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Alternative country, Americana, roots, folk,  
 blues, gospel, jazz, and bluegrass music news



October 2007

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## what's inside

**Welcome Mat.....3**

Mission  
 Contributors  
 H.A.T. Awards

**Full Circle.....5**

Recordially, Lou Curtiss  
 Carolyn Hester  
 Merle Travis

**Front Porch... ..8**

Michele Lundeen  
 Ray Brandes  
 Solid Blues Concert

**Parlor Showcase ...12**

Daniel Jackson

**Ramblin'.....14**

Bluegrass Corner  
 Zen of Recording  
 Hosing Down  
 Radio Daze  
 Stages

**Highway's Song. ...16**

Don Schiff  
 Solid Blues  
 Music in Cuyamaca

**Of Note.....20**

Mesa Blue  
 Craig Fischer  
 Dead Rock West  
 Fran Hartshorn  
 Aaron Bowen  
 The Hereafter  
 Eric Klein

**'Round About .....22**

October Music Calendar

**The Local Seen.....23**

Photo Page





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**SAN DIEGO TROUBADOUR**, the local source for alternative country, Americana, roots, folk, blues, gospel, jazz, and bluegrass music news, is published monthly and is free of charge. Letters to the editor must be signed and may be edited for content. It is not, however, guaranteed that they will appear.

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The San Diego Troubadour is dedicated to the memory of **Ellen and Lyle Duplessie**, whose vision inspired the creation of this newspaper.

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by Tim Mudd

In early Fall last year, one artist within the San Diego songwriter community decided it was time for a bit of "togetherness." Born of frustration, resulting from the lack of recognition afforded to independent acoustic artists within the local music market, Will Edwards founded, organized, promoted, and staged the first annual San Diego H.A.T awards to Honor Acoustic Talent in just three weeks . . . and this was by no means a slap-dash affair.

Edwards used his technical background in online development to engineer the entire balloting and voting process through the H.A.T Awards website. The voting results were also generated via this system leaving no room for human bias or error. Through his hard work and the help of a few other community-minded artists and friends, the 2006 H.A.T Awards were an unequivocal success. The website generated the interest of over 6,000 online users and clocked in more than 20,000 web page views. With 21 balloted awards and over 300 attendees, the ceremonies were hosted over

# Tipping the H.A.T.

the course of three nights at San Diego County's top acoustic venues – Hot Java Café in Poway, Lestat's West in Normal Heights, and Twiggs Green Room in University Heights, where more than 250 compilation CDs showcasing some of the city's top performers were available for sale.

Although it retains the grassroots ethos demonstrated by its predecessor, the 2007 incarnation of the San Diego H.A.T awards is already showing substantial maturity in its vision by recognizing its weaknesses and addressing them into strengths. Most notably through format, this year's event will be scaling back from 21 awards to 12 and the ceremony will take place on one night instead of three. In addition to the 12 balloted awards, the event will also be honoring two Artist's Choice awards, one for Artist of the Year and one for Album of the Year. Due to the raised awareness of this celebration within the community, the accolades will also include cash prizes in addition to the existing gifts donated by the events sponsors. The website has seen growth to include a new membership account feature whereby users can create a favorites list of artists and albums, as well as the option for users with accounts to update and edit their nominations and ballot at any time. A statistics feature has also been incorporated so that users can see how their vote will change the field of competition in real time.

It's hard to believe a year has already

passed since the H.A.T awards inaugural celebration, but with retrospect it has been an eventful one within this community. From artists who have



Will Edwards

moved on to those it has gained, the closing of one key venue to the birth and growth of others. Through sadness and success, these changes that feed evolution are crucial to everyone, especially when applied to those in the arts. While an event such as the H.A.T awards sets the stage to quantify these experiences, it also allows pause to celebrate the journey with friends, family, and peers – an opportunity that is just as necessary and just as important. The 2007 H.A.T awards will be held on Saturday, October 27, 7pm, at the Normal Heights Community Center, 4649 Hawley Blvd. Doors open at 6:30pm. To learn more and place your vote online, visit [www.sandiegohatawards.com](http://www.sandiegohatawards.com).

*Despite his impersonal and gratuitous use of big words and semicolons, Tim Mudd is really very fond of the San Diego songwriter community. Because his citizenship prevents him from voting in any local or national elections, he is excited to vote Damigo-Deez '07. Hola.*



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# Recordially, Lou Curtiss

FATS WALLER

It seems that September ain't doing anything wrong when it comes to Fats Waller and his era, with two productions of *Ain't Misbehavin'* going on in town. Most notably the San Diego Rep will be doing the music revue from through October 14, and by the time you read this I will have taken part in the Sam Woodhouse's salon presentation that goes with each of their shows to share what I know about Fats and his era (and the Harlem Renaissance in general). In honor of the man and to promote the show at the Rep, I've also devoted two of my "Jazz Roots" radio shows to Fats and his music, so you'd think I'd be talked out about Fats Waller, but "one never know, do one?"

There was a time before the original production of *Ain't Misbehavin'* when most folks had forgotten about Fats. Back in the early '60s I was poking around a thrift store in south Chula Vista when I came across an old Okeh 78 rpm record of this guy Fats Waller doing "Muscle Shoals Blues," with "Birmingham Blues" on the other side. Well, I know about old blues but I didn't think Fats Waller was a blues musician, so I took the record down to Ken Swerila's record shop (called Vintage Records) on E Street downtown and he told me that the record I found in the thrift shop was Fats' first record. I remember saying to him, "Well, now I need to get all the rest." He laughed at me, saying it would be a pretty big task since there were some six or seven hundred of them, not including radio shows, transcription discs that played in elevators, which he did for the Musak Corporation (elevator music was a little more hip in those days), and the three movies he was in (he should have been in a lot more as he was a marvelous character). So I started collecting Fats. In the beginning I mostly found bunches of those Bluebird sides (he recorded over 400 sides for RCA Victor's Bluebird budget label between 1934 and 1942), from which many of tunes were picked for the show — the title tune, "Ain't Misbehavin'," of course, and "Honeysuckle Rose." "I'm Gonna Sit Right Down and Write Myself a Letter," and other Waller top ten hits like "It's a Sin to Tell a Lie" (#1), "Truckin'" (#1), "All My Life" (#1), "Two Sleepy People" (#1), "Smarty" (#1), and "A Little Bit Independent" (#1). I soon became attracted to more of the novelty numbers like "You Run Your Mouth and I'll run my Bizness," "You're Not the Only Oyster in the Stew," "Abercrombie Had a Zombie," and, of course, the double entendre songs "Hold Tight" and "If Youse a Viper," which Fats somehow was allowed to sing on a radio transcription but not for the Bluebird people (I'd like to know which radio stations that played that one). I also started to find out about the rarer side of Fats Waller collecting. Most notably, those mid Depression-era records (ranging from about 1927 up to the mid 1930s). In the '20s Fats was often used as a side man who backed up blues singers like Alberta Hunter and Edith Wilson. He also worked as a side man with Clarence Williams, cornet player Tom Morris, and James P. Johnson's Orchestra (playing piano duets with the leader); he sat in with McKinneys Cottonpickers and Fletcher Henderson's Orchestra; and in the



Fats Waller

early '30s he began to get noticed by some of the white musicians. He did a session and some vocal work with Ted ("Is everybody happy?") Lewis and Eddie Condon teamed him up with Jack Teagarden, Henry "Red" Allen, Pee Wee Russell, and others for some remarkable all-star sessions that featured the best black and white jazzmen around. In 1934 George Gershwin invited Fats to play piano at one of his stylish parties in New York City and some of the Victor record people were there.

At that time Victor's top black jazz artist was Jelly Roll Morton and all the variations of his Red Hot Peppers groups that had been top sellers throughout the Roaring '20s. Jelly's latest recordings weren't selling as well anymore so they were looking for something new and it seemed that Fats might be just the ticket. At that time during the early '30s Fats had been doing some radio, starting with WLW in Cincinnati and then moving to New York and broadcasting on the CBS network. The show was called "The Fats Waller Rhythm Club," so when he started recording for Bluebird and was using a studio group for backup, they just called it "Fats Waller and his Rhythm." The studio guys he used eventually became a regular group and would also back him on gigs — most notably Gene Sedic on clarinet, alto, or tenor sax; Herman Autrey on trumpet; Al Casey on guitar; and Slick Jones on drums. Those were the best known players, but "the Rhythm" would also include Bill Coleman (trumpet), Floyd O'Brien (trombone), Billy Taylor (string bass), Rudy Powell (clarinet and alto sax), Harry Dial (drums), Charles Turner (string bass), Arnold Boling (drums), James Smith (guitar), Yank Porter (drums), Ceele Burke (steel guitar), Paul Campbell (trumpet),

regular Rhythm, added Benny Carter, Joe Thomas, and others to the mix. Another session teamed the three kings of stride piano: Fats Waller, James P. Johnson, and Willie "the Lion" Smith. Fats also recorded duets with other vocalists like Una Mae Carlisle, Adelaide Hall, Billy Banks, and his songwriting partner Andy Razaf. That brings us back to the songs, most of which were created by this remarkable songwriting team, which, when it comes to output, can stand right up there with Rogers and Hart, Cole Porter, Harold Arlen and Yip Harberg, and all the greats, although they never made anywhere near the money those other illustrious gentlemen did (and through shady deals with music publishers, they probably lost as many songs as they had published). At the time Jerome Kern was making \$10,000 a week for writing songs for one of the movie studios, Razaf was being paid 10 cents a song by the same studio even though Razaf produced more hit songs than Kern. No wonder one of Razaf's great songs was "What Did I Do to Be so Black and Blue?" He must have wondered.

Finally comes a story Slim Gailliard told me about Fats Waller sometime around 1962. When the California Pacific Expo that took place in San Diego during 1935-1936 was being planned, someone at Bluebird records got the idea that Fats should play the Spreckels' Organ in Balboa Park during the festivities. The performance would come out as a record memorializing the Expo as well as "the World's Largest Outdoor Organ," including an appropriate song with maybe San Diego in the title. So the proposal was made and the City Fathers of San Diego replied that they "didn't want no black man's fingers to touch their organ." So on his next trip to Europe Fats made a point to visit the world's second largest outdoor organ in Tours, France. He arranged to be recorded playing that organ and the record jacket reads "Fats Waller playing the world's second largest outdoor organ in Tours France." Fats made sure that copies were sent to the mayor of San Diego and all relevant people involved. Slim also told me



Lou Curtiss

that sometime in the '50s he'd suggested that he be recorded playing that same organ. He got the same answer.




I encourage you to go see *Ain't Misbehavin'* at the San Diego Rep to enjoy wonderful music from a wonderful era. The '30s wasn't a nice time to live in for a lot of people but they sure did have a way with a song that sort of made up for the egg that Wall Street laid. Go see the other productions at San Diego City College too. You can compare the two and send the your written critique to this publication (info@sandiegotroubadour.com), which they'll send to me. At any rate you'll have done your part and can feel good about yourself.

Recordially,  
Lou Curtiss

John Hamilton (trumpet), Cedric Wallace (string bass), Ray Hogan (trombone), Mezz Mezzrow (clarinet), and Zutty Singleton (drums) over the ten years or so of its existence. (Fats did European trips and recorded some sides for HMV (His Majesty's Voice) that included a "Continental Rhythm" as well. Along with that were organized jam sessions that teamed him with Louis Armstrong, Jack Teagarden, Bud Freeman, and others. There was also a session with his "Rhythm Orchestra," which, along with Sedic, Autrey, Casey, and the

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# MEMORIES OF MERLE

by Lou Curtiss

When I saw Tom Boyer up at the Sam Hinton Folk Heritage Festival in June doing some of that thumb pickin' made famous by all those Kentucky guitarists, it got me to thinking about maybe the most famous of them all: my favorite, Merle Travis. I grew up with Merle's music starting with some of those old Capitol 78 rpm recordings my dad had like "Sweet Temptation," "Dapper Dan," and a couple of others. When I moved to California in 1952, I was pleased to find out that Merle was all over L.A. television with his own show, with Cliffie Stone's *Hometown Jamboree*, and then with *Town Hall Party*. I got to see him in the movie *From Here to Eternity* and quite a few times at San Diego night spots like the Bostonia Ballroom. I even saw him sit in once with the Maddox Brothers and Rose at a club in National City. Merle saw me so many times that he started to recognize me and as I'm always searching for information, I started to ask questions and make notes. I wrote a couple of pieces about him for a high school journalism class and later did a couple of interviews with him backstage at one of the *Town Hall* shows. I got my first reel-to-reel (a Sony) tape recorder around 1956 and my second (a Uher, which was a lot more portable) in 1959. Sometime right about then I got Merle to sit down for an interview.

Later in 1964 I interviewed him again at the Ash Grove in L.A. It was around this time that I got copies of a couple of other interviews with him that were done by some UCLA folks. As part of this digitization project I've been involved in, I've been poking through tapes and writings, and I came across all of the Merle stuff kind of packed together. (I was probably thinking at one point about compiling it into something and just never got around to it.) In addition to what I've already mentioned, Merle appeared at two of the San Diego Folk Festivals, the first time was at the second festival in 1968. On Saturday morning he gave a dynamite guitar workshop, then disappeared and we never saw him again. (Ten years later Smokey Rogers told me that he had met up with Merle at that festival and they went down to Tijuana together.) Merle was part of another Folk Festival a few years later and again, I got Merle backstage for a few questions. So here it is, the Merle Travis Interview. The questions are mostly by me; some are from the UCLA guys and questions about the early stuff are from a couple of high school buddies (maybe Dexter Sykes?). NOTE: folksinger Hedy West was real helpful in getting Merle to do the Ash Grove interview and she may have asked a question or two as well.

### What were your earliest experiences with music and the guitar?

MT: My Dad started me along. He was a coal miner you know, and he picked the five-string banjer. I was nuts about that when I was a kid, that old rappin' style; the college kids all called it frailing. I learned that first when I was about six or seven years old before I ever picked up a guitar. Dad would play tunes like "Jeanie Weaver," "Going Across the Sea," "Ida Red," "Moonlight on the Lake," and a bunch of other pieces. Not a big repertoire of tunes like so many have today – didn't have a whole lot of reason for it, but they could play for hours on end.

### Were there many fiddlers around then?

MT: Oh yeah, I got real hooked on fiddling too. I use to try and play one. There was an old man named Uncle Merit Addison who lived down the road – we lived way down in the woods in Ebenezer, Kentucky. That's where I was raised up. And Uncle Merit played the fiddle. I'd heard him play a couple of times with my Dad and others – I was about 10 years old then, and he was a pretty elderly feller, but I'd go up to him and say, "Uncle Merit, play me one on the fiddle." He'd start to twist his wrist and say, "My ol' wrist ain't as nimble as it used to be, son." But I'd bug him so much, he'd say, "Okay, crawl under the bed and get me up the fiddle." And I'd crawl under the bed and get this old box that looked like a coffin and he'd unhook the latch and boy, would he play, so I decided that I'd be a fiddler just like Uncle Merit. Then my brother Taylor built a guitar and right after that, he moved to Indiana to take a job in a factory – anything beat coal mining. He wrote a letter back and at the end of it, he said, "Give Merle the guitar." After that I took interest in the guitar.

