his 75th birthday, Fiona discusses John's love of food (especially meat-and-three's once he moved to Nashville), how the pair originally connected over their rural upbringings, and John's deep connection to Muhlenberg County, Kentucky.

Episode Transcript:

FIONA: I think it's fair to say that I have a larger family around me here now than I would have known, than I had when I came here first. I mean, the music community in Nashville is just unbelievable. There were a lot of difficult times. And all of a sudden there'd be a casserole delivered. I mean, where else but in the south would you get a casserole delivered. It's become home because it's not just family, it's community. Community is what makes it real, what makes life meaningful. And that's what makes the South and Nashville home for me. Nashville will always be home.

(Biscuits and Jam Theme begins - Fiddler's Barn on Epidemic Sound)

Voice Over from SID EVANS: *Welcome to a special episode of Biscuits and Jam, from Southern Living. I'm Sid Evans, editor-in-chief of Southern Living Magazine.*

If you've followed our podcast since our launch in the summer of 2020, you know that we've put a spotlight on musicians, discussing how the worlds of songwriting, food, and family intersect. Few people understood that better than John Prine, who died in April of 2020 due to complications from COVID-19.

Often referred to as the Mark Twain of folk music, Prine's influence spans generations, genres, and genders. One of his best-known songs, "Angel from Montgomery" puts his voice in the shoes of a middle-aged woman at the end of her rope. And this song, "Hello In There," speaks to the loneliness of aging, asking the listener to consider reaching out to folks who are often forgotten. Like so many great artists, Prine had a way of connecting with people outside of his own experience.

("Hello In There" plays)

Voice Over from SID EVANS: *But John was just as well known for his sense of humor, and there were often tales of the Midwestern food he grew up on as a kid in Maywood, Illinois. He loved hot dogs and meatloaf, and legend has it he even traveled with his own condiments.*

With this week marking what would've been his 75th birthday, I asked his widow, Fiona Whelan Prine, to share stories about John's legacy, the independent record label he began 40 years ago this year, and his deep connection to Muhlenberg County, Kentucky.

FIONA: Kentucky was very important to John. In fact, I think it's true to say that when John and I met, it was our rural beginnings, our rural backgrounds that really connected us in a pretty deep way from the get-go. He was proud to be from Kentucky stock. We were country people. He and I were both country people.

Voice Over from SID EVANS: *All that and lots more this week as we pay tribute to John Prine on Biscuits & Jam.*

(Theme music ends)

SID: Well, Fiona Prine, welcome to Biscuits and Jam.

FIONA: It's lovely to be here, thank you, Sid. Thank you for inviting me.

SID: Well, Fiona, you know, we started planning this podcast back in February of 2020.

FIONA: Mm-hmm.

SID: And the very first interview that we confirmed was with John.

FIONA: I remember.

SID: And I was actually going to head to Nashville and do it in person, and of course, we had to cancel because everyone was getting worried about this new virus, and none of us could have guessed what was going to happen. But I just want to say how sorry I am for your loss.

FIONA: Thank you. I appreciate that. Not to be morose, but it touches me when people will take the opportunity to say that they're sorry that John's not here. It almost feels newer this year. I mean, the first year there was trauma and shock and so much pain. And I guess this year, I would say so far it's been a little more lonely.

SID: Hmm.

FIONA: So I love any opportunity I can take to remember him and talk about him. So thank you for that, Sid. I appreciate it.

SID: Oohh. Well, I can't tell you, uh, what his music has meant to me and, um, so many people. And I'm sure the last 18 months have been incredibly difficult, but I'm wondering what it's meant to you and the family to see this tremendous outpouring of love and gratitude for John.

FIONA: Yeah, it's, um—Jody and I were speaking about this recently, I think it's going to take me, at least to have some time to step back and really look at everything that happened. It was a huge, huge, overwhelming at times, reaction from friends and fans and family around the

world. While I can't say it was unexpected because on that night and those days after John passed, it was the biggest devastation in our lives for me and the boys.

