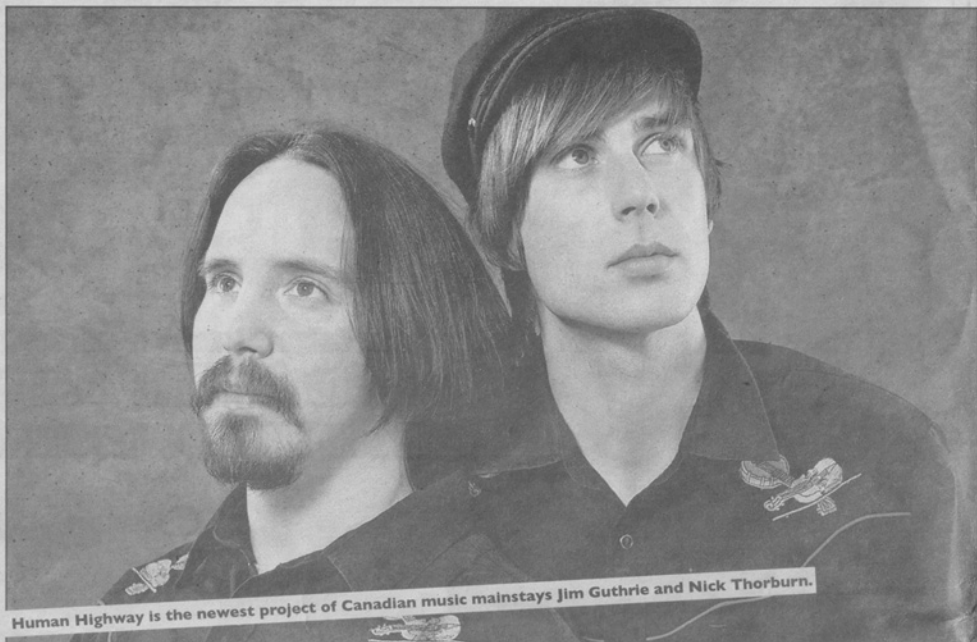


# Human Highway

roadtrip-ready AM radio pop

by Jesse Locke



Human Highway is the newest project of Canadian music mainstays Jim Guthrie and Nick Thorburn.

With his soft, ear-pleasing and immediately endearing singing style, it made perfect sense when the jingle Jim Guthrie wrote for Capitol One's "Hands In My Pocket" campaign wormed its way into the Canadian consciousness. Following the first appearance of the catchy tune on the bank's television commercials in 2005, it has since been used on TSN, in anti-Liberal election protests, re-recorded as a full-length single, modified into a viral ad with Paul Martin's head super imposed on a banker - and perhaps most important of all - parodied by the Royal Canadian Air Farce.

The sad part of this story, however, is that it took the mainstream public of the singer-songwriter's country this long to notice him. Guthrie began releasing solo albums way back in 1995 with his lo-fi debut *Home Is Where The Rock Is*, and later went on to college radio station acclaim with his band Royal City. More recently, he has been playing guitar for Islands, making his money writing more music for commercials, and composing these songs for *Hockey Night In Canada*.

In between all of this, Guthrie somehow also found the time to hop onto *Moody Motorcycle*, the debut album of Human Highway, his new duo with Islands' Nick Thorburn. Full of lazy Sunday afternoon strums, sweet and subtle harmonies, and the kind of breezy pop you might hear on AM radio if you traveled back in time to the '50s, it's a collection of songs even your grandma could warm up to. I spoke to Jim as he tended to the garden at his new home in Toronto, about Human Highway and the other projects he's cultivated over the years.

**BeatRoute: How did Human Highway first come to be?**

**Jim Guthrie:** It was a real organic thing. When I was on tour with [Nick and Islands], we were in a hotel room, and he was just like, "do you want to sing on this song I recorded?" It just started off with a little whisper, a little peep of a song, and it grew into a full album. Nick had a few more ideas, but I did more of the recording, and between the two of us we came up with the entire record.

**BR: It's interesting how simple and stripped down the album sounds, especially contrasted by how complex the music of Islands is.**

**JG:** We weren't trying to over think stuff. We wanted to get as much done as we could in the time we had given ourselves, and I think that it was the circumstance that sort of made it a simple record, I was recording everything and we wanted to just get to the heart of the song. I'm sure that if we had more time, we would have made it into a rock opera, but we didn't.

**BR: You're pretty well known these days for being the guy who wrote "Hands In My Pockets." But which other ads have you done songs for?**

**JG:** Since "Hands In My Pocket," I've done McDonalds, Swiss Chalet, Tim Hortons... the list goes on. I've probably done 30 or 40 ads in the last three years.

**BR: I think that's more honest than a lot of bands these days, who write music with the hope going in that a commercial will pick**

**them up.**

**JG:** I've always struggled with it. There are some things I just won't do, but if it seems like it's coming from an honest place. We all grew up watching a lot of TV, and I think there was a time when there was a huge stigma attached to doing music for ads, but it doesn't bother me because I've been able to separate what I do. I've maybe done one or two things where I kind of wish I didn't do it, but for the most part, I actually love doing it, and it's a huge challenge. It's a lot of work for something that in the end doesn't have a lot of meaning, other than it's a personal challenge for me.

**BR: You've also tried your hand at a Hockey Night In Canada theme recently. Can you tell me about that?**

**JG:** I had heard about the whole contest where they had lost the old theme and wanted a new one, and it was sort of in the back of my mind. I had never really thought about it, and I had some friends say that I should try it. I actually went to the site one day, and I went through a whole bunch of them, and didn't think any one of them were really doing it. There was a lot of good music, and if you take it out of the context of it being the next theme song for HNIC, they're really cool, weird pieces of music. But, if they're going to start off HNIC, it doesn't really fit. So, I just gave it a shot with some music laying around that I just reworked. I read the rules and you can submit as many as you want, so I might try again. That was my first stab at it, and I don't know, I think it's got a little something in there.