### Were there any guitar players you learned from?

MT: Well, my friend Fuzz Gregory taught me some of the chords on the guitar, at least enough so I could back up my brother John Melvin's banjer pickin'. And then I heard Mose Rager and Ike Everly (the Everly brothers' dad) and saw what they were doing with that thumb and index finger syncopated style, and that's what I had to play. Now, I never took a lesson from either of those guys but I folliered them everywhere they went and just sort of picked it up. I also listened to other guitar pickers around the area, like Lester "Plucker" English who was one of the best backup guys around and knew all those sophisticated "uptown" chords. Colie Addison taught me some tunes and ways of pickin' them that I didn't know, and there was the guy who taught Mose and Ike some, sort of the daddy of the Muhlenberg County guitar style and that would be Kennedy Jones who had played with Arthur Schultz (the black man who Bill Monroe gives credit for being an influence on bluegrass). Jones was among the first to use a thumb pick to play the guitar. He was actually playing the Hawaiian steel when he first started using the thumb pick because he had a blister on his thumb [that was back around 1918], but he found out he got a real good bass accompaniment. Mose Rager says Jones created that multi-finger roll that we all use now.

### Were you listening to records then?

MT: Oh, yeah. We had an old Nick Lucas record that had "Pickin' the Guitar" on one side and "Teasin' the Frets" on the other. I played that record 'til the grooves was near wore off it. And I had records by Chris Bouchillion, the old talkin' blues boy. If you don't pay attention to the jokes he's tellin', you're gonna hear some mighty fine guitar pickin'. I'd listen to the pop records too, along with the country, and I'd learn a tune from the Skillet Lickers one day and maybe Paul Whiteman's Orchestra the next.

### What was your first paying job as a musician?

MT: Well, I was walkin' home from a brush arbor meeting with Mose Rager's younger

brother J.R. and his cousin Guy Lester, and right outside the home of Billy Bridges, the operator of the Black Diamond Mining Company. Guy starts singing the old pop song "Shine on Harvest Moon." Well, all the lights came on, and I figured we was all going to have to run, but ol' Billy came out and thanked us and gave each one of us 50 cents. So I figured, well, maybe there's something more than a good time to this here makin' music, and I judged that that was one kind of life I wanted to have.

### Well how did you start in as a professional musician?

MT: I started out local playin' at play parties and dances. I quit school after the eighth grade. It was during the Depression and I figured I had to start makin' my own way. My folks weren't none too happy about that, but by 1935 I was out hoppin' freight trains and playing on street corners to make some money. I'd seen Clayton MacMichen and his Georgia Wildcats a few times and even got to know Carl Cotner who played in the band and wanted me to but that hadn't happened yet. I went up to Evansville, Indiana, to visit my brother Taylor and hooked up with a band called the Tennessee Tomcats and played on the radio for the first time, WEBS in Evansville. I made about 30 cents a show and lived on nickel hamburgers and orange pop. Didn't last with them long. I moved on to the Knox County Knockabouts and briefly with a group called the Drifting Pioneers. Finally, I got news from my Mother at home that a telegram had come from MacMichen to meet him in Columbus, Ohio, on March first. That was 1937.

### What was it like playing and working with MacMichen?

MT: Well, he called me Ridgerunner and always gave me a featured tune on the show, something like "Tiger Rag" or "I'll See You in my Dreams." When Riley Puckett [the blind singer guitarist who had worked with MacMichen in the Skillet Lickers back in the 1920s and early 1930s] came out with us for a show it was my job to sort of be his lead man and help him get around. That was okay with me since here was another guitar man I'd listened to on records for years and now I got to see and pick with him in person. I've found that every guitar picker I've ever known had something I could learn from. I don't think you ever stop learning how to pick a guitar. A lot has been made of me working with Mac, but actually I didn't stay with him very long, only a few months, and by late summer I was back in Evansville with the Drifting Pioneers. I think the reason so much has been made of my time with Mac is because of that real good band picture we had taken with my old Gretsch Model-30 guitar in it. That photo has been in more picture books and magazine articles than you could shake a stick at.

### What was your first big Barn Dance show?

MT: Well, the Driftin' Pioneers first tried to get it goin' in Chicago. We were a pretty good band with fiddler Sleepy Martin, mandolin player Walter Brown and his brother Bill on the bass, and me on guitar. We just never seemed to get beyond the guest shot stage in that city, but Bob Atcher, who we got to know pretty well, phoned George Biggar at WLW in Cincinnati, Ohio, and they were set-



Merle Travis

tin' up a new barn dance show named after the Kentucky county across the Ohio River from Cincinnati and that's how we got on the *Boone County Jamboree*. That was in 1939 and along with us they had Lazy Jim Day, Captain Stubby and his Buccaners, Ma and Pa McCormick, Hugh Cross, Shug Fisher and his Radio Pals, Helen Diller, and Georgia Brown. Then later on Joe Maphis, the Delmore Brothers, Bradley Kincaid, Grandpa Jones, Ramona Riggins [later Jones after she married Grandpa], Curly Fox and Texas Ruby, Roy Starkey the singing cowboy, and a young man from California named Wesley Tuttle who became a friend for life.

### When did you first hear Joe Maphis and what did you think of him?

MT: Fastest hands in the business. I don't

think he'll ever be equaled in that department. I first heard Joe when he was with Sunshine Sue Workman at WRVA in Richmond, Virginia. I'd listen to him every opportunity I got. When he came to WLW in 1943 or so, I found out he'd been listening to me on WLW. We struck up a friendship right away.

### How long did you stay with the Drifting Pioneers?

MT: We were together for seven years, most of that time on the *Jamboree*. The war – like it did all things about that time – broke up the group, but I stayed with the *Jamboree* as a solo act and with Grandpa Jones and the Delmore Brothers as the Browns Ferry Four,

Merle Travis, continued on page 20.

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# Carolyn Hester: Folk Music's Real Deal

by Paul Hornick

Carolyn Hester has spent her life with a guitar strapped over her shoulder. Through concert tours, television appearances, fame, notoriety, and all the bumps and ups and downs of a life on stage, she has held on to what she loves the most: folk music.

Hester grew up in Waco, Texas in a family of music enthusiasts. As a teen and particularly by the time she was 16 when her family moved to Denver, she always had music flowing around in her head, songs from Broadway musicals, the rock 'n' roll music that her contemporaries were going wild for, and the country music that her father encouraged her to pursue. The tunes that ultimately came to her were the folk tunes that her high clear soprano seemed the most suited for.

Impressed with the Roses, a local band she saw on television, Hester's mother sent a penny postcard to the band's manager, Norman Petty, and told him about her daughter and how talented she was. Surprisingly, Petty called and expressed interest in hearing Hester. In 1957 Petty produced Hester's first recording, *Scarlet Ribbons*.

Hester knew that her horizons were going to be broad. "I was inspired by the Nancy Drew books and some of the strong female characters I saw in the movies. I saw myself in that role as a woman who dares to go outside her sphere," she said in a recent interview. Forgoing a safe and easy path of a scholarship to the University of Denver, Hester set out for New York City to pursue folk singing. She landed in that swath of land, filled with guitars and stretching all the way from Harvard Yard to Blecker Street, and the great folk revival. For Hester the exciting zeitgeist was liberating. She said, "I began to see that in folk music there are definite patterns to follow, but I began to see that you weren't confined to tradition, that there was all this freedom to go in different directions."

At her mother's bidding, she studied acting at the American Theatre Wing, but recognition came to her music. Hester was signed to Columbia Records and released several recordings on that label. She appeared on national television shows such as "Folk Songs, Folk Songs, and More Folk Songs." And the *Saturday Evening Post* featured her on a May 1964 cover, in a story about the "Folk Music Fad."

She was also instrumental in another folksinger's career. "I was making my

third record for Columbia. My father had played harmonica on my first record. For this record I told Bob Dylan that I could use a harmonica player." It was in these recording sessions that the influential record producer John Hammond noticed the young troubadour and considered recording him on his own.

"This was also when the Vietnam War and civil rights came along," Hester notes. And anybody who remembers those heady days will tell you that for that for quite a few years folk music and progressive politics virtually became one. Hester was politicized, leading a boycott of the folk music television show "Hootenanny" when the show banned Pete Seeger, Hester's personal hero, from their stage. "I had been on the first show with the Limelighters, and it was a difficult thing to do," Hester remembers. "Pete liked the show and didn't want us to boycott it for him, but I thought that it was important for us to stand up for the one person who caused us to be folk singers." She thinks that these political moves may have hurt her career.

Hester released a couple of records in the late sixties in which she broadened her approach to include folk rock. These recordings, now rare and expensive, are considered psychedelic by many. When we talked about these records Hester laughed. "Me, psychedelic?" she says, and then laughs again.

In 1969 Hester married her second husband David Blume. (Hester was briefly married to writer/folksinger/wunderkind Richard Fariña in the early sixties.) Blume had written the hit single released by the Cyrle called "Turn Down Day" and was an A&R man for Paramount Records.

Thinking that they were going to start a performance club for jazz and folk music, the couple bought Café Danssa, famous as the club where Dani Dassa, Lord of Israeli dancing, taught Anthony Quinn how to dance for his role in the movie *Zorba the Greek*. "We thought we would stay with the place and see how it went for a few months," says Hester. Although they occasionally held jazz and folk concerts at the venue, the café remained largely a place for folk dancing, and the couple ran the club for 31 years. "We had Ukrainian folk dance, Mongolian folk dance... I think we had everything!" says Hester. She had wanted to sell the

Photo: Steve Covault



Hester and daughters, Karla and Amy Blume, at the 2006 Adams Ave. Roots Festival



Hester in 1962



Bruce Langhorne, Hester, Bob Dylan, and Bill Lee (Spike Lee's father), at a recording session in New York City, 1961

club after Bloom's death last year but was unable to find a buyer. The club closed earlier this year.

Although Hester performed at one of the famous Newport Folk Festivals,

Photo: Jim Dirden



Carolyn Hester today



On the cover of the *Saturday Evening Post*, May 30, 1964

honest smile. Yes, she's still pretty. And she's still a dynamic performer, although now she appears with her daughters Karla and Amy Blume. A proud mother, Hester tells of Karla's second college degree in science and Amy's work in ecology. "And they're both writers. I think they're both geniuses like their father," she says. "And playing music with them is my favorite thing to do now."

Even today Hester is still a true blue folk revivalist. "I'm not a radical," she says. "But I think the values and views of the sixties make sense. And I still love the music."

See Carolyn Hester in concert on Friday, November 2 in the Smith Recital Hall (across the way from the Powell Theatre) on the SDSU campus. Doors open at 6:45pm; concert starts at 7pm. Allen Singer and Chris Clarke will open. Advance tickets (\$10) can be purchased at [www.carolynhester.com](http://www.carolynhester.com).

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# MICHELE LUNDEEN

## Keeping the Legacy of the Blues Alive

by Steve Thorn

For San Diego's Michele Lundeen, the blues are about yesterday, today, and tomorrow. She reveres those artists who came before her, performs the blues herself with great passion on concert stages today, and is adamant this great genre in American music inspires others after her career concludes.

It is in the area of passing the torch onto future generations where Lundeen has devoted herself to bringing the blues to San Diego's youth. Lundeen's participation in the Blues in the Schools (BITS) program has been rewarding for both the singer and the kids.

"The BITS program has been around for many years," said Lundeen. "It was conceived in 1978 by Chicago musician Billy Branch. The program has evolved around the country as an educational project for school-age children. It teaches them all aspects of the blues as an American art form, including such topics as the history of the blues; famous blues musicians; different styles of blues; and writing, singing, and performing the blues. BITS is fostered by the Blues Foundation, the umbrella organization for all the blues societies in the world who provide direction, suggestions, and lesson plans. Locally, Blues Lovers United of San Diego (BLUSD), a non-profit 501(c)3 community organization, began utilizing a similar platform around 1999. Our ongoing lesson plan is created with the help of credentialed educators to incorporate into our performance workshops of live music and storytelling."

Lundeen mentioned how "satisfying it is to see children's faces light up as they learn about blues roots and lore, hands-on rhythms, singalongs (call and

response), making up songs, and much more. The biggest joy for me is being able to hopefully help build their confidence through personal expression while showing how one can overcome adversity with music. With the lack of arts and music cutbacks in schools, I believe it's imperative to offer positive alternatives. I can't imagine what my life would have been without music and art in school."

Photo: Paul Grupp



Raised in Oakland, Lundeen grew up in a family where listening to and performing music was encouraged. Her first singing partner was her older sister.

"The songs my sister Cherie and I sang at a talent show when I was in third or fourth grade was "You, You, You" by the Ames Brothers and the hit "Tonight You Belong to Me" by Patience and Prudence. My sister and I harmonized well together and sang popular songs of the day by Neil Sedaka and the Everly

Brothers at family picnics. My mother had lots of Hawaiian and African-style drums albums around the house so we were always dancing like crazy, and she even had some Mahalia Jackson. On the radio we were hearing Harry Belafonte, Rosemary Clooney, Gale Storm, and Peggy Lee. My mother sang stuff around the house like "Come-on-a-My-House" and we had Maguire Sisters paperdolls! I liked Brenda Lee, Teresa Brewer, and Connie Francis. In junior high I discovered Ike and Tina Turner and was turned on."

Without leaving her living room, Lundeen traveled the musical road map of popular music, listening to Ray Charles, the Righteous Brothers, Jackie Wilson, Sam Cooke, Conway Twitty, Bobby Darin, Ben E. King, Little Richard, Jerry Lee Lewis, James Brown, and Elvis. Also leaving a mark were female solo artists-girl groups (Little Eva, Doris Troy, Skeeter Davis, Dusty Springfield, the Shirelles and the Paris Sisters, Martha and the Vandellas) and music of the British Invasion (the Animals, Rolling Stones).

Janis Joplin and the Queen of Soul, Aretha Franklin, also had a tremendous impact. "When Aretha Franklin came out with "I Ain't Never Loved a Man," I went nuts," said Lundeen. "It was right up my alley. Later still I got into Sly and the Family Stone, Linda Ronstadt, Bonnie Raitt, Joan Baez, then old [records by] Patsy Cline, Hank Williams, Lavern Baker, Dinah Washington, and Etta James. I've been inspired by a variety of folk music from Americana, Irish, English, hillbilly, Middle Eastern, you name it. Music moves my soul."

With the eclecticism which was 20th century popular music, how did Lundeen settle down and decide on the blues?

"I got turned onto Jimmy Reed and



Michele Lundeen

Bobby Blue Bland by some lowrider, biker friends as a younger, slightly wayward girl. Those, and the artists I heard on Wolfman Jack's radio show, made an indelible impression on me." Lundeen said her first professional performance was with a big band out of Reno. "I got the gig from my sister and had to learn a variety of standards. I really liked it because it challenged me, plus I always have those songs in my back pocket now. I sang several of them "bluesier" than the band leader liked. I also did several numbers in the key of B<sup>b</sup>, what he used to call a "hillbilly" key. Huh? Well, he was an accordion player!