FIONA: So on the one hand, it came as no surprise that the world also stopped and said, "oh, my God, we've lost John." But it felt justified. It felt right, because indeed it was a cry to the heavens. "Oh, my God, what's happened?" But obviously, since that time, we have really started to—a little bit—understand just the depth of connection that he had to so many people in our world, within the music industry, within singer-songwriters, musicians from all walks of life, and then people. We've had letters from Australia, from New Zealand, from all over Europe, from Ireland, of course, where he was greatly loved—still is loved and so missed. So it's been a whole thing unto itself. I'm not even sure that I have language yet to describe it but it has kept us going. It has kept us busy. It has kept us engaged with John's legacy, with all of the wonderful songs that he left for us to work with. It has left us a community and friendships beyond anything we could have imagined. So you're right. It's been overwhelming, but in the most beautiful way.

SID: Well, Fiona, I want to talk about his story a little bit and his background. John was born and raised in Illinois, but his parents were both from Kentucky. And some of his ashes were spread in the Green River in Kentucky.

FIONA: Mm-hmm.

SID: Which he, of course, immortalized in this song called, "Paradise"

FIONA: Mm-hmm.

SID: You know, "Daddy, won't you take me back to Muhlenberg County?" I mean, what a great song. Can you tell me a little bit about what the state of Kentucky meant to him, and that connection?

FIONA: Yes. Kentucky was very important to John. In fact, I think it's true to say that when John and I met, it was our rural beginnings, our rural backgrounds that really connected us in a pretty deep way from the get go. He was proud to be from Kentucky stuck. He has a big family that still live in those areas. Family was important to John. And I think the correlation between my life and his life when we met—we met in Ireland, and I brought him to visit and see some of my relatives over those first couple of years when we knew each other—and honestly, the more humble and happy and chaotic some of those family homes were, the more content John was. And we talk about that now, how going into a chaotic home with eight or 10 kids, where my aunt and uncle would have a sponge cake at the ready just like that because he was visiting. It was those moments that really connected John to Ireland and connected John to the fact that we were, we were country people. He and I were both country people. Of course, it's well documented that he and his family visited Kentucky all the time when they were growing up in Chicago. It's true to say that his parents raised them as if they would shortly return to live there. John often said that, that his father never purchased the house that they lived in. They lived in the same home for many, many, many years. He never purchased that home because he was

convinced that one day he would take his family back to Kentucky. The funny thing is that my boys, the younger ones especially, would tell you that growing up in Nashville with me and with John, sometimes it felt like being in Ireland. You know, the food that I would cook or the things that I would come out with, they would make fun of me, you know. Some of my Irish sayings. And when I get mad, that Irish accent really gets locked in. So, yeah, Kentucky was important to John. And getting to know his relatives was very important to me. And I loved all of his mother's sisters, the ones that he talks about in songs and in interviews. All of those women were just phenomenal, including the ones that are left. A lot of them have now passed, including John's mother, of course, but they were mighty fine folk. They really were. All of them.

SID: Did you really grow up in more of a small town?

FIONA: Oh, yeah, absolutely. Yeah. I grew up in Adora County, Donegal.

SID: Okay.

FIONA: Which is in the west of Ireland. It's a tiny little village, beautiful, picturesque, nestled in the Donegal Hills. And of course, when I go back there now, which I got the opportunity to do this year, finally, to go back and see my mother and my sisters, and those relatives that John would visit and that he loved so dearly. It's all the more idyllic when I go back now. You know, you grow up there as a child and it's wet, rainy Ireland. And life, on the one hand, can be pretty monotonous and predictable. There's relatives everywhere. So you're just being watched from every corner. But now going back there, I mean, what a beautiful place to grow up.

SID: Yeah, it sounds like the South. It sounds like a small town in the South.

FIONA: Well, really, I mean, like I said, it's what connected John and I from literally from the very first conversation we, we had. It was about where we were from.

(Instrumental music)

SID: I know you've told this story a million times, but how did you and John meet, and what was the thing that you really connected on first?

