

cancer shortly after arriving in the States and after six months of treatment in Boston returned to his native Slovakia. After a short while his illness returned and Peter had to undergo a bone marrow transplant. It was at this point in his life that he picked up his father's guitar to fill his time and made such progress that he soon decided he would like a career in music.

Concentrating on developing his guitar playing skills seemed to aid his recovery and soon he was playing with a range of relatively unknown outfits in his home town. His father's collection of Johnny Cash records was an influence on the music he played at that time and is still with him today. When I asked Peter about his musical influences he included many of the current greats such as Alan Jackson, George Strait and Vince Gill but

other countries and people, especially singing and playing our songs for them.' On the other hand the Rowers have had plenty of exposure through radio, Peter explained. 'There are three big Country music stations in the Czech Republic based in Prague. Bluegrass is popular and some of the best musicians live there. Country music is also loved in Poland, Latvia and Lithuania where one of the biggest festivals in Europe, Visagino Country, attracts an audience of more than 40,000. We played there last year and it was the experience of a lifetime.'

As to their image, the Rowers look like any top contemporary American band and have a sound very reminiscent of Sawyer Brown. The significant difference is the songs and speaking accents are all from central Europe. Although they do

dedicated programmes once or twice a week. The air time has led to the undoubted popularity of the band, leading to them gaining several awards for being in the top 10 of most radio plays across Europe for both their latest hits, Blind Horses and I'm Leavin'. As the band goes from strength to strength, I asked about their future plans. Peter said that at the moment they were concentrating on recording but were looking forward to the concert and festival season that would soon be upon us. He explained that their biggest thrill so far was appearing in the largest Country festival in Slovakia. 'Our greatest success so far was winning an award for the best band at the festival.' He went on, 'I think the current line up has a really bright future'. More importantly perhaps, he gave a reason

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pointed out, 'I also really love the good ole boys like Waylon Jennings, Willie Nelson and Don Williams'. The music helped his recovery and he realised that his future was in Country.

In 2004 Peter joined the Rowers after their lead singer had left and the band had heard him singing in clubs around Slovakia. He was invited to become part of the group and as he says, 'It was a big honour to become the lead singer for the oldest Country band in Slovakia'. Within a couple of years Peter & The Rowers had become major players on the European Country music scene. Currently the band have several nominations in this year's European Country Music Awards and have already collected an array of accolades for both writing and performing. Their current single is in the European top 10 and their album has been at number one in several countries. So why do we know so little about them?

Like many of the top artists in Europe, they tend to operate around the Continent without taking in Britain. Peter told me that they have to travel large distances but play a range of festivals, rodeos and Country balls. In their own country they have limited access to clubs and there is no line dancing as yet so other opportunities are limited. Covering large distances presents few problems to the band. 'We all love travelling', Peter told me, it's so much fun getting to know

some covers, Peter explained about the band's musical philosophy. 'When we play in Slovakia we sing mostly in our native language but if we are abroad I usually sing in English. We mostly try to play our own material but sometimes play some covers so people can sing and dance along.'

As for their songs, like all good Country writers, the band take their inspiration from life. 'You just have to look around', Peter explained, 'the songs are all around us.'

More recently they have been in Nashville writing with some star names, including Roger Springer who has written hits for a string of top US artists. Their next album will also include duets with some well known names including Buddy Jewell and Joe Diffie (their next single is to be released in spring). Peter added, 'we are just cutting the final tracks and hopefully the new cd will be ready soon. We are very excited about that.' They plan to follow this up with a similar album for their own region, recorded in the Slovak language.

When I asked about the Country music scene in their part of the world, Peter was surprisingly positive. He told me that there is a strong following in the Czech Republic but there are few venues where the band can play live. They depend very much on radio airtime and the mainstream radio in Slovakia does play Country tracks regularly and has several

for the band's success. 'We are all really good friends and I think this is the most important thing. We get along very well and love what we do.'

This year marks another breakthrough as the band have put together a mini tour of some of the top British festivals including Wobstock, Exeter and Norfolk during the summer and plan to make themselves better known to the public over here. Unfortunately at the moment the band have had to cancel gigs for February as Peter has had to go back into hospital with serious health problems but he spoke optimistically about a speedy recovery and their upcoming tour. It seems odd that we do not associate mainland Europe with Country music, yet at the moment much of the top quality output is coming from artists about which we know very little. Peter & The Rowers is just one of a wide range of exciting bands playing across the continent and at the moment they are proving to be one of the outstanding successes. Let's hope they can pull themselves right to the top and perhaps this time next year we may all be talking about just how good they really are.

Meanwhile I can only hope Peter makes a speedy recovery so that we will be able to catch a glimpse of Slovakia's finest this summer.

For more information go to Peter & The Rowers website at www.therowers.eu or www.myspace.com/rowers.