Lundeen (left) with Candye Kane (center) and Sue Palmer at CityFest. Photo by Chet Cannon.

"Not long afterward, I found bands off the local music store bulletin board. At the time [early '80s] it was country rock, swing, rock, rockabilly, and R&B." In the early '90s Lundeen said she began to "frequent a blues-type jam at a local club and met my soon-to-be guitarist who played a fabulous Gibson. We ended up starting up a blues jam at another club and I began tuning into more and more bluesy numbers, mixing it up with R&B, soul, and a little swing, which I still do. A group of us founded the Reno Blues Society (RBS). I guess that's when I became a complete convert to the 'what-when-why-where-wild' world of blues. I was fascinated with its history, the intense variety of blues artists that I'd never even heard of, and the fact that there was this huge 'family' of blues lovers around the globe. I gained a huge respect for the genre as I delved into its roots.

"Blues has literally become part of my life. Blues lets us know that we are human. It's an honest expression from the heart, good, bad, or even funny. I feel I'm an honest person, heart on my sleeve.... I live to share and am passionate about it. Blues seems natural. I feel blessed."

Blessed – and duly acknowledged for her talents – Lundeen was a nominee for Best Blues Artist at the 2007 San Diego Music Awards. In 2000, Lundeen and her band, Blues Streak, won the San Diego Blues Challenge and became the city's musical ambassadors for the Blues Foundation's International Blues Challenge in Memphis in 2001. Blues Streak's lineup revolves around musicians Reuben Vigil (guitar), Tim Cash or Len Rainey (bass/vocals), Walter Gentry (sax/vocals), Ric Lee or Tony Peterson (drums), and John Chambers (keyboards). Lundeen has performed at concerts, sharing the bill with veteran British road warrior Kim Simmonds and his latest incarnation of Savoy Brown, John Lee

Hooker, and Queen Ida.

The constant perfecting of her craft was rewarded when Lundeen released her own independent CD, *Song Inside Me*, in 2004. Under the steady guidance of producer and veteran musician Johnny "V" Vernazza (Elvin Bishop Band), *Song Inside Me* is chock full of talented session personnel, including slide guitar ace Roy Rogers, keyboardist Austin Delone, and San Diego's queen of boogie woogie, Sue Palmer. The listener can expect not to hear another round of "Well, I woke up this morning..." Instead, there are a dozen songs (nine penned by Lundeen) that are different variations of the blues, from James Brown-style funk ("Blues Is a Feeling"), swamp rock (Lavelle White's "Voodoo Man"), Memphis soul (O.V. Wright's "You're Gonna Make Me Cry"), and the Billie Holiday-inspired torch number "No Money, No Honey." The sound of the compact disc is surprisingly warm and clear, perhaps the closest a recording studio performance can come to on an evening with Ms. Lundeen at the Belly Up Tavern or Humphrey's Backstage.

When Lundeen isn't working with budding young talent in San Diego schools, performing on stage somewhere in the county or visualizing the inevitable follow-up to *Song Inside Me*, she is busy at a drafting table as a graphic artist. She does see a connection between singing and drawing.

"I majored in art – then partying – at Fullerton Junior College. At the time I didn't know about graphics or computers but I knew I wanted to make a living sharing art in some fashion someday, somehow. I eventually worked in print shops as a layout/paste-up person. Mind you, this was before computers were prevalent at all, so it was much different. I've had my own, one-woman graphics design/print brokering business since 1985. I juggled this with raising two children and my music career. As a graphics person I've been able to create all the while learning for myself as well as blues-related business. I'm the founding and current editor of the RBS (music paper) and former editor of Blues Lovers United of San Diego. Many don't realize that I've devoted over a decade to promoting other artists, but I honestly love it and feel honored that I can help in this way. I'm also the editor of a nationally distributed annual magazine called the *Blues Festival Guide*, which was the proud recipient of the Blues Foundation's 2006 Keeping the Blues Alive award for Print Media.

"As far as graphic art and music? I love to create, explore, and share and much of it is improvised, which I think is a good thing."



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# Ray Brandes: A Matter of Time



Ray Brandes

by Bart Mendoza

During the early 1980s, San Diego's music community produced a number of artists whose impact is still felt today. Some, like Mojo Nixon and the late Buddy Blue, remain household names at home. Others have kept a lower local profile, ultimately finding their greatest success abroad. Such is the case with Ray Brandes.

Although born in Tucson in 1962, Brandes' major role in San Diego's music history is indisputable. In addition to more than two decades of his own music, he has served as both a conduit for local talent and a crucial lynch pin when it comes to the overseas reputation of our local music scene. I've been a fan of his since his earliest days on San Diego stages and have since had the pleasure of sharing several musical adventures with him over the decades. His dedication to music, especially his songcraft, is inspiring.

Brandes' accomplishments are particularly amazing when you take into account that he has been a teacher in San Diego for the past 18 years, with stints at Point Loma High School, San Diego School for the Creative and Performing Arts, Montgomery Middle School, and, currently, San Diego Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical High School. He and his wife, Raquel (whom he met while on tour in Spain), have a son, Lucas.

Though Brandes' musical beginnings stem from the earliest days of the local mod scene, Brandes is no one-trick pony. His oeuvre includes everything from garage-punk to country rockers, with a lot of great stuff in between.

Brandes arrived in San Diego as a toddler in 1963. By the time he was a student at Point Loma High School he had begun to play with various combos, performing at friends' parties. Graduating in 1980, within months of leaving school he had formed his first real combo, the Hedgehogs. With a repertoire based on the Beatles' *Live at the Star Club* set list, the band included future all-stars Ron Silva (the Crawdaddys/the Saturn V), Paul Carsola (the Tell-Tale Hearts), and Carl Rusk (the Nashville Ramblers). A big hit on the then burgeoning teen dance circuit, no official recordings were made, but live tapes do circulate.

The Hedgehogs faded quickly as the various band members began to concentrate on their own projects and by 1982, Brandes had joined the Mystery Machine. The band was led by Rusk, though Brandes sang, with Mark Zadarnowski (the Crawdaddys/the Shambles), Bill Calhoun, and David Klowden (both in the Tell-Tale Hearts) also aboard. Though the band only played three



The Tell-Tale Hearts: Brandes on far left

shows before splitting, they would provide Brandes with the first notch on his discography in 1983 when their song "She's Not Mine," a minor-key gem that crosses the Zombies with the Everly Brothers, was released on Voxx Records *Battle of the Garages Vol. 3*.

Within the year Brandes founded the Tell-Tale Hearts, a 1960s-influenced punk/rhythm and blues band, with Calhoun and Klowden, alongside Mike Stax (the Loons/the Hoods) and Eric Bacher. The band was instantly a big local draw, opening up for the Red Hot Chili Peppers, the Cramps, and Jesus and Mary Chain. They also made several local TV appearances well worth seeking out, including dance segments on retro-classic "It's Happening" and a pair of songs on a Cox Cable local band showcase. Considered among the leaders of the garage rock movement, the group even appeared in *People* magazine, but surprisingly, save for a short jaunt to Springfield, Missouri, they never toured. They did, however, sign with Voxx Records to release a self-titled album in 1985 and an EP, *The Now Sound*, in 1986. Tracks from both releases were also compiled for a French release that year and a single, "Too Many Lovers," was released in Australia in 1987, but the original line-up of the group soon split.

His next group, the Town Criers, was on stage within weeks of the Tell-Tale Hearts (mach 1) parting ways. This time out Brandes mixed folk-rock with country influences. The rotating line up included Klowden and Zadarnowski and recorded, though nothing has been released from those sessions. This group lasted through 1990, at which time he began concentrating on solo work.

A short detour occurred when he became a founding member of the Shambles late that year, alongside Klowden, Zadarnowski, and Kevin Donaker-Ring (Manual Scan). In addition to local shows, the band toured England in 1992 with the group (I joined the band just prior to this tour) and released three songs, including his "Stuck on the Inside." The following year the band inked with Susstones Records, releasing "Fire," which was backed with Paul Revere & the Raiders' "Louise," sung by Brandes. He taped several other tunes with the band, all eventually released and re-issued several times during the ensuing years, but he soon returned to his solo career.

The mid-1990s saw a mini-revival of interest in the Tell-Tale Hearts, with demand for their music, particularly in Europe and Australia, at a fever pitch. While the group only reunited for a handful of shows, a string of discs was released, including a best of CD from Voxx, *High Tide*

(*Big Noses & Pizza Faces*). A vinyl bootleg of the album was also issued by the mysterious Tapir Records. In 1997 a pair of live albums, recorded in 1985 during their Missouri trip, were also released.

Wonderfully capturing the excitement of their concerts, *Live in Springfield Vol. 1* and *Vol. 2* are also notable for their "Simpsons"-style depictions of the band on the cover.

All of this activity coincided with Brandes' first release under his own name, *The Lonely Sock*, via former Crawdaddy keyboardist Keith Fisher's label, Spun, in 1995. Followed by a single, "Monkey Planet" (also available on 1997's *Staring at the Sun Vol. 4*), Brandes began to draw international attention as a solo performer. In 1998 he signed with Snap!! Records, based in Madrid. The label released his second album, *Continental Drifter*, in 1999, which received a nomination for Best Pop Album at that year's San Diego Music Awards. Brandes toured Spain alongside myself and backing band Los Impossibles, which resulted in immediately putting together another tour of that country, this time under the name the Riot Act.

Billed as a San Diego all-star group, the group included Brandes and myself, as well as Hector Peñalosa (the Zeros), Victor Peñalosa (the Melanies), and Peter Meisner (the Crawdaddys). The group also played a few shows around Southern California and released a single, "This Town"/"Tried So Hard" (without my participation) on Snap!! Records later that year. The latter was released under Brandes' name on the Gene Clark tribute album, *Full Circle*, in 2000. That same year, Spain's Munster Records re-issued the Tell-Tale Hearts' single "Too Many Lovers," and Brandes took part in a loose collective of area musicians, including A.J. Croce, Mike Kamoo, myself, the Peñalosa Brothers, and Billy Lovcki (the Cables), backing Rachael Gordon for a series of recordings under the moniker the Very Idea. These have been reissued numerous times in Spain, Germany, and Japan, with Gordon recording a cover of his song "I know You're in Love Again" on her debut album, *The Coming of Spring*.

In 2002, Brandes released his third CD, *The Rise and Fall of Ray Brandes*, again via Snap!! Records. While Brandes has recorded at least another album's worth of material since then, work and married life have taken precedent and live shows have become a rarity. The exceptions have come via a pair of unofficial Tell-Tale Hearts reunions, both sans at least one original member, including a 2003 impromptu set at the Ken Club and a festival date in Spain in 2005. Confirming his status as a local music icon, on March 9, 2006, legendary author Paul Williams penned an article for the *San Diego Reader*, detailing the connection between San Diego musicians and Spain,

with Brandes as the main interviewee.

While Brandes now considers himself retired from the music scene, 2007 is proving to be a banner year for him. The Tell-Tale Hearts regrouped, with all original members, last month for a pair of headline shows at the Casbah and the Adams Avenue Street Fair respectively. Meanwhile, Spain's *Ansia de Color* magazine and Italy's *Misty Lane* magazine published retrospectives on the band, the latter including a previously unreleased vintage live track on an accompanying CD. More important, this month, Spain's Party Line Records releases *A Matter of Time: The Best of Ray Brandes*. Available at all of the usual online locations and local

shops, the album takes in 24 tracks from nearly all phases of Brandes' career, with cooperation from all the various labels. Some tracks make their first appearance on CD, but long-time fans will be most thrilled to hear three unreleased tracks that close the disc.

With a little luck, this compilation should do wonders for bringing the spotlight to Brandes' work. A songwriter and musician of his talent deserves to be heard by a wider audience. If the current spate of activity does prove to be Brandes' music biz swan song, it will cap a career that's been nothing short of spectacular. But here's hoping he still has a few aces left up his sleeve. [www.myspace.com/raybrandes](http://www.myspace.com/raybrandes)

## RAY BRANDES COMPLETE DISCOGRAPHY

### RAY BRANDES ALBUMS

- 1995: *The Lonely Sock* (Spun 29401-2/CD/US)
- 12/98: *Continental Drifter* (Spain/Snap/CD)
- 2002: *The Rise and Fall of Ray Brandes* (Spain/Snap/CD)
- 10/07: *Ray Brandes Anthology* (Party Line/VACD/Spain)

### SINGLES

- "Monkey Planet"/"Now That I Have Seen Your Face" (Spun 1417-S/45PS/US)

### COMPILATIONS

- 1994: *Staring at the Sun III - "Popular"*
  - 1998: *Staring at the Sun IV - "Monkey Planet"*
  - 1999: *Ninth Annual San Diego Music Awards* (SLAMM009/VACD/US): "Walking Tall"
  - 2000: *Full Circle: A Tribute to Gene Clark* (Not Lane/VACD/US): "Tried So Hard" Same recording used on the Riot Act single.
- ### MYSTERY MACHINE LPs
- 1984: *Battle of the Garages Vol.3* (Voxx/US) & other groups
- ### CDs
- 1996: *Destination Bomp* (Bomp/US) & other groups
  - Battle of the Garages Vol. 2* (Voxx/CD/US) & other groups
  - Roots of Powerpop* (Bomp/US) & other groups

### THE TELL-TALE HEARTS ALBUMS

- 2/85: *The Tell-Tale Hearts* (Voxx 200.027/LP/USA)
- 11/86: *The Now Sound of...* (Voxx 200.036/LP/USA, 6-song 12")
- 1986: *The Tell-Tale Hearts* (Lolita, France) Includes tracks from above two releases.
- 1994: *High Tide* (*Big Noses & Pizza Faces*) (Voxx, CD anthology)
- High Tide* (*Big Noses & Pizza Faces*) (vinyl bootleg-less tracks: Tapir Records)
- 1997: *Live in Springfield Vol. 1* (rec. 1985) (Corduroy, Australia)
- 1997: *Live in Springfield Vol. 2* (Corduroy, Australia)

### SINGLES

- 1987: "Promise"/"Too Many Lovers" (Kavern 7, Australia) Blue tint cover.
- 1990: "Take a Look Inside"/"I'm Ready" (Nevermore, USA)
- 1992: "Circus Mind"/"Flying" (Nevermore, USA) (rec. 1989)
- 2000: "Promise"/"Too Many Lovers" (Munster, Spain, reissue) Purple tint cover.