FIONA: Well, we met through music. I worked in the music industry and he was playing a big, big show in Ireland that actually my company was providing some production. And so I was at that concert, but I had seen John play when I was 17, which was 10 years before that. I'd seen him play in Dublin. A friend had given me some tickets and I'd gone. I had no idea who this guy was, this funny little guy. And, um, but I do remember a line from that night that had stayed with me all the years up to the day I met him and it still stays with me, um, "sweet songs never last too long in broken radios." And that song, when I heard that at 17, that had such an enormous impact on me. Radio is a huge part of—it's really stitched into the fabric of life in Ireland. Every home has the radio on either down low in the background or up loud for the one o'clock news or whatever it might be. Every home has that sound going on and our home in rural Ireland was no

different. And I grew up loving the radio and the radio became a friend through all kinds of trials and tribulations. I lost my father when I was very young and the radio became a friend, a great friend in those times, Radio Luxembourg, you know, back in the 70s. And so, when I met John, you know, it was in a way a little bit like meeting an old friend but not really. But I definitely had a point of connection. When we met, I was introduced by a mutual friend. And John had his own version of the story, which was silly and romantic and kind of embarrassing, honestly. But he said he was very taken by how I looked and I was very taken by how immediate and how gentle and kind he was. That was one of the first things that came to me was he was completely immediate, like you would talk to a young person or a child almost. I asked him a question. He listened. He answered. We had a brief conversation, but we did sit together, close by together and listen to music all that night while we sat in the lounge of that hotel in Ireland. And then our subsequent conversations were about, um, probably the very next one was about Kentucky and about my little town in Ireland where I'd grown up. And about the characters and our family. And as I got to know more and more of his songs, I came to realize that a lot of those characters inhabit those songs. And a lot of those characters could be my relatives as much as his.

SID: Yeah.

FIONA: So, yeah. We had a deep connection from early on.

SID: So, did you grow up in a very musical family?

FIONA: Well, growing up in Ireland, it's one big musical family.

SID: Right.

FIONA: You don't get away from music in Ireland. My father was a teacher. And so, a teacher in Ireland teaches all the subjects and that includes music. And so we would have learned a lot of the Irish tunes and we would have done Irish dancing and sang some of the old Irish ballads and entered into the Feis competitions. And I did all of that. There's six girls in my family and there are some of us that have, uh, let's just say, a higher degree of, uh, musicality than others. I can hold a tune. John thought I could sing, but I call it, I could hold a tune. But there are other sisters who really can sing. And I have one sister who's classically trained on the piano. But yeah, music was everywhere growing up, Sid. I mean, you couldn't get away from it. First of all, that radio was on all day long. And depending on what show was on, it was either Irish music or it was country music from America. And—

SID: Really?

FIONA: It was often — yes, absolutely. It was often times on the radio, the original country artists. So, one of the things that John was amazed at very early on—again, these were in the early months and the early year or two when we started to get to know each other—it was, I knew the word to every country song. From Johnny Cash to Johnny Paycheck. You know, from Loretta Lynn to Linda Anderson. And he was like, "How, how would you know?" And so, yeah.

We heard them on the radio, the music that our parents listened to. Growing up in Ireland, there was a great deep connection between America and Ireland for all the obvious reasons. Right? We had the immigration. Hundreds of thousands of people emigrated from Ireland into America looking for economic security and getting out of poverty, essentially. And so it seemed like a very easy relationship to have country music in Ireland. It just traveled back and forth very easily. So that's what I grew up with.

SID: So, Fiona, when you moved to Nashville, that probably was not a very difficult transition for you.

FIONA: I mean, my God, I was moving from Cafe Society Dublin to, at that time, Nashville, where rush hour was 12 cars on Hillsborough Road. And when I asked John one day if we could go out and have coffee, he looked at me. And he wasn't being smart. He wasn't being facetious. He was like, "Out for coffee, like where?" And I said, "Let's go out and have coffee somewhere and look at people." And he was really stumped and he ended up bringing me to Shoney's. There were no—there were no—there were, there were no—there were no coffee shops. Of course, that's all changed now. Nashville is this fabulous cosmopolitan city where there's great people-watching opportunities. But that's what people do in Dublin on their downtime, maybe even afternoon for a little pick-up. You go and you get coffee, and you watch people.

SID: Yeah. You sit on some probably fabulous square or something.

FIONA: Or—more in Dublin, outside on a street corner or inside a cafe. And in the old cafes that are buildings that are hundreds of years old.

SID: Right.

FIONA: Where James Joyce could well have—I mean, it sounds ridiculous, but where James Joyce would have sat, you know, a hundred years before you.

SID: Well, Fiona, speaking of cafes, you know, we always talk a little bit about food on this podcast. And—

FIONA: Mm-hmm.

SID: I've heard that John was a fan of Arnold's Country Kitchen in Nashville—

FIONA: Yes, sir.

