

IF YOU GO...

WHAT: Malcolm Holcombe in concert

WHEN: 9 p.m., Friday, July 7

WHERE: Down Home, 300 W. Main St., Johnson City

COST: \$12

CONTACT: 929-9622, www.downhome.com

LISTEN: Song samples are available at Holcombe's Web site, www.malcolmholcombe.com

I F I HAVE A TOMATO PLANT up on the hill and I get a couple tomatoes out of it, I ain't gonna take a chance on a plastic carrot that looks good in the sun, all shined up, but when the sun goes down it turns into a cowpie. You ever step in a cowpie?

—MALCOLM HOLCOMBE



photo courtesy Malcolm Holcombe

along with drummers Josh Day and Brian Landrum.

Recorded in four days, the disc has the unfussy feel of friends picking on a back porch.

"We just did our job and had a lot of fun," Holcombe says. "I don't try to beat a dead horse. If you do that, you end up on the side of the road."

Residing in Nashville throughout much of the '90s, Holcombe found his music career derailed on several occasions. Sometimes selling his compositions for "pocket money, he reached a low point in 1996 when his Geffen Records debut album, "A Hundred Lies," was shelved in the wake of a corporate shakeup. After some persistent lobbying by Holcombe fans Lucinda Williams and Steve Earle, the album was released three years later by Universal Entertainment subsidiary Hip-O Records. By that time Holcombe was no longer in the Music City, having returned to the hills of Western Carolina.

"It's a very ruthless, money-hungry, political game," Holcombe says of the music industry. "But it's not a game because it's people's lives."

Wiser from the experience, Holcombe is now on firmer ground at age 50. Married on Valentine's Day 2003, wife Cynthia and her 7-year old son Jesse

have given him the stability needed to pursue his career.

"I'm very grateful to have made some decisions that make me more comfortable in my own skin," Holcombe says. "I've got a bad taste in my mouth for the music industry. I don't whine about it, but I've got a little bit more clarity than I used to have."

That clarity includes calling his own shots. In addition to producing himself, Holcombe also releases his music on his own — with no mention of a label on the CD's spine.

He says he's been approached by labels, but is content being his own boss.

"My experience tells me it's not wise to get bitten by the big dog," he says. "When you start doing your homework, looking at the pros and cons, it's selling out — and I'm holding out."

In classic Malcolmes, Holcombe further explains the disaster that might loom should he sign a label deal.

"If I have a tomato plant up on the hill and I get a couple tomatoes out of it, I ain't gonna take a chance on a plastic carrot that looks good in the sun, all shined up, but when the sun goes down it turns into a cowpie. You ever step in a cowpie?" 