### COMPILATIONS

- 1984: *Battle of the Garages Vol. 3* (Voxx, USA): "My World Is Upside Down"
- 1984: *Garage Sale* (Roir, cassette, USA): "That's Your Problem"
- 1984: *99th Floor* Fanzine Flexi (1984): "I Get Up in the Morning"
- Sound Affects* (cassette): "Nothin' You Can Do"
- 1989: *Oh God! My Mom's on Channel 10!* (Nardwuar, Canada): "I Get Up in the Morning"
- 1989: *Misfit: A Tribute to the Outsiders* (Screaming Apple, Germany): "Daddy Died on Saturday"
- 1996: *Destination Bomp* (Bomp/CD/US) "Just a Matter of Time"
- 1996: *Not So Pretty* (Pretty Things Tribute LP/ Corduroy, Australia): "Me Needing You"
- Be a Caveman* (Voxx/CD/US): "It's Not Me"
- What the Fuzz* (Wild6T's/Cass/UK)
- 2007: *Children of Nuggets* (Rhino /4CDVA/US): "Won't Need Yours"
- 2007: *Misty Lane* (Misty Lane/VACD/Italy) Live.

### THE SHAMBLES SINGLES

- 7/93: "(She's Used to Playing with) Fire"/"Louise" (US/Susstones 537/PS 45) First pressing.
- 6/94: "(She's Used to Playing with) Fire"/"Louise" (US/Prospective 537/PS 45) Second pressing, now on different label.
- 10/95: "Fire" (US Prospective 537/PS 45) Third pressing with see through black vinyl.

- 5/95: *Original Tangent* (US/Gouramie 105/PS Blue Vinyl EP) "I Can't Don't Want to Faster..." "Stuck on the Inside," "Thin Lines"

### ALBUMS

- 8/96: *Clouds All Day* (US/Blindspot 10/CD): "Thin Lines," "Original Tangent"
- 12/96: *Reviving Spark* (Japan/1+2 087/CD): "(She's Used to Playing with) Fire"/"Louise," "You Make Me Feel Good," "What Went Wrong"
- 12/96: *Clouds All Day* (Spain/Snap/CD): "Thin Lines," "Original Tangent," plus bonus tracks: "Innocence Becomes You" (4-trk demo), "All the Love" (4-trk demo), "I've Just Seen a Face" (home tape)
- 12/98: *Clouds All Day* (Spain/Snap/CD) Second pressing of Spanish edition, different tray card
- 6/00: *What You're Missing* (Spain/Snap/CD): "(She's Used to Playing With) Fire," Medley: "Of Heart and Soul," "For Jamie," "Stuck on the Inside"
- 5/01: *What You're Missing* (Spain/Snap/CD) Reissue with the color of the cover, tray card, and disc artwork now blue. Changes to the booklet include the photos on page 6-7
- 4/03: *Chelsea Smiles* (Spain/Snap/CD): "Truly" (demo)

- 4/93: *Staring at the Sun Vol. 2* (US/Blindspot 002/VA CD): "Thin Lines"
- 4/93: *That Sounds Like Fun Vol. 1* (Spain/Snap 001/VA Cassette): "Just a Matter of Time" (Live)
- 1/95: *Sounds of Snap* (Spain/Snap 003/VA PS7 EP): "Original Tangent" (remake) Blue cover.
- 5/95: *Symphphony* (US/Not Lane 034/VA CD, 2 pressings): Medley: "Of Heart and Soul," "For Jamie," "Original Tangent" (remake)
- 1/96: *Sounds of Snap* (Spain/Snap 003/VA PS7 EP): "Original Tangent" (remake) Red cover.

### COMPILATIONS

- 8/92: *Staring at the Sun Vol. 1* (US/Blindspot 001/VA CD): Medley: "Of Heart and Soul," "For Jamie," "Original Tangent," "Stuck on the Inside"
  - 4/93: *Staring at the Sun Vol. 1* (US/Blindspot 002/VA CD): "Thin Lines"
  - 4/93: *That Sounds Like Fun Vol. 1* (Spain/Snap 001/VA Cassette): "Just a Matter of Time" (Live)
  - 1/95: *Sounds of Snap* (Spain/Snap 003/VA PS7 EP): "Original Tangent" (remake) Blue cover.
  - 5/95: *Symphphony* (US/Not Lane 034/VA CD, 2 pressings): Medley: "Of Heart and Soul," "For Jamie," "Original Tangent" (remake)
  - 1/96: *Sounds of Snap* (Spain/Snap 003/VA PS7 EP): "Original Tangent" (remake) Red cover.
- ### VIDEO
- 1994: *Racing Video* (US/VHS Video) "Fire" (Alt version Inst.)
  - 6/00: *VespAmerica Video* (US/VHS Video) Thin Lines
  - 11/00: *Knight's of Fuzz* (CD-ROM) No music but entries on the Tell-Tale Hearts, Mystery Machine, and the Shambles.

### RACHAEL GORDON AND THE VERY IDEA ALBUMS

- Rachael Gordon (Subterranean/LP/Germany) *Coming of Spring* - Ray wrote "I Know You're in Love Again" and plays on that track as well as "Fun at Your House."
- Rachael Gordon (Subterranean/CD/Germany) *Coming of Spring* - as above
- Rachael Gordon (Wizzard In Vinyl/CD/Japan) *Rock 'n' Roll Girl* - Ray plays guitar on "Fun at Your House" and "And Sometimes," each with both demo and finished versions here.

### COMPILATIONS

- Pop Greetings: California* (Yesterday Girl/Sweden) Rachael Gordon: "Fun at Your House" (remake)
- San Diego Music Awards 2000* (SLAAM/US) Rachael Gordon: "Sense of Perception" (remake)
- Moloko* (Germany/VACD+) 2002 Rachael Gordon: "Fun at Your House" (remake) This is a freebie CD of various artists, given with copies of German magazine *Moloko*

### SINGLES

- Rachael Gordon and the Very Idea (Snap 7002/PS 7" EP/Spain) "And Sometimes" (Version 2)/"Fun at Your House" (Version 2)
- Rachael Gordon and the Very Idea (Snap 7002/PS 7" EP/Spain) Blue vinyl promo of above.

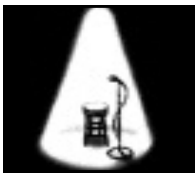
### RIOT ACT SINGLES

- "This Town"/"Tried So Hard" (Snap! Records/45PS/US)
- "This Town"/"Tried So Hard" (Snap! Records/45PS Burgundy vinyl promo/US)

### VIDEO

- 6/00: *VespAmerica Video* (US/VHS Video) Brief footage of the band playing live is included.





Story by Paul Hormick  
Photos by Steve Covault & Paul Hormick

Daniel Jackson agreed to talk to me, to tell me of his life and music, at a coffee shop where he often plays in the impromptu jazz jams. We set our meeting time a couple hours before the jam and, not wanting Jackson to wait for me, I arrived early. When I walked into the café there was a small crowd, mostly mellow aging hippies who were listening to Joe Rathburn. Rathburn shared the stage with a friend of his, and the two swapped songs and stories. The doors and windows were open to let the breeze in. The afternoon was warm and had that lazy summer feel.

I had met Jackson years ago, at one of the jazz classes that he used to hold downtown. At the class we hadn't really talked much. He told me that he was from La Jolla; I told him that I was from West Virginia; and that was about it. Besides that one encounter, we had never spoken to each other. I had seen him perform, so I knew what he looked like, and I thought that I'd introduce myself when I saw him walk in. With a smoothie in hand, some sort of mambo berry concoction, I kept an eye on the door.

Rathburn's friend was singing a song about traveling through Mexico when a voice behind me said, "Paul?" I turned around. It was Jackson. How did he get here? No one had walked through the café's door. He looked at me in a knowing way, amused at my befuddlement. How did he know it was me? He nodded and smiled in a way that lets me know that he understands that I'm flummoxed.

Jackson and I take a couple of seats outside. Dusk approached with a light breeze picking up from time to time, and I continued on my smoothie. Jackson is a slight man; his frame failed to fill up the chair in which he sat, and he shifted in it to one side. The hair was short and gray, and he had a hint of a moustache. He wore a short-sleeved print shirt and the coolest pair of sunglasses, something you'd expect Arnold to wear in the next *Terminator* sequel. As he told me about his life and his music, the staff was solicitous in a dozen ways, checking with him often to see if he wanted anything from the coffee bar.

There are a good number of top-notch jazz musicians in San Diego, people who

play at an exceptional level. But it's only a handful of folks who are distinguished by extraordinary abilities and a life history full of notable music, who can tell you about when bop was still thriving, or what 42nd Street was like in its heyday. Daniel Jackson is one of these men.

If you've been around San Diego for any length of time and been the slightest bit aware of the local music scene, you'd be familiar with Fro Brigham. Along with the opera and symphony he was an institution, a band-leader whose knowledge of American standards was encyclopedic; I never knew him to turn down a request. He fronted the Preservation Band until his death in 1996. Jackson's older brother was a pianist who played with Brigham back in the late forties and early fifties. "My brother was not a soloist, but he could play chord comping so beautifully," Jackson says, as his hands move over an imaginary keyboard to accentuate his point.

The band rehearsed at the Jackson household, giving the young Daniel plenty of exposure to music. Among the members of the band was Harold Land, who was later to become one of the country's top bop sax players and jazz educators. Jackson remembered, "One day Harold Land was there rehearsing at the house. Harold was like Coltrane. Whenever he played, he played these long solos. It wasn't because he was trying to please anybody. It's because he was trying to work out something. You know, finish what he was trying to say, musically. Listening to him, I decided right then and there that the saxophone was going to be my medium of expression. I liked the sound. The vibration. It was melodic. So I asked my mother if I could have a saxophone. I believe it was that next Christmas that I got one. I played it that day."

After high school Jackson joined the Air Force, in hopes of seeing other shores. For better or worse, he never made it overseas; the military kept him stateside, shipping him off to Illinois. "I thought 'I don't like this country. I don't like America, so I want to go somewhere else.' I went in with the idea in mind that they were going to send me to Japan. See, they don't tell you that they aren't going to send you where you want to go," he says.

After basic training in San Francisco Jackson was stationed in Rantoul, Illinois, a small dot on the map about 40 miles south of Champagne. This was the San Diego native's first experience with real snow and ice. One day, in the black part of town, Jackson walked into the VFW and found perhaps something that may have not been there for him had he gone overseas: a jam session. And not just a jam session, but a noteworthy jam session that included Joe Farrell and Wes Montgomery before either had gained any fame.

He had studied the saxophone through private lessons during his high school years, and Jackson had been exposed to jazz through his brother's band. (By the way, through the years he has picked up the

piano, flute, and piccolo.) But it was in these Rantoul jam sessions that Jackson honed his skills as a jazz musician. I asked him how someone, with no formal training in the genre, learns to play jazz by attending a jam session. Jackson looks at me like I've just asked a fish where he learned to swim.

"I came back to San Diego and I got a job with Sears," Jackson says, recalling his life after the military. "I worked as a janitor in their warehouse. Then I get this phone call. It's Lenny McBrowne from Brooklyn. He says, 'I'm looking for a tenor player to go with me to Denver.' I would be taking Harold Land's place." Jackson made it to Denver to play with McBrowne and traveled with him to dates on the East Coast.

Jackson's first step into the recording studio came while he was with McBrowne. These LPs, *Eastern Lights* and *Lenny McBrowne and the Four Souls*, which have recently been reissued by EMI as CDs, contain Jackson's compositions and are considered classics of that jazz era.

As I talked to Jackson and night began to fall, our conversation shifted here and there. We talked about fame and power and the effects they've had on the music world. Jackson has lived his entire life in music and seen the effect that fame and power have on people. He says, "We were playing this club in Denver when in walks Oscar Peterson. He's wearing a jacket and he walks in and tells the club owner, 'Before I play here I need a grand piano and a stage.' Well, that night they break out the hammers right after we finish playing and, middle of the night, they start to build this stage for Oscar Peterson."

Jackson came of age in the mid-fifties, the years that the Supreme Court handed down the decision of *Brown vs. Board of Education* and the Montgomery Bus Boycott. A decade would pass before the Voting Rights Act. He has experienced racism in all its forms, personal through institutional. He says, "When I was 15, I'm just a kid. What do I know? This eight year old boy came up to me and said, 'do you live in nigger town?' Thus beginning the racism that I would experience through times of my life. You see, California had not been a slave state but there was a war, one they call World War II, and after that war people came from all over the country, including the South, here. And they brought their attitudes with them."

Jackson has performed with an impressive list of musicians: Willie Bobo, Art Farmer, Jimmy Smith, and Buddy Rich, traveling the nation and the world. Jackson played with Ray Charles for years. He tells a story that might have come from *Ray*, the movie, which revealed a darker side of the soul singer that the public was not able to see, namely his trouble with money and drugs. "So there I was sitting there and Ray says to me that he can't have anybody in his band who might draw him heat." (Translation: Charles was telling Jackson that he didn't want any trouble from the law because of drug use by members of his band.) "All the while he's doubled over from his own addiction." Jackson shoots me a knowing glance. "I tell him I can't be doing drugs, because you don't pay me enough."

Back in San Diego Jackson participated in

*[John Coltrane] tells me,  
"Don't listen to what  
these other guys do. You  
do what you do."*

— Daniel Jackson



Photo: Steve Covault

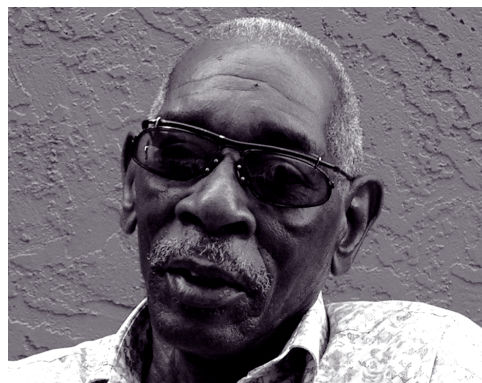


Photo: Steve Covault





Photos: Paul Hornick



don't know a song until you can play it in every key. And if you ever do anything wrong, make sure the police aren't there." Jackson speaks highly of Cannonball Adderly, who gave him a lot of advice and mentored the younger musician. Jackson says, "Cannonball wouldn't show me anything, anything with music or about playing my horn, but he'd tell me things, give me advice. He'd help me with my life and tell me things about business. He wanted to help a young guy." And perhaps the best advice any musician might get came from John Coltrane. "I was playing the same place as John Coltrane. We had the matinee, four to eight, and he played the regular show. One day I go up to him saying, 'Hey, how you doing?' You know, I'm a young kid just trying to talk to him some. And he tells me, 'don't listen to what these other guys do. You do what you do.'"

Weeks, actually months, pass before I see Jackson again, this time at the Belly Up Tavern at Sue Palmer's release party for her latest disk, *Sophisticated Ladies*, and Jackson was part of Palmer's Motel Swing Orchestra. Back stage, there were last minute preparations and primping. A tall fellow with brown hair talked to Jackson. He said that a mutual friend had asked him to give Jackson a hug. The two embraced briefly. The general excitement before the show was loose and celebratory, but Jackson was more restrained. He had done this sort of thing many times before. I think of Jackson primarily as a jazz performer, but the music that was going to be played that night showcased Palmer's forte: blues and boogie woogie. He was right with the band through every lick and riff. He had done this sort of thing before as well.

