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## Bluesman's life subject of Dolinger's book



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Lightnin' Charlie Dolinger's life as a professional musician can be divided into two distinct phases — his younger, wilder days and his more stable, married-life, church-going days.

Doing justice to both those parts of his career was the challenge Dolinger faced when he decided to write a book about his exploits and adventures. "Off the Record: The Trials and Tribulations of a Travelin' Troubadour" is a collection of Charlie's online posts, originally called "The Lightnin' Lowdown," from his Web site, and the book has been picked up by regional publisher Aaron Publishing to be distributed worldwide by Ingram Books.

For Dolinger, writing his stories for its two distinctly different reading audiences made for a fine balancing act.

“This book is going to be read by two demographics, those who hear me in church and those who’ve heard me in bars,” he said, “and I wanted to make it real for people who know me from playing clubs with the band, but I don’t want to offend the 70-year-old lady in church or in a nursing home.

“I have to walk a tightrope with the writing.”

Now a professed Christian and a family man, Dolinger has replaced gigs at smoky night clubs, playing to a drunk audience, with shows at festivals, theaters, private parties and even churches and nursing homes. His longtime love of the blues shares time onstage with gospel, country and other American music forms, and his shows are filled with jokes and stories.

Dolinger wrote in the book’s introduction: “Folks are naturally curious about the lifestyle of a professional, touring musician, and have often asked me what it has been like.” At shows, between songs he’s sometimes gotten requests for specific stories. “And I’m not sure if that’s a compliment to my storytelling, or a criticism of my singing, or both!” he writes.

Those comic tales of things gone wrong while playing at shady clubs, with band members who often create as much trouble as they do music, became fan favorites when Charlie began posting them in 2005 at [www.lightnincharlie.com](http://www.lightnincharlie.com). He was inclined to clean up the stories for his now broader audience, but not at the expense of losing their color.

And behind his stories is a deeper message he wants to convey.

“These stories are an opportunity for me to give my own personal testimony not as a glorification of me but of God,” he said. “It’s really a cool thing. It’s a chance to get my message across,” and he added with a laugh: “Don’t do it like I did.”

Dolinger, who lives in Johnson City with his wife, Beth, and two children, has recorded three CDs, including his 2005 release, “A New Leaf,” which has drawn positive critical reviews.

Lightnin’ Charlie will be performing his regular gig at Cranberry Thistle, 107 E. Main St. in Jonesborough, on Saturday at 7 p.m.