

# Brad Cole – Songwriter & Musician

Brad Cole is an American singer, songwriter and musician. He plays guitar and percussion and is largely self-taught. Cole has devoted the bulk of his musical career to folk, country, Americana, and pop/rock. His songwriting is borne from the heart and focuses on relationships, struggles, experiences, and coming into one's own. For over 20 years, Brad has been a fixture on the Chicago music scene sharing the stage with such greats as [Uncle Tupelo](#), [The Smashing Pumpkins](#), [Material Issue](#), Nicholas Tremulis, and blues great [Joanna Connor](#). Cole led several Chicago-based bands including Treatment, Psycholove, The Second Story, and toured with NYC-based The Subscribers. In recent years (since 2011), Brad has been touring nationwide with his own band and as a solo performer, playing to sellout audiences in New York, Chicago and Nashville, sharing the stage with other great folk and Americana artists such as [Shovels & Rope](#), [Dan Navarro](#), [Chris Stapleton](#) and [Amy Speace](#). Brad Cole maintains homes in New York and Nashville, and continues to tour and write memorable, thought-provoking songs that speak to the human condition and uneasy truths we too often evade.

## Contents

- 1 [Early Years](#)
- 2 [Early Financial Career & Musical Adventures](#)
- 3 [Personal Milestones](#)
- 4 [Musical Career: 2000 - 2009](#)
- 5 [Personal Re-Awakenings](#)
- 6 [Into His Own: 2010 - Present](#)
- 7 [Awards & Accolades](#)
- 8 [Discography](#)
- 9 [Links](#)
- 10 [References](#)

## Brad Cole



Brad Cole performing live at the Bluebird Cafe (Nashville, TN) in 2012

<b>Born</b>	Bradley Fred Cole January 25, 1958 (age 56) Chicago, IL (USA)
<b>Occupation</b>	Songwriter, singer, musician
<b>Years active</b>	1990–present
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://bradcolemusic.com">bradcolemusic.com</a>

## Early Years

Bradley Fred Cole was born on January 25, 1958, in Chicago, IL, to father Sy Cole (1922-1999), and mother, the former Carolyn Gardner (1925-2011). Both parents were of Eastern European ancestry and raised the family Jewish. His father owned a car dealership in Chicago Heights and mother was a housewife. Brad had a typical upper-middle-class, suburban upbringing on the south side of Chicago. His early years were spent in a suburb called Graymoor. It was peaceful, safe, with room to wander. Sy Cole filled the house with jazz records and show tunes while Brad was growing up, and Brad credits his father with his earliest musical influences and love of jazz. Later, both of Brad's older siblings, Richard (b. 1948) and DeeDee (b. 1952), brought home records from their college years (late 60s and early 70's) including [The Beatles](#), [The Beach Boys](#), [Frank Zappa](#), [Cat Stevens](#), [The Who](#) and many other classic rock artists that had an even greater impact on Brad's music sensibilities. While in grade school, Brad began playing bongos with older brother Richard, who played guitar in a folk trio.

Brad attended Homewood-Flossmoor High School in Flossmoor, IL, in south suburban Chicago. Though Brad did not excel in high school, his parents convinced him to attend college. The first two years he spent at [Drake University](#) (Des Moines, IA), where he applied himself and became interested in psychology. When money ran out for private school, Brad transferred to the [University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign](#). While in college, Brad picked up his roommate's guitar and began teaching himself to play. Artists Brad idolized at the time were [Carlos Santana](#), [Little Feat](#), [Bob Marley](#), [Miles Davis](#) and many other jazz icons. Brad graduated from the University of Illinois in 1980 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Communications, with a concentration in Advertising. He

fancied himself like Darren Stevens, the ad agency husband on the TV series *Bewitched*, while also cultivating his musical talents.

## Early Financial Career & Musical Adventures

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Through much of early adulthood, Brad worked various jobs at the [Chicago Mercantile Exchange](#), eventually becoming a future's trader. He put together his first band – *Rude Boy International*<sup>[1]</sup> – with friends who also worked at the CME. Their style was [Ska](#), [Reggae](#), and [punk rock](#), though they never left the confines of the basement.