Sunday, around noon at Croce's, the sun shines and San Diego has that bucolic vibe and the feeling that the weekend will end all too early. This is the last time I see Jackson before my editor says that she wants to see copy. It's rare to see a piano in a bar saloon or restaurant these days, let alone a Steinway grand. Jackson is at the keyboard. He has had this gig for the last couple of months, playing piano from 11:30 to 2:30 for Croce's brunch crowd. The waitresses pick up and deliver mimosas and bloody marys. I sit in the bar, not far from the piano, and except for me there is the bartender and another patron. Later a couple joins me at the bar for appetizers.

Jackson plays a series of jazz standards. "Coming Home" has a groove, his left hand light yet steady, while "Autumn Leaves" has a loose almost impressionistic air. The music seems to float through the room, first with a riff, then a snatch of melody, and ending with a chromatic flourish. Except for his hands and arms, Jackson is quite still, his torso leaning forward from time to time. He takes a break and we talk briefly. He tells me about his upcoming gig at the Jazz in the Pines concert.

The break is short, maybe seven or eight minutes, and Jackson fits himself back behind the piano. The music starts again. And as I notice how intently Jackson concentrates on the keys and the notes, I'm reminded of something he said when we first talked. "I *have* to play music," he said. "There are few things, very few things in my life, that are more important to me than my music."

the halcyon days of jazz, which was part of postwar San Diego. If you type "Harlem of the West" into Google, you get a whole bunch of stuff about San Francisco, but many place that mantle over San Diego as well. This was the heyday of the Creole Palace and the Douglas Hotel, the days when Fro Brigham would front two bands at the same time. Jackson recalls walking down Fifth Avenue or Market Street, sax in hand, and always finding music to hear or play along with.

It's now dark. The guitar and vocal of Rathburn continue to flow out the doors of the café. One of the waitresses brings out a piece of cake for Jackson. He had not asked for it, but seems unsurprised that it shows up on his table. We're winding down on the interview; my hand is slowing down taking notes. Jackson again turns philosophic, sharing some of the advice he has received in his life. Among the great biological drives, our need for food, sleep, and basic needs, the greatest among these for the human animal is the absolute drive we all have to give advice, and Daniel Jackson has received his share. "So in high school I'm playing teen dances," he says. "So now I'm a piano player, playing in a band led by Peggy Minefee. My brother finds out I'm playing piano. He says, I'm going to tell you two things, You







# Bluegras S

by Dwight Worden

## FIVE YEARS OF SUMMERGRASS



This year's Summergrass (August 24-26) successfully marked the fifth anniversary of Southern California's premier bluegrass festival. The music was stellar, with 10 great bands, including Bluegrass, Etc., John Reischman and the Jaybirds, Fragment, U.S. Navy Bluegrass Band, the Brombies, Uglum and Sons, the Bladerunners, Virtual Strangers, Lighthouse, and Soledad Mountain. Also popular were the get acquainted jams led by Les and Lou Ann Preston and the kids' activities and on stage performance.

Although rain surprised everyone on Sunday morning, it was all taken in stride and the skies soon cleared. Word has it that some outstanding jamming was happening in the camping grounds on both Friday and Saturday nights, with campers and performers jamming together and having a great time sharing music and stories. This wonderful three-day festival continues to grow and prosper.

Let's take a brief look back at Summergrass's first years. Five years ago a handful of volunteers from the San Diego Bluegrass Society and the North San Diego County Bluegrass and Folk Club got together to discuss starting a local bluegrass festival that would bring top-notch national bluegrass acts to San Diego and also provide an opportunity to showcase our talented local bands. These two non-profit clubs had been helping produce the Julian Festival for several years but were looking for a location closer to home that provided on-site camping, that could accommodate music at night, and that did not place spectators on such a steep hill at the prior festivals, none of which could be accommodated at Julian. Corky Shelton of the NCBFC suggested the Antique Gas and Steam Engine Museum in Vista, talks were had, the site was visited, and a deal was made to partner with the museum to host the festival.

Bands were booked, camping arrangements made, port-a-potties rented, and all the details taken care of by dedicated volunteers, and, in 2003, the very first Summergrass Festival took place. The band California was booked as headliner to make a reunion appearance at Summergrass with other top local and regional bands filling out the bill, including perennial crowd favorite Bluegrass Etc., which helped Summergrass jump start its first festival. A



Dennis Caplinger, Byron Berline, and Mark O'Connor at Summergrass 2003

highlight of year one was when Mark O'Connor spontaneously showed up, bought a ticket, and played some unforgettable triple fiddles on stage with Byron Berline (California) and Dennis Caplinger (Bluegrass Etc.). It was a good omen for a first-time festival.

Other highlights over Summergrass's five-year run include construction of the beautiful new stage by the Antique Gas and Steam Engine Museum, which has served Summergrass for years two though five. Musical highlights include Summergrass's presentation of the band Fragment from the Czech



and Slovak Republics in its first ever West Coast appearance in year two; presentation of the Nashville Bluegrass Band coupled with Summergrass's Fiddle Extravaganza in year three, which featured Sean and Sara Watkins of Nickel Creek; Gabe Witcher of the Jerry Douglas band (now with Chris Thile and the Tensions Mountain Boys); and Stuart Duncan of the Nashville Bluegrass Band. The inauguration of Summergrass's Kids Academy in



Sara and Sean Watkins, Gabe Witcher, and Stuart Duncan warm up backstage for the Summergrass Fiddle Extravaganza

years two through four was also a proud moment for Summergrass as it provided high-level training over three days to more than 30 youngsters who attended the academy, including the provision of Summergrass scholarships to those who needed them.

The Infamous Stringdusters and Blue Highway, two of the top national bands currently on the scene were highlights of last year's Summergrass, and this year's festival continued what has now become a tradition: August in San Diego is Summergrass time! On behalf of the entire bluegrass community in San Diego, a big thanks goes out to the Summergrass Board members, the 100-plus volunteers and all those who have worked so hard to make this festival a success every year, and especially to Corky and Debbie Shelton and Richard and Sandy Beesley who have been so important to Summergrass from the get go and who are now moving out of the area.

## JAMES KING COMING TO SAN DIEGO



James King Band

The San Diego Bluegrass Society is bringing the critically acclaimed James King Band to San Diego for a special performance on Friday evening, October 26, at the First Baptist Church of Pacific Beach at 4747 Soledad Mountain Road. There will be a local opening act at 7:30pm followed by the James King Band at 8pm. A \$15 donation is suggested. If you like your bluegrass hard-driving and traditional, then don't miss this top-notch national band.

## MUSIC FROM THE CROOKED ROAD

The San Diego Bluegrass Society is supporting a program presented by UCSD titled Music From the Crooked Road (referring to the winding road through scenic Appalachia). This program will present a variety of touring musicians playing traditional, old time, and bluegrass music. For info and tickets, visit the show's web site at [www.thecrookedroad.org](http://www.thecrookedroad.org).

Keep picking, and try to get out and attend one or more of these great shows. You won't regret it!



# The Zen of Recording

by Sven-Erik Seaholm

## THE MOMENT

Where does music happen? At what point does the strumming of a guitar, the beat of a drum, or the vibration of a vocal chord become musical expression? What is the key that suddenly unlocks the barrier between musician and listener (or in some cases, "overhear-er")? Is it when going through playbacks at the end of a session or before you have even hit "record?"

The point my foggy, under-cafeinated little mind is trying to make here is that while all of the pieces can be laid carefully into place to allow great music to appear, there's no guarantee that those magical moments are going to show up on cue. Of course, the more one is prepared to ensnare those elusive quicksilver flashes of inspiration, the better the chances that they can be captured. Therein lies the rub: at what point does preparation actually move from advantage to hindrance?

Preparedness can be a tricky beast for the music recordist, because while the microphones can be set up and each musician assigned a general workspace to occupy, things can change in actual practice. Maybe the bass player ALWAYS stands to the drummer's immediate left, even though you've set him up someplace else. Or said drummer has brought in a 13-piece kit for a "jazz with brushes" session (okay, maybe Steve Gadd would). Or even (and this is my favorite folks, you wouldn't believe how much this actually happens) the extra couple of players that the band met at last night's gig that would love to "do some stuff" on the session but only have an hour or so before they have to leave. These little "snags" can take you from "everything's cool and we're just about ready" mode to "full-on running across the studio floor" in a single skipped heartbeat. Once people are set up and ready there are still issues to contend with, like what folks are hearing in their phones or who'd like some coffee.

We haven't even gotten into tones and levels!

Imagine how counter-intuitive it must feel to an artist who's gone from waking up, having breakfast, showering (please, thank you), gathering and loading their gear along with one or two band members, dealing with traffic, finding the place, loading in, setting up, warming up...and NOW we get to hear the bass drum stomp out slow quarter notes...FOREVER. Oh, and NOW the snare! Yaaaaay! Now we'll spend the next three hours arguing about which guitar and amp combination really WORKS for a particular song the band was thinking of tracking first...THEN we'll wake up the bass player and get him situated...

It is my firmly held conviction that producers and engineers be nearly invisible at the outset of the process. The reason for this is simple: we are making a recording of the artist. The goal is to make the best record this artist can make within whatever the collective time and budgetary restrictions will allow. How can you get a clear picture of what a band sounds like if they're not allowed to play together because you're still spreading your "wish list" of sounds onto your palette?

Get some mics up, get your levels ball parked (explain to the band that you'll be dialing in the headphone mixes shortly), and let them run through the tunes and make those last minute adjustments (like how many times to play the chorus at the end, etc.). Meanwhile, you'll be able to fine tune things a bit more as they're playing. Yes, eventually you will have to ask that only the drummer play for a few minutes so you can track down certain eq issues, etc., but the real benefit here is that most of the artist's time will have been spent being a musical participant, rather than just a technical bystander. By getting a session to the music making stage early, you've cleared the way for an opportunity to bottle lightning in the form of the perfect take.

I'd be remiss in saying that there is no flip side to this "guerilla-style"



Sven-Erik Seaholm

approach to recording. My own headlong forays into perpetual readiness have seen me miss a few things here or there. A little digital clipping on the guitar track or a mic no one noticed was kicked over...

Drums can be the toughest, because they can be so mix and style dependent. What started as a perfect balance seems to lack punch in the kick and snare once all the other parts are added in. Or the toms just aren't holding their own...enter the concept of "beat replacement."

I believe Steely Dan engineer Roger Nichols came up with the first commercially available (and there were very few of them) triggered drum sound device. It was affectionately called "Wendell." It worked rather simply: Wendell had different samples loaded into it, and an output (from the snare track for instance) would be fed into it to trigger the desired sound, effectively replacing the old snare sound with the new one, or the engineer could subsequently use a combination of the two.

For my money, the butt saver du jour is Wavemachine Labs' Drumagog ([www.drumagog.com](http://www.drumagog.com)). I've covered this product in past issues, so I'll just say that Wendell's come a long way, baby. Drumagog is a plug-in with a wide array of immaculately recorded and multi-sampled drum sounds. It responds to velocity and has all the user functionality you need to take your drums from ho-hum to BOH-BUM in a no time flat.

Just when I thought it couldn't get any better, here comes the Supersonic Samples for Drumagog (\$179)! Supersonic's sounds take Drumagog's already great sounding drum replacement solution and kick it into hyper-drive with huge kicks, massive snares and incredibly deep toms. The bottom line is that you can make your bedroom studio drums sound like they were recorded in a world-class room, through the best mics and preamps money can buy for less than the price of a good snare.

Running a dead-sounding Tama kits' snare and kick drums into just a few of the 2700(!) supplied sounds from Super Sonic showed an incredible amount of tonal and ambient possibilities, from subtle SS Hybrid Blenders™ that mix in with your existing sounds to "ohmagawdthedrumsisgonnaeat-us" over-the-top car crunchers!! Regardless of what you're looking for, the excellent PDF manual included makes it easy to find the sounds you need.

Of course, the perfect performance is always more important than the perfect sound. Now products like Super Sonic Samples make it easy to get right down to playing music by providing you with invaluable post-session options. Wake up the bass player, we're ready!

Sven-Erik Seaholm is an award-winning independent producer as well as a singer and songwriter. He will soon begin private instruction on recording and production on location in his home-based studio. Send him an email at [info@kaspro.com](mailto:info@kaspro.com) if you are interested in taking part in this program.

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# Hosing Down

by José Sinatra

## THE GRADUATE. CUM LAWD-HAVE-MERCY

*Farewell, summer of double-o-seven. I caress the conditional diploma you gave me, pondering whether to frame it or toss it in the trash.*

I recall attending a delightful afternoon house party at the home of a married couple I've known, admired, respected, loved for decades, and the controversy over a remark I made there.

Actually, I found out about the controversy many weeks later, when the host himself unambiguously brought it to my attention. Unambiguous only in that I'd said something terrible; he couldn't recall himself what it was that I'd said exactly, but that whatever those words were, they had lit a fire that had been burning from boil to meltdown for a long time now (without my faintest knowledge of its existence).

So, upon finally learning of my own unintended offense, I was surprised and shocked. Later, shame, sorrow, and despondency jumped me heavily and began to dry-hump my shoulders. Oh, did I forget embarrassment? Let my name, for now, be sorrow; that's pretty much the part of me that typed and mailed an apology to the party I had offended, after eventually recalling the humorously intended *bombe de bouche* I had so unfortunately let fly that day.

There's a proud, tenacious hurt, too, in the apparent fact that my host seems never to have known me as well as I'd assumed — that I'd rather jump into a pool of snot than intentionally insult any decent person in front of his own (or anyone else's) face. Even if you don't buy the fact that, somewhere essential inside, I'm actually a rather sensitive person, your basic random blonde would know I'm a total pussy when it comes to confrontations (and I apologize to felines everywhere for that pathetic truth).

I can't even say that yeah, it always hurts when a longstanding friendship seems to burn out like this, because this is a first for me, a lesson from a summer class I should never have attended.

I recall the bitter stir that my band's performance of "OJ's Coming" at the Ocean Beach Street Fair begat.

Actually, I only learned about this one many days after the event. Indeed, a handful of offended audience members had complained that very afternoon to the O.B. Town Council (or something), registering their outrage.

"OJ's Coming" has been an audience favorite for years (if I do say so myself, and I do), including its performance on the Main Stage at the O.B. Street Fair two years ago (oh, how the mighty have fallen!). Never mind the S-words and the F-words loudly billowing from the bowels of another band across the street in the middle of that fine afternoon. No complaints there. But how dare these degenerates, this lounge metal group, poke fun at



Photo: Fallon Faraday  
José Sinatra: Hose in pain

the famous millionaire who probably hacked two people to ribbons and got away with it? Musical satire has no place in Ocean Beach in double-o-seven, these righteously offended milquetoasts complained; we don't want these politically incorrect ingrates playing in our community again! We didn't like it one bit, gosh darn it, and we don't want anyone else to hear it either, because we know what's best for the community since we're much smarter than they are and they probably just don't realize the damage that songs like that can do to the very fiber of our town, our city, our nation, our world . . .

