

arts & entertainment

ALL THE FUN STUFF

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NEW ALBUM

LOCAL MUSICIANS
BRENDAN MCKINNEY
& THE 99 BROWN DOGS
PRESENT
'SKIN A CAT'



BRENDAN MCKINNEY/COURTESY PHOTO

Brendan McKinney, left, and Jeff Armistead record music at Mintown Studios in Minturn for a new album, 'Skin A Cat.'

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Beyond playing "Brown Eyed Girl" or classic rock covers at après ski gigs, longtime Vail Valley entertainer Brendan McKinney has been busy recording new songs with several other local musicians and his "Skin A Cat" album is now ready for the airwaves.

"This album is pure Americana. It's a healthy blend of alt rock and blues rock, with some newgrass elements with all original songs," McKinney said of his latest project with his band The 99 Brown Dogs. "We've been getting a lot of traction with airplay from all over, nationally and internationally."

McKinney didn't have to travel far to record the album, the 12 songs on "Skin A Cat" were recorded at Mintown Studios in Minturn. Mintown Studios is a music production studio founded by fellow musician, Joe Bianchi. Bianchi and his sister, Terry Armistead and Terry's husband Jeff Armistead are all featured on the album along with Brian Loftus.

"One of my favorites is 'Out of the Goodness.' Joe Bianchi's mandolin and the cool open snare sound that Brian Loftus did really make the track. Terry Armistead's sweet guest vocals lift it even higher. It's a strong newgrass-style song that turned out great," McKinney said.

"So Easy" is a laid-back, bluesy tune featuring Jeff Armistead on the Hammond organ. It's the unexpected star track so far, with a lot of people adding it to their playlists," McKinney said.

In addition to working with local musicians, McKinney enlisted the help of Philadelphia producer Erik Horvitz to co-produce the album. McKinney and



BRENDAN MCKINNEY/COURTESY PHOTO

Brendan McKinney & The 99 Brown Dogs take a break from recording 'Skin A Cat' at the Mintown Studios in Minturn.

Horvitz collaborated on productions years ago and his production expertise brings a new dimension to the band's sound, enhancing each track's depth and texture.

"There are 12 songs on the album. I'm planning on promoting and pushing more tracks like 'James Dunn's Daughter,' 'Stripperina' and 'Get on With It' as time goes on. Erik's production skills really make the songs shine," McKinney said. "The Woods" has been getting a lot of airplay and love. It's a funky, groovy track with some nice guitar work and nice lyrical imagery. The YouTube video is an animation by Erik and has already gotten over 4,000 views and I just love it."

McKinney came to Vail 15 years ago, by way of Norway. McKinney was born and raised near



BRENDAN MCKINNEY/COURTESY PHOTO

Brendan McKinney & The 99 Brown Dogs play at Beaver Creek during the Blues, Brews and BBQ in 2023. The band recently released 'Skin A Cat,' a 12-song album recorded at Mintown Studios in Minturn.

Philadelphia, but while on tour in Scandinavia he met another musician, Robin Tripp, who invited McKinney to play in Vail and soon McKinney moved his family here and played gigs full-time.

"For me, the Vail Valley was a golden opportunity to get off the road and still play music to provide for my family. Traveling and performing on the road is fun, but it gets a whole lot trickier when you start to have children. Being able to drive home after gigs and wake up with my wife, Diana, and our kids at home changed everything. We've thrived here ever since," McKinney said.

McKinney's original songs have placements in TV and film, and he's had record deals in Colorado and Nashville, Tennessee.

"My originals have been featured on TV shows like 'Justified,' 'United States of Tara,' and 'Shameless,' to name a few. One of my songs was also placed in the feature film 'Lean on Pete.' I'm so grateful for the exposure placements bring. It's been a handy way to grow the fan-base," McKinney said.

Although McKinney says the music industry is changing and is much more about digital distribution and platforms than it used to be, he said the industry is still built on relationships.

"There are people who will love and support what you do and help you get your music out there, but you have to make an effort to meet them. It's a long game, not a short one. There are always pitfalls, but opportunities to network and connect with the right people are still out there," McKinney said.

Take a listen to "Skin a Cat" and follow Brendan McKinney & The 99 Brown Dogs on Spotify, YouTube or any of the digital platforms worldwide. McKinney plays Tuesdays through Saturday this winter at various venues in the valley and sometimes has guest players join him. Find locations on the Vail Daily's Events Calendar.

"Come see a live performance and share in a drink or two," McKinney said.