In 1984, Brad became the front man and principal songwriter for the 6-piece band, *Treatment*<sup>[2]</sup>, along with Gerry Berlin, Tony Gassaway, Paul Zimmerman, Kevin Price and Shae Jones. Their musical style was a blend of [Ska](#), [Reggae](#) and rock, and Brad strived to create unique, artistic dance-club music. They played in clubs all over Chicago, recorded one record, "Musical Therapy," but were unsigned. *Treatment* shared the stage with many bands back then, including [Material Issue](#) [Mercury Records], [The Smashing Pumpkins](#) [then, on Virgin Records], Nick Tremulis [then, on Island Records], The Bonedaddys, and Timbuck 3 [then, on I.R.S. Records]. In 1990, *Treatment*'s "Ain't No Sign of Life" was featured on WXRT's compilation "Best of Chicago." Brad characterizes this period in his life (1984-1991) as reckless, godless, partying, and searching. During this time, Brad was influenced by bands such as [The Police](#), [The Clash](#), [The Specials](#), [English Beat](#), [LKJ](#) and [Bob Marley and the Wailers](#).

A couple of years later, Brad formed *Psycholove*, a band that played danceable tunes with an Afro-pop influence, along with sax player, Frankie Hill (from the band Heavy Manners). From 1992 to 1996, *Psycholove* played numerous gigs around Chicago.

## Personal Milestones

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In 1987, Brad married Maria Rodriguez, with whom he had a daughter, Rachel, in 1993. Brad's brother, Richard, who had been an early musical influence, gave up music, got married and had two children. In 1992, while traveling in the [Philippines](#) on business, Richard was shot in the head at close range and killed. Unable to contact his brother, and not aware of what had transpired, the family began searching. For six months, Brad was consumed with finding his missing brother. It was only later - through a positive identification by a Philippine mortician - that the U.S. Embassy broke the news to the family, and Richard's body was disinterred and brought back to Chicago for burial.

Brad was so grieved by his brother's death that he walked away from music completely. The band, *Treatment*, folded, and Brad shut down musically for five years and did not play or write songs. Before the news about his brother broke, Brad had begun making a documentary about the murder of [Malcolm X](#). He met Malcom X's "inner circle," who pointed the finger at government employees being his killer, and not the Nation of Islam. But, after his brother's death, Brad was so grief-stricken, he never finished the movie. However, he continued working on the Mercantile Exchange, traveled for business to Europe and Asia, and became quite knowledgeable in the world of finance. It was only upon the birth of his daughter, that Brad became emotionally resurrected. He named her Rachel Marley, in honor of his brother Richard and his idol, [Bob Marley](#). Brad found joy in being a dad, but still could not pick up the guitar.

The light was again turned on for Brad, when in 1998, he heard [Patty Griffin](#)'s "Living With Ghosts" album. Listening to female songwriters [Patty Griffin](#), [Shawn Colvin](#), [Lucinda Williams](#), [Nancy Griffith](#), and [Aimee Mann](#), Brad was drawn back into music. He began writing and playing as a solo artist around Chicago, with a distinctly different musical style from his earlier work. Also in 1998, Brad started his own company, a securities brokerage firm called *Cole Partners*, and later in 2004, formed a sister company, *Cole Asset Management* (CAM), and managed a

natural resources-focused fund of [hedge funds](#). Garnering success in both his musical and financial career, Brad was content to pursue both simultaneously for a while.

In 1999, while Brad's parents were living in San Diego, Brad's father died after having been misdiagnosed and given the wrong drugs in the hospital. Brad brought his mother back to Chicago, and in 2006, when she was stricken with [Alzheimer's disease](#), Brad became her primary caretaker until her death in 2011. His song, "Something About Goodbye," released on his "**Down the Line**" CD, is about her.

## Musical Career: 2000 - 2009

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In 2001, Brad self-produced the EP "Mercy Graymoor" with the help of producer/engineer David Axelbaum in Chicago. It was comprised of five dark pop songs with a full band, featuring Sandy Lee on vocal harmonies, [Kyle Woodring](#) on drums, Alan Berlaint on bass, and Grant Tye on guitar. This marked Brad's first studio recording since 1990.