*This is our last song and we're gonna kick the f—ing s— out of it! You got that?" screams the singer with the band across the street on a different stage, and the crowd goes wild. "Yeah! Do it!" they cry, while the band figuratively does it with gusto and verve. Two daddies dance with their infant daughters in one of those "aw, that's so f—ing cute" displays that usually ends up the next day in the local section of the U-T.*

Even though it seems to be becoming acceptable, I still don't use F- or S-words in performances before family audiences, nor do I intend to in the future. But I always stick in satirical references to famous folk or newsworthy topics when the mood hits. Or even gently nudges. Especially when I'm naked.

And I'm sad and sorry that there are those who are determined that I never again perform on any outdoor stage in lovely Ocean Beach. They truly do believe that they know what's best for me, and for you, too.

When I asked a well-known O.B. business owner whether he'd heard about the Street Fair complaints, he shrugged, shook his head sadly, and said, "Oh yeah, sure. It's the end of 'Ocean Beach.'"

My apologies. To everybody.  
Except OJ.

*José Sinatra will be performing at the Ocean Beach Octoberfest, October 13, on the outdoor stage at 10:45am.*



# RADIO DAZE



Jim McInnes

by Jim McInnes

## WEIRD SCENES INSIDE THE OLD MIND

Isn't that a cool title? It's my twist on a Doors compilation called *Weird Scenes Inside the Goldmine*. Jim Morrison probably stole that one from elsewhere, too. Anyway,...

I was watching the evening news recently when the obligatory series of prescription drug ads came on the screen during a commercial break. Not wishing to be subjected to another three minutes of being told my colon's going to explode or that restless leg syndrome causes dementia, I flipped channels until I came to KPBS, which is (mostly) commercial free. I thought, "I don't care what's on, at least they won't have any f\*cking prescription drug ads!" For the next seven minutes I was happy to watch what appeared to be a mid-1950s kinscope of an accordion *cutting contest* between Lawrence Welk and Myron Floren. *That was a weird scene.*

Speaking of prescription drug ads, while I was watching "Baseball Tonight" on ESPN, a spot for the erectile dysfunction drug Cialis came on. I switched immediately to ESPN2. They were in a commercial for Viagra. I found *that* to be weird.

I was playing computer Scrabble last night. I played the three letter verb "jew." The computer responded by using the "e" to make the word, "ovens." *That was a weird scene, for sure!*

In Dublin, Ireland, I had a 20-minute conversation with my mother. She assured me that she was okay and that everything was going to be fine. I was happy for her. My mother died four months before our chat. *That was a very weird scene.*

On September 2, 2004, I was lying on a gurney at Sharp Hospital in Linda Vista/Kearny Mesa, being prepped for my second spinal surgery. I was going to have my spine "fused" into position by one of San Diego's rising young neurosurgeons. As the assistants were rolling me into the Operating room, one of their cell phones rang. Her call was from my neurosurgeon, Dr. X. Sounding both apologetic as well as extremely tired, (he said he hadn't slept in three days), he had rescheduled the surgery for September 16, when he'd be able to devote the full eight hours necessary to mount the titanium rods and screws into my lower spine. That seemed weird — but very logical!

On a final note, what if Steve Fossett, the aeronautical adventurer who's been missing since Labor Day, is found to have flown into Area 51 in the Nevada desert? *That wouldn't seem to be so weird to me.*



by Peter Bolland

## SUCCESS IS AN INSIDE JOB

In his acceptance speech at the 2005 San Diego Music Awards, Lifetime Achievement Award winner Al Guerra said something very wise. A veteran of radio, promotions, production, and band management, Guerra offered this sage advice to all the musicians and bands in the audience: "If your band is struggling — having a problem finding success — the problem will always be internal."

I've been thinking about that for years, and I think he's right. As a high-level band manager and music industry insider, Guerra's seen it all — the self-destruction, the arrogant lethargy, the victim consciousness, the misdirected rage. I've seen it too. I know more than a few artists in the San Diego scene who have permanently terminated their relationships with every talent buyer and venue in town, taking bitter refuge in the "knowledge" that they were "mistreated" and "disrespected." Unwilling to examine their own role in the dissolution of the relationship, they prefer to retain the irrational and untenable position that they are flawless princes and everyone else is a soulless whore.

The psychological storm surrounding the San Diego Music Awards is a perfect example of this kind of self-defeating behavior. There are always waves of sour grape juice lapping at the bow of any awards ceremony, but the SDMA's elicit an unusually vigorous backlash from some of the artists who are overlooked. Even the Grammys don't rile as much bile as the SDMA's do. I guess the smaller the stakes, the more vicious the venom.

Let's be honest. We all know that art contests are not really about measuring the quality of art. All the nominees in each category deserve the prize, but only one can take home the trophy. I think everybody with a brain knows that the winner is not necessarily the "best" — it's just that they're damn good and we're all taking a moment to recognize that. And the other nominees are damn good too. And a lot of damn good bands and albums didn't even get nominated.

It seems to me that the purpose of the SDMA's is not to find the best bands and the best albums. The real purpose of the

SDMA's is threefold: to raise money to put Taylor guitars in the hands of school kids, to raise the profile of deserving San Diego talent, and to ritualistically celebrate the joy of music. That's it. No one is claiming that the Academy of the San Diego Music Foundation is the Sole Arbiter of Taste and Quality in Music. Let's all relax a little.

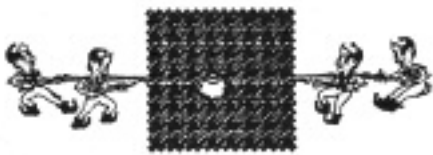
If your band was overlooked, ask yourself a few questions. Do you have a high-quality, professionally produced CD? Do you write solid, gorgeous, emotionally satisfying songs? Do you sing them with haunting power and conviction? Do you have a real website? Have you bothered to hire a real photographer to create striking images of your band? Do you regularly play shows all over San Diego county and beyond (not just at your local pub)? Have you spent years cultivating warm and reciprocal relationships with talent buyers, deejays, journalists, and other artists? When performing, do you look your audience in the eye and meet them heart to heart? Do people take something powerful and real away from your shows? Do they leave humming your songs? In other words, if you haven't sacrificed large amounts of time, heart, talent, energy, soul, and money into your vision, no one else will either.

Don't ask the Academy to take your artistry more seriously than you do. Sitting at home and waiting to be discovered, then begrudging successful artists the fruits they've earned through sheer talent and tenacity is the height of arrogance. Envy is a bitter mistress. The only thing it gets you is resentment, victim consciousness, and, ultimately, paralysis.

Guerra was right. Our lack of success, as artists and as human beings, has more to do with the state of our soul than with the state of the world. Success is an inside job. We teach people how to treat us by the way that we treat them. Meeting the world with open hands and open hearts in the generous spirit of humility, service and gratitude will open more doors than an arrogant sense of entitlement every time. People are hungry for great music and they'll sacrifice a lot to get it. What are you willing to sacrifice to meet them half way?

*Peter Bolland is a professor of philosophy and humanities at Southwestern College and singer-songwriter-guitarist of the Coyote Problem. You can complain to him about what you read here at peterbolland@cox.net. www.thecoyoteproblem.com is the ethereal home of the Coyote Problem.*

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by Mike Alvarez

Stick virtuoso Don Schiff is an enthusiastic blogger as well as a masterful musician, so it was with a mixture of amusement and awe that I read his account of the day many years ago when he picked up the tab for every patron at a Reno diner. When his bandmate asked for a reason, he simply replied that it was the day Don Schiff came to town. And really, that's just the kind of guy he is. He's made a career out of bringing people happiness, whether they be the superstar performers he's backed up, awestruck music fans standing agape at his virtuosity, or the many students who continue to benefit from his experience. He is always smiling, always lavishing praise and encouragement upon others, and has never once been heard to say a harsh word about anybody. According to Erik Norlander, a noted keyboardist and producer with whom he frequently works, "Don is an unbelievably warm and generous guy who keeps a positive outlook at all times. That is a big part of what makes him such a compelling musician and artist. With Don, the glass is not just half full, it's three quarters full."

With Norlander, Schiff is part of the progressive rock band Rocket Scientists. He also records and performs regularly with Erik's wife, symphonic rock diva Lana Lane. While originally brought aboard as a "hired gun," Schiff soon became an actively contributing songwriter whose compositions are prominently featured on many of their albums. On *Revolution Road*, the latest Rocket Scientists album, he has sole songwriting credit for two instrumentals. He is also the proud owner of his very own gold record, earned from his co-authorship of the song "Cerebral Man" with Tully Winfield. Pat Benatar recorded it for her hit album *Wide Awake in Dreamland*. I first became aware of Schiff in September of 2000 when I saw him perform with Rocket Scientists at L.A.'s legendary Troubadour club. During this show, he did a stick solo called "Inspirations on Life" that brought the house down.

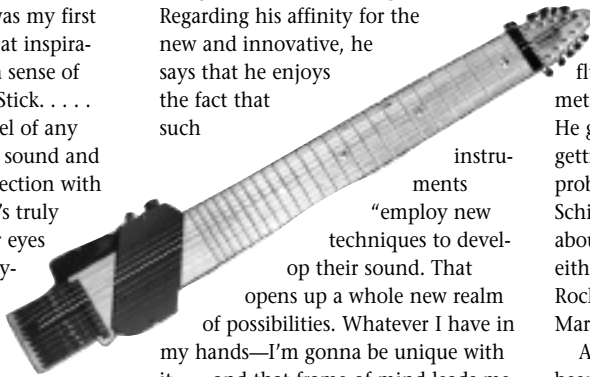
# The Day Don Schiff Came to Town

People were still talking about it years later. Watching him play is like witnessing a world class athlete at their peak. They score high on a technical level but don't neglect their artistry because that's what's most important. Larry Tuttle of the stick-and-violin duo String Planet says, "Don was my first Stick teacher. He was a great inspiration for me and gave me a sense of what was possible on the Stick. . . . He has the best rhythm feel of any Stick player going. He can sound and feel like a whole rhythm section with just his left hand alone. It's truly amazing. If you close your eyes when he's singing and playing his NS (a variant of the Stick) you'd swear there were at least three people on stage."

Schiff started as a bass player and moved to Las Vegas right after high school where he became a showroom musician. During this phase of his career he racked up impressive credits, playing big gigs with the likes of Ann-Margret, Ike and Tina Turner, Sammy Davis Jr., the Jerry Lewis Telethons and, most impressively, the King himself: Elvis Presley! To this day he still tours with Frankie Avalon. He is a font of show biz tales, once fondly recalling the time he gave upright bass lessons to Bill Cosby. One need only click on the his bio link at [www.donschiff.com](http://www.donschiff.com) to view the jaw-dropping list of musical legends who have availed themselves of his prodigious talent.

In the late '70s, Schiff took up the challenge of learning a strange new instrument called the Chapman Stick. This multi-stringed fretboard is played by tapping instead of plucking, and its range is comparable to that of the bass as well as the guitar. Local music fans who have seen San Diego Stick master Tom Griesgraber will already be familiar with it. Not one to rest on his laurels, Schiff's insatiable curiosity led him to a variation of the Stick developed by famed instrument maker Ned Steinberger. The NS/Stick takes the concept even further by allowing the player to pluck and pick the instrument as well as tap it. It is such a new innovation that Schiff received the first one ever made and is currently inventing techniques for playing it. The fruits of his explorations will be published in an instructional book someday. He says, "I still come up with new techniques for it. I guess that's my excuse for not finishing it yet. I'm constantly

coming up with new approaches for it." Recently, he turned his attention to yet another exotic instrument: the bowed guitar. Although still in the process of figuring it out, he has already mastered it well enough to bring it into the recording studio. Regarding his affinity for the new and innovative, he says that he enjoys the fact that such



instruments "employ new techniques to develop their sound. That opens up a whole new realm of possibilities. Whatever I have in my hands—I'm gonna be unique with it . . . and that frame of mind leads me to find unique instruments."

As valued as he is as an accompanist, Schiff also has a lot to say as an artist. "I'm a 'feel' writer and am fortunate enough to have the ability to write and play what I feel. It's hard to even say 'I' when it comes to music. The best way for me to describe the process with the word 'I' in it is to say that I stand in the way of the notes. The emotion and the music flows through me." Over the past several years he released three solo albums, *Timeless*, *Wait by the River*, and *Peering Over Clouds*. The first two showcase his

singing as well as his instrumental prowess, whereas the third is an unabashed smorgasbord of pure NS/Stick playing with percussion by Greg Ellis. His music is a sophisticated blend of world music, R&B, funk, progressive rock, and jazz. Rock solid bass lines anchor intricate melodies, complex chords, and fluid runs. Sometimes he'll use a metal slide to create liquid glissandos. He gives the NS/Stick a real workout, getting sounds from it that its inventor probably never dreamed of. Lately, Schiff has been more forthcoming about playing his own music live, either as a soloist or partnering with Rocket Scientists' guitarist and vocalist Mark McCrite.

An important part of his career has been his work in film, scoring soundtracks and sometimes even acting in bit parts. His musical contributions can be heard in a number of movies, and he can be seen onscreen in 84 *Charlie Mopic* and *Live From Death Row*. Recently Schiff composed and recorded the theme for a web-only series called "The Guild." His collaborator on many of these film projects has been his brother Dave, a gifted woodwind player. The Schiff brothers are hard at work on an album in the smooth jazz genre. He takes particular delight in talking about this project, saying that, "I'm really enjoying it immensely . . .



Don Schiff at the Namm Show

pushin' the boundaries on it too." Coming from a musical family, they have surely done their father proud. Of him, Schiff proudly states, "My dad (Hal Schiff) was an incredible teacher and a great benefit to many a young musician. Many have become professional musicians."

Luckily, San Diegans can experience their own "day that Don Schiff came to town," as he will be performing on November 3 at Across the Street, Mueller College's music venue. Trust me: it's going to be a lot better than a free meal.

## Solid Blues in Escondido

by Tim Mudd

Raise your arms and sing to the heavens! On October 19, the juggernaut that is the six-week 40-plus city 2007 SOLID BLUES tour, pairing Mavis Staples with Charlie Musselwhite, the North Mississippi Allstars, and Joe Krown in their first-ever tour together, will have wended its way down the West Coast and make a scheduled stop at the California Center for the Arts in Escondido, before turning the veritable San Diego "tour corner" and making its way East.

Despite its unfortunate lack of press, online and off, we at the *San Diego Troubadour* felt it was our divine duty to inform our readers of this unprecedented event, as well as satisfying the gospel quotient of our masthead.

With thanks to Columbia Artists Management, we've assembled a quick overview of each artist performing during this event who should be the only four reasons you'll need to attend this must-see concert of the fall.

