

Here Kitty

Clark Williams wants to amuse you

By [Charlie Swanson](#)

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- Carlos Chavez
- **MAD CAT** Big Kitty's style combines folk, pop and crooning.

There's something captivating in the weirdness of Big Kitty. Like a surreal Sinatra, or an absurdist Elvis, Big Kitty's folk-pop moves between the boundaries of silly and sentimental.

On Feb. 11, Big Kitty (the stage name of Clark Williams) unveils a new musical performance piece in a benefit to help Santa Rosa theater collective the Imaginists buy their building (see "Called Home," Dec. 20, 2017).

Born in Maryville, Tenn., Williams was raised on country and the "sacred harp" music of his grandparents, while older siblings introduced him to

British rock bands like the Beatles and Queen. Once Williams moved to Chattanooga after high school, he delved deep into the folk scene and adopted the moniker Big Kitty, named for an actual cat. "It's a name I chose so long ago that it's just become like my own name," says Williams.

After meeting and marrying a woman with North Bay ties, Williams moved to Sebastopol two years ago with his wife and daughter, and Big Kitty came along too.

"In Chattanooga, my main job was playing music, so I'm trying to make that happen here," says Williams, who is a regular feature at several clubs in Sonoma County, playing the last Sunday every month at the Toad in the Hole in Santa Rosa and sitting in at spots like Occidental's Barley & Hops Tavern.

Last year, Big Kitty recorded and released the full-length album

Excelsior Breeze Catchers, which melds his wide range of influences into a showcase of songs with whimsical melodies and quirky lyrics.

"It's very British-sounding," laughs Williams. "It's a mixture of Britain, Tennessee and California."

Throughout the record, the sounds of choir bells, brassy trumpets, Hammond organs and the occasional howling coyote accompany Williams' wistful drawl as he sings about cleaning the *Queen Mary* and other fantasies.

"All my colorfulness is really just following a muse," says Williams. "I have tried to write more normal songs, with more standard country imagery, but I find it very difficult to do that and make it interesting to myself."

For the last three years, Williams has been adapting his music into a dramatic presentation that combines his songs with monologues and dancing. For the upcoming benefit show, Williams is presenting both his

original piece and a never-before-seen work.

"I'm really excited about it, and so flattered that the Imaginists want me to do it in their space," says Williams. "I'm really happy to help them."