Also in 2001, Brad began spending time at the [Old Town School of Folk Music](#) in Chicago with the *First Friday Singer Songwriter Collective*, a mentoring group for songwriters. Through this collective, Brad became associated with some of the best contemporary writers in Chicago, many of whom he has performed with and continues to perform with to this day.

From 2003 to 2007, Brad was the lead singer and principal songwriter for *The Second Story*<sup>[3]</sup>. It was comprised of 4-5 various musicians and had more of a folk-rock sound. They played all over Chicago, the Mid-West, and a west coast tour where they headlined at [The Viper Room](#) in LA in July of 2005. In 2007, they recorded the album "**Hwy 200**," Brad's first full-length album of original songs. It is a disc full of alternative rock gems, rich with harmonies and non-stop hooks, which Brad refers to as "an ode to dysfunctional love in all its pathetic glory." It was recorded at Rax Trax in Chicago, with Josh Shapera as engineer and co-producer (along with Brad). A number of talented players appeared on that album, including Grant Tye on guitar and Alain Berlaint on bass. But by 2008, interest by the other members in the band waned, as they were more interested in their "day jobs" than in pursuing a musician's life on the road. Brad disbanded the group in 2008 and released "**Hwy 200**" under his own name and played in the Midwest with various Chicago-based musicians. In 2009, Brad Cole was a featured artist on WXRT's "Local Anesthetic," hosted by DJ Richard Milne.

As a side project, from 2004 to 2007, Brad was a vocalist and percussionist with the NY-based band *The Subscribers*, a rock-cover party band that did a few charity gigs across the U.S. and London. They recorded a self-titled album of originals over a weekend in Clarksdale, Mississippi, produced by [Jimbo Mathus](#), who had toured and recorded with [Buddy Guy](#).

Brad continued playing numerous solo singer-songwriter gigs, primarily in the Chicago area. In 2006, Brad began working with Chicago-based singer-songwriter Jeff Libman and formed *Check With Lucy* as an acoustic duo. In this format, Brad and Jeff shared original songs and played some cover tunes with their own stylings. While Brad and Jeff are the core of *Check With Lucy*, it is not unusual for the number and complement of band members to vary, depending on the venue. *Check with Lucy* continues to perform around the Midwest.

## Personal Re-Awakenings

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Brad and his childhood friend, Phil, had been inseparable since age 8. When Brad's brother died, Phil wanted Brad to go to Las Vegas with him. But Brad, having a wife and young child, could not leave his family. Phil went anyway, and disappeared from Brad's life for 10 years. Brad felt abandoned yet again. Phil had gotten addicted to drugs and for 10 years was in and out of rehab. Phil re-surfaced in 2005 to make amends with Brad, paid a debt he owed him,

and apologized. Now sober, Phil gave Brad a glimpse of life in hell, and Brad became intrigued by Phil's story of survival and coming to terms with God and a deeper truth about himself and his place in the world. It was then that Brad decided to come to terms with what was then an unhappy marriage. Brad and Maria divorced in 2007, and the heartache from his divorce became the fuel for many of Brad's songs.

In 2008, Brad wound down his investment advising companies and walked away from the world of finance. Chasing money was no longer important. Brad felt if he moved away from material trappings, and pursued a life of truth as a musician, that God would help him. His songwriting became a path to discovery, of what he was and what he valued. Leaving the world of finance, Brad began pursuing his songwriting and musical artistry full-time. He made frequent trips to [Nashville, Tennessee](#), where he was inspired by the slower pace of life, the rolling park-like hills, and was inspired by the talented musicians and songwriters in the area.

## Into His Own: 2010 - Present

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During 2010-2011, Brad developed and produced the *Acoustic Circus* concert series at Chicago's famed Elbo Room. This was a monthly series featuring Brad as artist-in-residence. This allowed him to experiment with new arrangements and different configurations on existing and new material. Brad also used *Acoustic Circus* to showcase some of his favorite local and touring acts. In 2011, Brad moved his *Acoustic Circus* series to The Uncommon Ground in Chicago. In 2013, *Acoustic Circus* made its New York City debut at Rockwood Music Hall. In this format - a singer-songwriter "variety show" – Brad and other artists could collaborate, jam, and take some risks. This is an on-going passion of Brad's, allowing him to give great under-the-radar performers more exposure. Fans enjoy the discovery process and unpredictability of the shows.