### MAVIS STAPLES



From early days sharing lead vocals with her groundbreaking gospel group the Staple Singers — with hits including "Respect Yourself" and "I'll Take You There" — to acclaimed solo recordings, Mavis Staples has become an inspirational force in modern popular culture and music. Inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 1999, she received three Grammy® nominations in 2004, a Grammy® Lifetime Achievement Award, three W.C. Handy Awards in 2005, and the NEAs National Heritage Fellowship Award in 2006. Staples has garnered wide critical

acclaim in 2007 with her "quite remarkable" Ry Cooder produced CD *We'll Never Turn Back*, which focuses on the hope that the men and women who engaged in the civil rights struggles of the early '60s brought to America that changed its laws and attitudes forever.

Find out more about Mavis Staples at <http://www.mavisstaples.com>

### CHARLIE MUSSELWHITE



Charlie Musselwhite has been called "the world's greatest living blues harmonica player" by the *New York Press*. Eight-time Grammy-nominee and 18-time W. C. Handy

Award-winner, Musselwhite has also won Lifetime Achievement Awards from the Monterey Blues Festival and the San Javier Jazz Festival in Spain, and the Mississippi Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts. Musselwhite's latest CD, *Delta Hardware*, was called "an early candidate for blues record of the year" by All Music Guide.

Find out more about Charlie Musselwhite at <http://www.charliemusselwhite.com/>

### NORTH MISSISSIPPI ALLSTARS



North Mississippi Allstars won three Grammy® nominations for Best Contemporary Blues Album

— for their debut recording, *Shake Hands with Shorty* in 2001, *Phantom 51* in 2003, and their latest recording, *Electric Blue Watermelon*, in 2005. *Electric Blue Watermelon* also reached

number one on the 2005 Billboard Top Blues Album Chart. The group recently recorded the soundtrack (along with Charlie Musselwhite) for Paramount's *Black Snake Moan* (directed by Craig Brewer with music by Scott Bomar of Hustle and Flow fame, and starring Samuel L. Jackson, Christina Ricci, and Justin Timberlake).

Find out more about North Mississippi Allstars at <http://www.nmallstars.com/>

### JOE KROWN



New Orleans-style piano and Hammond B-3 player, Joe Krown is a favorite of the Crescent City and has

won numerous awards there for his recordings and performances. He held the keyboard chair with Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown and Gate's Express from 1992 until Gatemouth's passing in the fall of 2005 and has performed and recorded with innumerable other artists, including Carlos Santana, Eric Clapton, Buddy Guy, Dr. John, B. B. King. Krown's latest CD is *Livin' Large with the Joe Krown Organ Combo*.

Find out more about Joe Krown at <http://www.joekrown.com/>

So there you have it; four great artists providing four good reasons to head on over to <http://www.artcenter.org/> to book your tickets for this incredible evening of blues and gospel. Hurry up now. Once the word gets out, you could be out of luck!

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# Phil Harmonic Sez:



"I never heard the melody 'til I needed the song."

— Tom Waits  
"San Diego Serenade"

# The Cuyamaca Water Conservation Garden: Bringing Streams of Music to Our Ears

by Raul Sandelin

J amul. Japatul. Jacumba. Jamacha. The soft alliteration cascading from each word to the next itself alerts the listener to some spiraling connection. But, there is more in common here than common sounds: each of these words – words beginning with *ja* in the Kumeyaay language, the language of San Diego's Native American bands – denotes the presence of water.

"Sweet water," "slimy water," "watering hole," "view of the water." These place names were formed by a people who knew the value of water in San Diego's rugged chaparral. And, living in such an arid ecosystem also instilled an understanding of water conservation.

With no coincidence, then, one now finds Cuyamaca College's Water Conservation Garden just off Jamacha Road. (Jamacha translates to a "gourd for carrying water.")

The Conservation Garden is a

state-of-the-art enclave on the Cuyamaca College campus that functions as museum, nursery, technological showcase, and, even, a concert venue.



Why music would find its way into the art and science of water conservation might strike some as a mixed metaphor. But, certainly, the musicality of an East County stream and the liquidity of song are as primordial as the human heart beat.

For this reason, the Water

Conservation Garden began a free, Summer Concert Series this year featuring a variety of artists and styles, from Joe Earp, John Katchur, and Joe Rathburn who combined their loves of folk music and fingerstyle guitar to pop to Latin jazz.

One feature of the Water Conservation Garden is its brand new amphitheater, a beautiful outdoor venue, which is a dream for both musician and audience alike.

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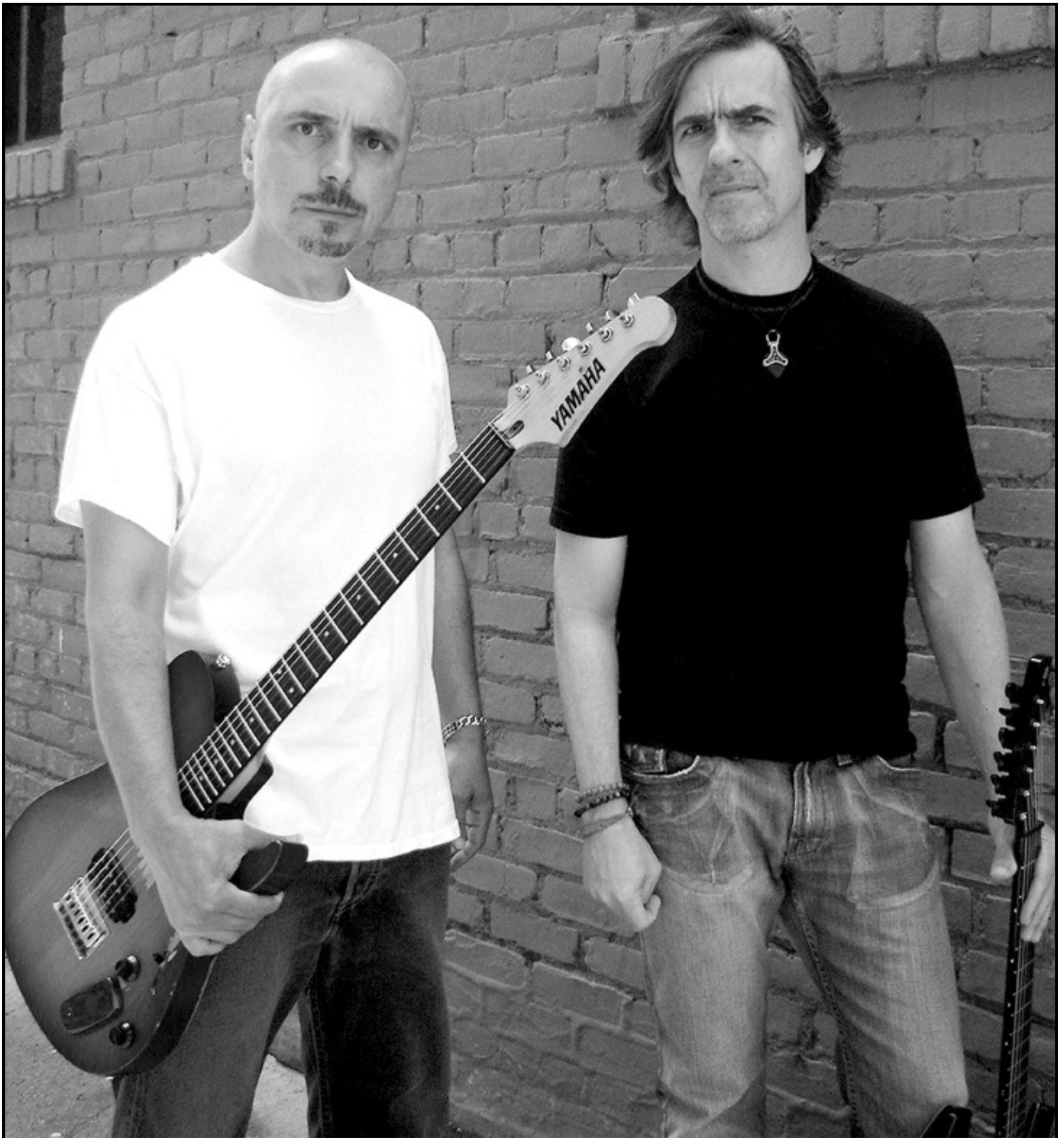
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Merle Travis, continued from page 6.

singing gospel songs and other quartet stuff like old Mill Brothers and Ink Spots tunes. During the war years Texas Jim Lewis and Smokey Rogers came to WLW for awhile before headin' west, and so did Charlie and Kate Linville. Smiley Burnette came on for awhile and Hank Penny brought his Radio Cowboys up from Atlanta and stayed on as a solo comic and picker for awhile. Hank also led the Plantation Boys with another great guitarist, Roy Lanham. Hank talked me into trying my hand as a comic for a time. I worked out a character named Possum Gosset, but it was too much like some of the folks I knew back in Ebenezer and I gave it up. [NOTE: Joe Maphis and Hank Penny told me they tried to get Merle to revive the character out in California as it was one of the funniest and most original they'd seen but he never would.] I didn't want to hurt anyone's feelings.

**How was it being on a show like Boone County?**

Well, you know Cincinnati isn't exactly known for its rich and varied night life. Mostly it was sittin' around pickin' and going out drinking. With Alton and Rabon Delmore around, there was no shortage of knowin' about drinking places. They knew them all and the rest of us just tried to keep up. I started to hang around Sid Nathan's Record Shop on Central Avenue, particularly after the Browns Ferry Four got started, looking for those old black gospel quartets on record so we could steal stuff for our group. I'd buy records by groups like the Golden Gate Quartet and the Heavenly Gospel Singers, most any quartet with the word Jubilee in it. That was gonna be stuff we could use.

Sid Nathan was thinking about starting a record label about this time and sort of recruited me and Grandpa as his first artists. WLW had a strict rule about any of their radio contracted artists doing anything for anyone else and that included making records. So Sid put us out as the Sheppard Brothers. The songs, I believe, were "The Steppin' Out Kind" and "You'll Be Lonesome Too." He called his label King Records 'cause he said it was gonna be king of them all. I also did a couple of solo sides that Sid put

out as Bob McCarthy. [NOTE: the titles were "When Mussolini Laid his Pistol Down" and "Two Time Annie."] I guess they came out, but I don't remember ever seeing one in a store anywhere. [NOTE: In 40 years of running a collector's record shop, I've never come across a copy of either one. They remain among the rarest of the rare but they were the start of King Records, which became one of the leading independent rhythm and blues and country and bluegrass labels in the 1940s and 1950s.]

**How did you happen to get out to the West Coast?**

MT: Well, I was with the Marines for a time and when I got out, I resumed playing at WLW, did another session for King backing Grandpa on a couple of tunes [NOTE: "It's Raining Here this Morning" and "Eight More Miles to Louisville"], and did a couple of my own. Grandpa was going in the army, Joe Maphis had moved on to WLS in Chicago, and the Delmores had moved on and so had the Linvilles [who had moved to California]. I met with Smiley Burnette who was doin' a show in town and he was ravin' about California and how there was so much work for musicians out there. So on March 1, 1944, I borrowed \$10 from about six WLW musicians and just took off. I started off to visit Joe in Chicago and told him I was going to California to seek my fortune, and that's just what I did. Joe loaned me an extra \$25 to get me on my way. I never forgot all those folks who loaned me money: I paid every one of them back and I hope I've shown them all how proud I am to have them as friends. I took the train to L.A. - ate sandwiches, slept sitting up, got into town, and crashed at a flophouse across from the station. The next day I called Wesley Tuttle, and he came and got me and took me out to his house in the San Fernando Valley. The next day he called the Linvilles and took me down to Stuart Hamblen's radio show where I appeared as a guest. He also took me over to a movie set where I met Tex Ritter and just a couple months later I was in a studio backing Tex on his hit "Jealous Heart." I was also playing with Ritter on shows, as well as with Charlie and Margie Linville, Al Dexter, and Texas Jim Lewis. I was also singing on CBS radio in a trio with Wes Tuttle and Jimmy Dean.

[NOTE: not the sausage selling Big John guy, but the older brother of movie cowboy Eddie



Merle Travis

Dean.] At the "Jealous Heart" session at Capitol Records I met Cliffie Stone [who played bass in that session]. Cliffie was a mover at Capitol and had been an L.A. radio personality since the mid 1930s. He was just the guy I needed to meet to get me goin' on the L.A. scene.

Next month: Part Two: Merle Travis, the next 20 Years - From Session Man to Country Music Legend



## Mesa Blue Looking Down the Road

by Mike Alvarez

The word "sunny" springs to mind unbidden when listening to Mesa Blue's third album, *Looking Down the Road*. The jazzy chord progressions, breezy melodies, and acoustic textures of the opening track "Waiting on my Time" sets the tone for what proves to be an enjoyable listening experience. The songs are well crafted, frequently conjuring up the vibe of classic pop radio hits that I remember from years gone by. The style is consistently upbeat but there is enough variety in the songwriting to keep the album interesting throughout. Songs range from the bluesy "Never Been Here Before" to the Latin-flavored "Life of Lies." The closing track is a gorgeous instrumental called "The Jig" that really knocked my socks off. It ebbs and flows as it tells its wordless tale, bringing to mind the instrumental tracks from the Beach Boys' magnum opus *Pet Sounds*. If only they had taken another five minutes or so to come up with a proper name!

In an era when technology puts powerful production tools in the hands of independent local artists, it's refreshing to hear music that sounds like it's being made by real instruments. Instead of pulling out all the bells and whistles and then throwing in the kitchen sink, Mesa Blue and their producer Andy Machin went to great lengths to record each instrument and voice as accurately as possible. Lead and background vocals are crisp. Lead singer Chris Del Priore's voice can be described as "dusky," as it has a warm quality with just a shade of darkness. When combined with bassist Omar Rodriguez's vocals on the backing tracks, they achieve a very robust sound. Lead and rhythm guitars sparkle. Drums and percussion have an almost three dimensional quality. The bass is beefy and articulate. Every part is intelligently placed in the mix.

The instrumental and vocal performances are tight and proficient. Guest guitarist Andy Tirpak is a versatile player who shows a real mastery of acoustic and electric styles. Drummer Jeffrey Stasny has great meter and feel. These top-notch musicians play with melodic taste and an unerring sensitivity for being part of an ensemble. The songs are first priority, but they also leave themselves room for some impressive licks when appropriate.

This is a pleasing record of well-crafted and melodic songs. I am tempted to say that it might be a bit "too perfect," as a little grit and slop could have given this music some of the oomph I craved after hearing it all the way through. While there are no overt overtures to spirituality or religion, I occasionally got the impression that their sound would be a good fit for Christian lyrics. But regardless, Mesa Blue's vibe is sophisticated and light. They know what they're doing and do it well.



## Craig Fischer & Blue Saguaro Derailed

by Allen Singer

*Derailed* is an apt title for a CD anchored in Craig Fischer's view of life and relationships. It's an album that has a "West Coast does Nashville" country music style. The CD also comes in a fine, eco-friendly package.

Fischer's musical niche is somewhere between the 1970s' West Coast folk country sounds of the Flying Burrito Brothers and the post-Byrds, California-tinged country bands. It's a combination of Rolling Stones playing American country music and Bob Seger's Silver Bullet Band Motor City driven rock n' roll.