SID: Which is a famous meat-and-three.

FIONA: Yes. Yes.

SID: So did you ever go there with him or was that more of John's thing?

FIONA: You know, I did. I absolutely did. We were both really fond and are very fond of the Arnold family. The thing is going for lunch with John, it took a while. I might take a lunch break from my work da and, you know, I will sit and eat and whatever, but a lunch could be two hours with John. Because he would talk to people. And so, every now and again, I'd go and it was always wonderful. You know, I'd have the veg plate.

SID: Well, tell me about his connection to the Arnold family.

FIONA: Well, I think meat-and-three, certainly, we would start there. He loved how they prepared their food. I think it really reminded him of his own mother's cooking.

SID: Hmm.

FIONA: That's all the kinds of things that she made, the meatloaf and the mac and cheese and the mashed potatoes and the gravy. It was like, gravy was like a sacrament to John. You know? Seriously. It was like, when he found out that I could make gravy, I think that was probably a big part of what clinched the deal. Um, and I did do all those home-cooked meals, as well, we when we first met and the kids were small and before we started touring together. But when he went in there, you know, just getting to know the family and they would see him coming in or they would know that he was going in and they'd have a fabulous table in the corner ready for him. And if they were running low—what is—you might have to help me. Banana pudding?

FIONA: Oh, sure. Yeah.

FIONA: Yeah. OK, so if they were running low on banana pudding, they would have put one aside for him, you know, like, spoiled him rotten. No wonder he loved going there.

SID: I think I read somewhere that he would use a trip to Arnold's as an incentive to finish a morning of songwriting.

FIONA: Oh, yeah. Absolutely.

SID: That was kind of the reward at the end.

FIONA: Absolutely. He would make a writing appointment with one of his co-writers. And they would meet here at the house or they'd meet at the co-writer's place, but it was always particularly on days where meatloaf was circulating around the meat and threes. So I think it was Tuesdays, maybe, at Arnold's?

SID: Yeah, that sounds right.

FIONA: And maybe it was at Wendell's another day. Anyway, he loved that meatloaf. So, yep. That's how he conducted business.

SID: What were some of the things that y'all enjoyed making at home, Fiona?

FIONA: Oh, you know, it really kind of changed over the years. It's interesting. So it started out with very traditional roast beef with roast potatoes and mashed potatoes and gravy and vegetables that John wouldn't even look at. Roast chicken. He liked stuffing, but he only liked it out of a box. It took me a little while to get used to him and his Southern ways. I mean, we—I used to call him Mr. American. My God, he—that's who John was. I mean, he was so, to me, that was so American that he preferred something—that he preferred jello, too, that was premade, you know, from the grocery store—

SID: Yeah.

FIONA: Rather than jello that I would make. But over the years, it kind of evolved a little bit. When he had some health issues, over time—I will say, and I need to stop here and say he never forgot or left behind his love of meatloaf. That never finished. But he did certainly develop a wider palate. And so, he revisited sushi. I always loved sushi. And I guess he did, too, but he never—something he never gravitated towards. But he did really develop a taste. And so we enjoyed a lot of sushi. And sometimes I would make simple sushi here at home and we would hunt down on the road. We would like what we would call, a picnic meal. Especially if we were home on a weekend. So it would involve me making a big platter with cheese, cause he loved blue cheese. We both did. Blue cheese. But again, like for him, it couldn't be any new fancy, shmancy cracker. He was very set in his ways in some ways. And he loved smoked salmon. And so I would order that in from Ireland. And then he even developed, a taste for courgettes. And so anything that he liked in the green family, I mean, I went all out. And so I would prepare courgettes different ways. He even at one point enjoyed a kale salad. I mean, nobody would believe that was true.

SID: Oh, wow.

FIONA: Yeah.

SID: Yeah.

FIONA: I would make a kale salad with raisins and Parmesan cheese and marcona almonds and pulp it, you know, in a blender. And he loved that. So—

SID: But he probably wasn't eating that back in the 80s.

FIONA: I don't think so. I mean, his life in the eighties was so different. I mean, he lived on the road. John practically lived on the road.

SID: Yeah.

FIONA: Yeah. Back then, that was his only income.

SID: Yeah.

FIONA: And it's something he still enjoyed doing right up till his last show.