With "**Exile**," recorded in 2010, Brad moved toward an alt-country sound, displaying his versatility as a songwriter as well as his compassion for the human condition. "**Exile**"'s lead track, "Come Home," won first place in Songwriter's Universe songwriting competition in January 2013, was named finalist in the 2012 Great Lakes Song Writing Contest, and was a finalist in the 2012 Mountain Stage – New Song Regional competition. The song was born out of a meeting with a soldier-friend of his who was returning home from the Mid-East conflict. It reflects on how the feelings of separation from home that this soldier had were not unlike what Brad experienced being on the road. "**Exile**" was co-produced with Josh Shapera at Black Sheep Studios in Chicago, and received critical acclaim. Many of the songs on this CD are an outgrowth of Brad's life experiences, such as "The Hardest Part," a song about the breakup of his marriage.

Still deeply affected by his brother's violent death, and becoming increasingly disturbed by the growth of gun violence in Chicago, Brad launched a video campaign focused on curbing gun violence. Brad's song "Killing Your Brother" was picked up in 2011 by producer Jason Harper, who collaborated with hip-hop artist Staff Johnson to create a powerful video with a poignant message. The video can be found [here](#)[1]. The song and video have gained critical acclaim and are being used to raise awareness and funding for The Illinois Coalition Against Hand Gun Violence as well as CeaseFire Chicago.

Beginning in 2011, Brad began touring extensively with his band and as a solo acoustic performer. In 2012 and 2013, he did over 100 shows per year. During this time, Brad began spending more and more time in Nashville, where he shared the stage with many talented artists and musicians - [Dan Navarro](#), [Ellis Paul](#), [Chris Stapleton](#), [Shovels & Rope](#), and [Muriel Anderson](#) - and where he found inspiration for his songwriting.

Brad's third album, "**Down the Line**," was recorded at Studio X in Nashville with engineer Tom Manche in 2012. Numerous guest artists appear on the CD, including [Muriel Anderson](#), [Amy Speace](#), Adam Ollendorff and Tim Lorsch. The song "Butterfly" on this album was awarded finalist honors in the 13th Annual Great American Songwriting Contest in 2012.

As of 2014, Brad moved his home base to Nashville, but also maintains a residence in New York. He continues touring, writing songs, collaborating with other artists and looking for inspiration.

## Awards & Accolades

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- 2014 Folk Alliance Official Showcase Performer
- 2013 Acoustic Live! Magazine - cover - "Stripped Down to the Truth" by Richard Cuccaro, August 2013 [2]
- 2013 FARM Official Showcase Performer
- 2013 "Top 20 Roots/Country Americana albums" as reported by Roots Music Report - Down The Line
- 2013 Songwriter Universe, Song of the Month Winner - "Come Home"
- 2013 Charted in the "Top 50" for Radio Airplay as reported by Folk DJ – Down The Line
- 2012 WDCB's Top 20 songs for 2012 - "Something About Goodbye"
- 2012 NERFA Official Quad Showcase Performer
- 2012 Falcon Ridge Grassy Hill Emerging Artist Performer
- 2012 Mountain Stage New Song Regional, Finalist - "Come Home"
- 2012 Great American Songwriting Contest, Finalist - "Butterfly"
- 2011 Great Lakes Songwriting Competition, Top 10 Finalist - "Come Home"

## Discography

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- 2012 – Down the Line
- 2010 – Exile
- 2008 – Hwy 200
- 2005 – Mercy Graymoor – EP
- 1990 – Musical Therapy (Treatment)

## Links

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[Brad Cole Music](#)

[Brad Cole's facebook page](#)

Brad Cole's videos on YouTube

Brad Cole on ReverbNation

Brad Cole's music on SoundCloud

Brad Cole's Twitter

Ripple: Host a show with Brad Cole

## References

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<sup>1</sup>Not affiliated with the present-day Florida-based *RudeBoy International*.

<sup>2</sup>Not affiliated with the present-day UK-based rock band *Treatment*.

<sup>3</sup>Not affiliated with the present-day Wisconsin-based *Second Story Band*.