(Biscuits and Jam Theme begins - Fiddler's Barn on Epidemic Sound)

Voice Over from SID EVANS: I'll be back with more from Fiona Prine, after the break.

BREAK

(Biscuits and Jam Theme begins - Fiddler's Barn on Epidemic Sound)

Voice Over from SID EVANS: Welcome back to Biscuits & Jam, from Southern Living. I'm Sid Evans, and this week, we're remembering legendary singer/songwriter John Prine with his widow, Fiona.

SID: Well, Fiona, I want to ask you about Oh Boy records, which John started back in 1981. It's celebrating its 40th anniversary this year.

FIONA: Yes. It is. Mm-hmm.

SID: And I just love that the very first recording on his new label was, "I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus"

FIONA: Yeah.

SID: What was the story behind that song?

FIONA: They needed something to start the label with. And John wasn't ready yet to make a record. Literally. I mean, that's the story. You know, John loved Christmas and he didn't care really about anybody who didn't love Christmas. And so he just figured, well everybody loved Christmas. And why wouldn't people just go crazy over getting a red seven-inch vinyl with "I Saw Mommy Kitchen, Santa Claus"? I mean, and he still, he always used to love that song. I've got to tell you that a red cardinal's come, that's sitting right there in my line of vision right now.

SID: Oh.

FIONA: Just perched right on the window.

SID: Listening.

FIONA: Just saying. She's—I mean, it's literally not budging. It's just staring in at me.

SID: Aww.

FIONA: So that was the beginning. I mean, it was the beginnings of the label, but it was, what can we put out? What do we have? What can we release? What can we sell to create some revenues to get this label started? And that was it.

SID: Well, this was a gutsy thing to do back then. And really any time to start a new record label. And now it's been around for 40 years. It's been a great success. And it's put so many people on the map. What were some of the long-term goals that you and John discussed for Oh Boy?

FIONA: In the beginning, the label was really set up as a vehicle for John. He had sort of said, look, the labels don't get me. I don't dig them. I want to make my own music, my own way, when I want to make it. I make my living on the road. He never made any money selling records. So when the time came to look for a new home, because he would continue to make records, it didn't add up to him. And, you know, I kind of laugh a little bit and John, too, when you say it was kind of a brave thing to do or took some courage to do that. John was a visionary. And the best visionaries that I've ever known have the best ideas, but they have no clue how to carry them out. They find they find the people around them who can actually execute, and he certainly had a brother in Al Vernetta in that sense. Al adored John. He totally got John. He *got* him. He understood what made the man tick. He understood where the songs came from. He understood the importance of that connection between fans. Al was a smart guy and what he didn't know he had no problem asking for help, which was, I think, which is one of the, the greatest gifts that he did have. And he got a team, a small team around him, including Dan Einstein, who was extremely important to the early days of Oh Boy. I would say completely pivotal to its, to its success and to the fact that it's still standing. And I think it was really one foot in front of the other. Let's do this. Let's put out this record. Let's tell our fans. Let's go to the big long mailing list that we have, all those names and addresses and we will write to them. And they did, on a typewriter. And they mailed the letters. And they got letters back and that's the way it went. I don't know that Al and John, initially at least, invested a whole lot of money in Oh Boy Records, other than a lot of time. It was really funded by the fans.

SID: Hmm.

FIONA: Which meant the world to John, but also made all the sense in the world to him.

SID: Yeah. Well, I just love that they started with Santa Claus.

FIONA: I know. Yes, absolutely.

(Instrumental music)

SID: Fiona, I want to ask you about the song, "Angel from Montgomery"

FIONA: Mm-hmm.

SID: Which is one of his most famous songs and, and which appeared on his self-titled album back in 1971. And it's also a song that meant a lot to me, personally. It's one of the first songs I ever really learned how to play on the guitar. I remember the version with Bonnie Raitt that I must have listened to a thousand times over. What did that song mean to you and John?

FIONA: Well, I know that John was very grateful for that song. And he was very grateful that it became Bonnie Raitt's song. He would often say that the first time most people hear that song, they hear Bonnie Raitt's version of that song. I know he believed that nobody could or would ever sing it as well, that Bonnie made it her own. But as a female manifesto, I think we both recognized the importance of that song to women. And John was asked many, many times over the years, who is the angel from Montgomery? And, you know, you could go to some obvious angles and say, you know, maybe his mother or his grandmother. I know that John was a very observant, quiet, cheerful, but an observant, curious, listening child. He really paid attention. And I think he might have seen that in a lot of the women in his family during those days. I mean, he was born in the 40s. He grew up in the 50s. Um, and into the 60s when he started writing, things were changing a lot for women. He understood that women did not always have a voice. And that the voice that they did have, was an important one and should and needed to be listened to.

(“Angel from Montgomery” plays)

SID: Well, it's just very remarkable to me that he wrote that song when he was in his early 20s.

FIONA: Yeah.

SID: And it's so believable and so real and it's the voice of a woman who's middle-aged, and has seen a lot and has lived through a lot, um, and that he could channel that at, at age 20, whatever, is remarkable.

FIONA: I know. I know. And I think it is a testimony to the artist in him. You know, I think the best artists are observers. They really pay attention. And while John looked like the last person in the room who was paying attention to anything, that he may even have just drifted off to another room in his own mind, he was really absorbing everything around him.

SID: Yeah.

FIONA: The landscape, the sounds, the personalities. He was the best judge of character that I've ever met, and he got it within seconds.

(Instrumental music)

SID: Fiona, you performed with John quite a bit and you sang on, "My happiness"

FIONA: Mm-hmm.

SID: And "Till a tear becomes a rose." Did you and John ever just sing together around the house?

FIONA: All the time. I was much better singing at home than I ever was on stage. Because we traveled a lot together. And we loved to listen to music and sing in the car. We did that for sure. And, you know, we started that from the first month we met.

SID: I would have loved to have been a fly on the wall for that a couple of times.

FIONA: Yeah, but we did. We had this exact same taste in music. Really interesting. I mean, I knew all the country songs, and then he loved Van Morrison. I would have been a big fan of Rory Gallagher back in the day. Yeah. And then we both loved finding new artists.

SID: Mm-hmm.

FIONA: I'll never forget the day he came into the kitchen, and there were several moments like this over time. But he came in one afternoon and he said "Fi," and he handed me a CD, "Get in your car right now and go listen to this." He said, "You're going to flip." I was like, "Really?" and I knew because if he said I was going to flip, I was going to flip. And it was Jason Isbell's *Southeastern*.

SID: Oh yeah.

FIONA: And we played that record frontways, backways, and sideways. And then of course Jason came out in open shows and, well, Jason doesn't need any help anymore from anybody. He's just a superstar in our books, for our family.

SID: Yeah.

FIONA: I mean, John just amazed by his songwriting.

SID: Yeah. That and that was before he had really made it big at all.

FIONA: Yeah. I mean, John had actually paid attention to him back in the Drive-By Truckers days. I mean, he was aware. John kept himself really up to date on what was going on. He read every newspaper. He preferred to read a real magazine rather than an online magazine. But he was aware of Jason's work all the way back to the Drive-By Truckers and had his eye on him as a writer. But *Southeastern* was a turning point for sure.

SID: Hmm. So John had an album called, *The Tree of Forgiveness* that came out in 2018 and ended up getting a bunch of Grammy nominations. And the last song on that album is called, "When I Go to Heaven"

FIONA: Mm-hmm.

SID: What did you think the first time you heard that song?

FIONA: I was, I was stunned, actually. Yeah, I was stunned. You know, John had had a lot of health issues. He was taking care of himself, and he and I, together, we visited more doctors than we did meat-and-three's, I'll tell you that, Sid.

SID: Hmm.

FIONA: In recent years. But I actually heard the chorus first and thought, well, that's—wow. I mean, what is he saying here? And then I heard the verses and it just became more and more revealing but it ended up being so joyful.

FIONA: I mean, it was such a joyful song and such a confirmation to me on John's entire outlook on life — and on death. He had the same outlook. There was nothing that was going to scare him and he found a way to protect himself from even the most difficult things in life. We laughed about it. I said, "You know, that you contradict your father in that song?" And he was like, "Oh, yeah, I know." He goes, "Man, that might be the first time I ever got to do that." But, yeah, what an interesting song to finish your last record on. I mean, I don't know that John had any inclination that he was—well, he certainly wasn't unwell because he'd had a recent checkup and he was doing absolutely fine. But did he know more than we knew? I don't know. But what I do know is, about John, is that he would definitely not have known when he was going to make his next record. I think about this a lot, you know, what were his thoughts at that time when he was making what is now his last record. He was probably thinking to myself, I'm going tour — well, I know because he told me this, "I'll tour, but then we're going to take a lot of time off." And so, who knows that long time might have—well, it turned out to happen quicker than he anticipated.

(“When I Get To Heaven” plays)

SID: Well, he sure did leave us with a gem of a song.

FIONA: Yeah, he did.

SID: Many, many, many gems of songs.

FIONA: Yes. Yeah, a lot a catalog. I mean, it's such a joy to get to work with his whole catalog now and get to celebrate 40 years of Oh Boy.

SID: Well, Fiona, I just have one more question for you, and I know that neither you nor John were born in the South—

FIONA: Nu-uh.

SID: But you both ended up spending a lot of years here and it really became your home.

FIONA: Mm-hmm.

SID: And, of course, John had all those ties to Kentucky, to the family there. What does it mean to you to be a Southerner now? And what do you think it meant to John?

FIONA: Well, my family is here, my three sons are here, and my three gorgeous grandchildren are here. And. I think it's fair to say that I have a larger family around me here now than I would have known, than I had when I came here first. I mean, the music community in Nashville is just unbelievable. The love and support, even from a distance, that has been shown to me and to Jody and Jack and Tommy and our family has just really kept us going on days when it was difficult. There were a lot of difficult times. And all of a sudden there'd be a casserole delivered. I mean, where else but in the south would you get a casserole delivered. Or because I have Irish friends here, somebody would drop off some brown Irish soda bread or it's just, it's become home because it's not just family, it's community. Community is what makes it real, what makes life meaningful. I value and I really am so grateful for the friendships I have in the music community here. A lot of them are young artists that are a lot younger than me. And God knows, they're so sweet and they amuse me and they tolerate me, but they really keep me going. They really do. I mean, I could be mother to all of them, maybe grandmother to some. We did have a celebration of Tre Burt's new record. "You, Yeah, You" came out just on Friday and we finally got together. A really small group of people community, friends, and family. And we gathered outdoors and it was just wonderful. It was the first time that I had been in a setting like that since John passed. It was very emotional. I didn't know how emotional it was until Tre opened his beautiful little set. He did three or four songs and he opened it with "John Garfield Blues"

SID: Hmm.

FIONA: And that just unwound me for a minute or two, but it was just so great to see, see Lilly Hiatt's face in real life.

SID: Yeah.

FIONA: And Kelsey Walden and Adia Victoria, and I'm going to forget others, but it was just wonderful just to be with people again. And that's what makes the South and Nashville home for me. I could never leave this place behind. I may spend more time with my family in Ireland and but this will always be home.

SID: Hmm.

FIONA: Nashville will always be home.

SID: Well, Fiona Prine, it has been such an honor to have you on Biscuits and Jam.

FIONA: Thank you, Sid. I loved talking to you. It's always nice to bring up some old memories and dust them off and talk about them. So I've enjoyed our conversation.

(Biscuits and Jam Theme begins - Fiddler's Barn on Epidemic Sound)

Voice Over from SID EVANS: Thanks for listening to my conversation with Fiona Prine. Visit ohboy.com as well as thehellointherefoundation.org to stay updated on how the Prine family is keeping John's legacy alive.

Join me on our next episode for my conversation with singer/songwriter and Alabama native Anderson East.

ANDERSON: I didn't have any aspirations of like making it as a singer or songwriter. That wasn't really my goal. I just wanted to make records. You know, I was always just so intrigued with like, "how do these Michael Jackson records sound this good and mine coming off of this little cassette recorder don't?" Like, what's the difference? And then eventually you're like, "well, not only does it take like all the buttons and knobs to do it, but you have to have a good song and you have to be able to perform it well and play your instrument well. So, everything was just, all these ingredients to make the chili, essentially. And it just so happens that, I just randomly get seen playing the show one night and life just takes another turn.

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Biscuits and Jam is produced by Heather Morgan Shott, Krissy Tiglias and me, Sid Evans, for Southern Living. Thanks also to Ann Kane, Jim Hanke, Danielle Roth, Andy Bosnak, Matt Sav and Rachael King at Pod People.

We'll see you back here next week for more Biscuits & Jam!