*Derailed* contains 11 of Fischer self-penned songs that rhythmically stay midrange and are carried along by a heavy hand on the drums. He's got some talented musicians on the CD as well - folks like Dennis Caplinger, Eve Selis, and Sharon Whyte. A fine moment on the CD is Kevin Ryan's pedal steel guitar work on track nine, "While You Weren't Looking." I really enjoyed that track's musicality and wished the other tracks had taken off on some of the country swing found in Ryan's pedal steel guitar. Fischer's songs tend to be similar in melody and tempos, although this is obviously his chosen style and his way of putting his music across.

The CD's songs cover the usual territory of love, women, lost chances, and the usual realities of life. His alt country style has a definite back beat, which hints of Nashville in his bones. You'll definitely hear some musical fragments of 1950s' country music, Southern rock, and post-1970s alt country-tinged changes on this disk.

I only wish Fischer's voice had not been so submerged or compressed into the final mix. I re-equalized some tracks and found his arrangements worked better when he was drawn out of the mix so that his distant, laid-back vocals really opened up. This put Fischer out in front of the band and not behind the band's musical umbrella of sound. Of course, I think many of today's CDs suffer from too much compression, which tends to create a mix that sometimes make them sound as if they were cut in a tunnel. I realize everyone tries to produce a CD based on their own taste and sensibilities about how it should sound. Craig's done it his way and every one who hears "Derailed" has to decide for themselves if the sound is to their liking.

Craig Fischer is singing Craig Fischer's writings and that's what you'd expect he'd be doing. Everyone has their own musical taste and Craig has found his comfort zone. Take a listen and you'll be satisfied.

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## Dead Rock West Honey and Salt

by Tim Mudd

Dead Rock West is a place buried deep in the California desert that you may only get to in a rusting convertible while *Honey and Salt* is playing on its aftermarket stereo; once you've thrown all caution to the wind, quit your job, and decided to lay it all on the line for some stranger who may just be "the one."

From the opening chords and dramatic build of "Highway One" to the fading lap steel of "All I Know," *Honey and Salt* rolls through the peaks and valleys of a vast musical highway, picking up along the way the best of the mid to late nineties adult alternative Americana acts (Wallflowers, Jayhawks, and Counting Crows) while leaving the yawn factor on the side of the road with the tumbleweed.

There isn't anything new or hip about this disc, but this is not to say it is at all boring or passé. From start to finish it is an interesting listen, which is more than can be said about many things new or hip. Just when you think you've got Dead Rock West pegged, you're surprised by the Beatles-esque harmonies of "Desert Rose," the June-and-Johnny style duet of "Boredom (How Did I Get Here)," the R.E.M. jangle-pop of "I Really Wanted You," or the lazy West Coast '70s Fleetwood Mac of "Burning House of Love."

If you like to think of songs as they would fit into a movie, "Going Home" is the moment where the drama ends, the protagonists kiss, and the credits roll. I believe this to be important as it illustrates the tender triumph invoked by the major chord melodies that lay the foundation for the lyrical experience of love, loss, and redemption to stand.

As a rock music purist, I do like to look at records from a presentation point of view as well as a musical one and from both an artistic and photographic standpoint the layout and packaging of *Honey and Salt* is flawless. I was a little irked by the blatant name-dropping in the liner note credits because I honestly feel that this band, and particularly this record, stands strong on its own two feet without such yesteryear pretense. However, this pretense does serve them well when applied to the overall production and mastering of the album, which is also flawless in a nice big "wall-of-sound" sort of way.

My only other gripe is the song order of *Honey and Salt*, which I felt could have flowed a little more smoothly, but I also see how this once important aspect of record making can be glossed over in the context of today's ADHD iPod shuffling world.

So stop what you're doing, find your "someone," and take a highway drive with this CD. Someday I'll guarantee the chorus to "Highway One" will sneak up to goose you, which is an effect any artist can only dream their music will have on anyone.



## Fran Hartshorn Introducing Fran Hartshorn

by Julia Bemiss

San Diego's own Fran Hartshorn's debut CD, *Introducing Fran Hartshorn*, is a sparkling set of reimagined jazz standards from the '30s, '40s, and '50s.

The youngest of nine children, Hartshorn began singing in her hometown of Evansville, Indiana. A professional vocalist for 20 years, she has studied both privately and on her own. She has performed with theater groups in New York City and Tucson, Arizona, and has appeared in Lyric Opera San Diego productions at the Birch Theater in North Park. Currently she plays the role of the housekeeper in LOSD's production of *Man of La Mancha*.

Hartshorn's musical theater training and experience are evident here; each of the CD's ten songs comes to life with crisp, clear enunciation and the theatricality one would expect from musical theater but with appropriate restraint. The songs are original arrangements by Hartshorn's bandleader and pianist Jaeryoung Lee and they assuredly balance Hartshorn's influences (Diane Schuur, Ella Fitzgerald, and Sarah Vaughn) with her own fresh vocal styling.

The album opens with Kevin Koch's catchy brushed drum solo, claps, and an impressive 20-second scat by Hartshorn on "East of the Sun and West of the Moon" and segues into a languid vocalized "You'd Be So Nice to Come Home To." Lee thumps a piano-bass beat to "Let's Fall in Love" until Danny Weller's bass solo picks up where she left off. The song comes full circle when the piano rhythm and Hartshorn's scat are nicely reintroduced toward the end of the song.

Three of the first four songs utilize Hartshorn's infectious scatting, so it would appear at first that the album is too scat-heavy, but after the fourth song the scatting disappears. If these songs were spaced more evenly throughout the album, it wouldn't sound so front-heavy with scat and it would give one's ears a chance to catch their breath between songs.

Listeners may expect to hear familiar tempos based on their own record collections, but Hartshorn's band playfully reinterprets them, alternately speeding them up or slowing them down in unexpected variations. Examples include the unusual bass-thumping funk of "Just One of Those Nights" and the finger snapping (literally) "How High the Moon." "Lush Life" begins sparingly and grows into a musical-styled ballad, later turning into a jazzier version of its own self.

Hartshorn's voice is strong yet malleable. She effortlessly changes pitch and places herself solidly within the framework of her accompanying musicians, each of whom showcases his or her instrument expertly. Available at cdbaby.com and at wire-diva.com.



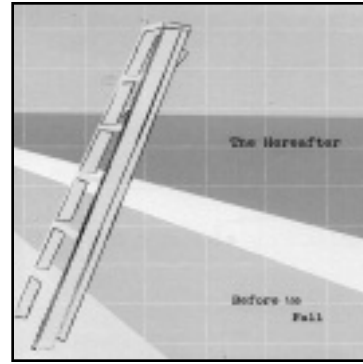
## Aaron Bowen Supreme Macaroni Co., Ltd.

by Craig Yerkes

One of the most deadly adversaries that a music reviewer can face is *expectation*. If you have heard an artist or heard about them before you get their disc, it can't help but color your observations. In the case of Aaron Bowen's new disc, *Supreme Macaroni Co. Ltd.*, I certainly didn't get what I was expecting and had to adjust my ears in a hurry (but hold on, I didn't say that was a BAD thing!). Prior to hearing this CD, I had seen Bowen perform live once and had also checked out his videos on MySpace. This artist has supreme command of an acoustic guitar and his exciting virtuosity certainly plays a big part in making him an electrifying performer. Naturally, I assumed that the acoustic guitar would take front and center on this recording, but alas, Bowen throws the proverbial curve ball here. While there is certainly some stellar guitar playing here (can this guy fingerpick or what?), there are only a few tracks that really spotlight the guitar and even on those, don't be expecting the kind of "snap your head back" stuff you'll hear live. To be sure, Bowen seems to be veering away from guitar hero territory here, but the good news is that the curve ball he throws us is right over the plate.

Bowen lists Hoagie Carmichael and Brian Wilson as influences. I was also reminded of Tom Waits (without the raspy voice), T-Bone Burnett, and local mainstay Gregory Page as I listened to this stylish, moody music. The approach here seems to be as though a group of street musicians gathered in some Bohemian parlor, opened a bottle of wine, grabbed some acoustic instruments, and played their sad songs until the sun came up. Bowen plays all kinds of instruments from banjo to glockenspiel to toy piano in order to create the right atmosphere. The track that seems to make the best use of this highly stylized approach is "Mr. A," a beautiful tune that paints a vivid word picture of an (almost) love story between two good hearted creatures of the night. "Song #2" also makes for a very effective marriage between the retro/jazzy music and some wonderfully bittersweet lyrics (about how this cold world tends to snuff out most of our more whimsical pursuits and dreams). "The Bird" and "Don't Mind Me" also make for deliciously melancholy offerings, which will have you picturing the artist as a dignified and heartbroken street-busker from another time. The lyrics all throughout this disc are thoughtful, poetic, and downright poignant. Musically, the expertly crafted melodic/harmonic ideas sound fresh but also, somehow, pleasingly familiar. This recording is best enjoyed as a whole and it may take a bit of time for the vibe to rub off on you (and I highly suggest reading the lyrics sheet to catch all the subtleties), but a little

continued adjacent ➔



## The Hereafter Before We Fall

by Chuck Schiele

One of the best things about being a CD reviewer is being able to take note of the abundance of great music coming from the San Diego region. I am constantly blown away by the talent above and below the radar. And the new CD by the Hereafter is no exception. Here are a dozen well-crafted, concise, and very catchy pop songs. Some are mellow-er than others, most of it is spirited. Some of the mixes are thicker with distorted guitars and some are sparse leaning on piano motifs and a good melody. All of them wreak with the kind of catchiness that has you bouncing your head from side-to-side like a rubber ball.

Remember that song "Video Killed the Radio Star"? This is the fun sense of "pop" that I'm talking about. Add a Paul Simon sense of song structure and vocal mannerism and you're almost there.

Kudos to John Elliott who wrote the material, performed lots of instruments, sang the songs and – low and behold – produced and engineered the album. The effort is a successful one as he manages to push the boundaries of where his pop goes, while keeping the common denominator in tact, making for a wide sonic range without any of the songs alienating that common denominator. Some of the songs have a happy bluegrass influence. Some simply rock out. None go on longer than they're supposed to. The melodies and lyrics are smart and fun, sweetly approaching the line of saccharin without going over it (which is one of the things Paul Simon was so good at). They get in, make their statement, kick you in the teeth, and get out before they start talking too much – the concern and faith is focused on the songwriting over existentialist jamming. And this lends to the urge of rolling any track to its beginning for another spin.

Let's talk about John's voice. It's a great radio-friendly voice. I can't imagine that anyone would find it displeasing, especially when he sings from the introspective approach. It's a lullaby of a voice that's likeable and believable. My only (somewhat) negative observation comes at the one moment in this CD when he reaches for the "gruff" line in the vocal take on one of the more rocker tunes, which is ever so slightly incongruous with the rest. But really, that's it.

This is a marvelous record for the fun, catchy-hook lovers of the world. Buy one and pop it in your player at [www.thehereafterisere.com](http://www.thehereafterisere.com)

continued from previous column

patience will pay off big if you let this artist work his magic on you. While this disc isn't the best place to fully experience Aaron Bowen, the guitar wizard, you will certainly be treated to Aaron Bowen the master songwriter, musician, and storyteller. Just make sure your expectations are in check and enjoy this sublime music. If you find yourself jonesin' for a guitar fix, go see Bowen live and I am sure he will oblige.



## Eric Klein Road to Now

by Mike Alvarez

Eric Klein must have very eclectic tastes in music because his album, *Road to Now* covers an awful lot of stylistic territory. While primarily a rock album, he unabashedly flavors his songs with pop, blues, and even New Age. The first few tracks alone take a multitude of musical directions, more than some artists attempt in the span of an entire album. If you were to judge the CD on the strength of the first track, "Perfect Day," you might conclude that Klein is a folk rock singer-songwriter in the vein of Jackson Browne. However, it is followed by "Sugar Jones," a whiskey-soaked Southern blues raver that would do George Thorogood proud. Next up is the introspective "The Garden," which finds him crooning like the late Jim Croce over a sparsely textured musical backdrop. Yet once that concludes, the piano and guitar boogie of "Gainesville Girl" takes us back down South. "Bluesman," the next song is physically grafted to "Gainesville Girl," even though it takes a darker turn with its menacing minor blues beat. It's an interesting juxtaposition. The blues and the South are recurring themes, as is evident with songs like "MCWBB (Middle Class White Boy Blues)," a hilarious send-up of consumer culture with a catchy walking bass line, and "Diesel Town," a rolling country song that is firmly entrenched in the Cash/Carter camp.

Let anybody think that this is merely a collection of tunes assembled at the behest of one guy's wide-ranging whims, I have news for you: it hangs together surprisingly well! When you listen to this album, it feels as if a singular vision unites the array of styles presented. Klein is a talented songwriter and musician who has undertaken a very ambitious project with this CD. He plays a lot of instruments and sings almost every note. For things like drums, percussion, piano, pedal steel guitar, and female backing vocals, he notes that they were assembled from software loops. Truthfully? It sounds as if he recruited a tight band of great players and brought them into the studio. The attention to detail and care in the creation of these tracks is really quite remarkable.

Klein is a versatile guitarist and vocalist, rising very capably to the occasion with each musical style he attempts. I have already noted his voice's similarity to George Thorogood and Jim Croce, yet on "Now," the psychedelic closing track, I can close my eyes and see Roger McGuinn of the Byrds at the mic. How cool is that? His guitar playing is immaculate, whether he's burnin' on an electric blues solo, laying down atmospheric textures, or taking us to the bayou with his dobro. What he does is perfect for the songs. While I can't credit him with breaking much new ground, he makes a very strong statement within the artistic territory he has staked out for himself. There is a lot to see and hear on the *Road to Now*.







# SDMA ACOUSTIC FEST @ CLAIRE DE LUNE



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Sven-Erik Seaholm & Sara Petite

# AWARDS NIGHT @ VIEJAS



Photo: Steve Covault  
Cady Truckee



Photo: Steve Covault  
Award-winner Sweet Elise of the Grams



Photo: Steve Covault  
Song of the year winner Greg Laswell



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Greg Friedman



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Joanie Mendenhall



Photo: Steve Covault  
award winner Molly Jensen



Photo: Steve Covault  
Billy Fritz & Peter Bolland of the Coyote Problem



Marcia Claire & daughter Chelsea



Photo: Steve Covault  
Jason Mraz



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Get Back Loretta



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Sean Watkins



Photo: Steve Covault  
Lifetime Achievement Award winner Nick Reynolds

# ELSEWHERE



Photo: Steve Covault  
Lady Dottie



Photo: Liz Abbott  
Kelli Rudick plays the mbira @ Lestat's



Photo: Steve Covault  
Ken Graydon @ Sea Shantey Fest



Photo: Liz Abbott  
The Flimz serenade birthday boy, Tim Mudd



Photo: Liz Abbott  
Tim Flack & Brooklyn



Photo: Liz Abbott  
Dan Strum @ O'Connell's Open Mic



Photo: Steve Covault  
Oceans Apart @ Sea Shantey Fest



Photo: Liz Abbott  
Happy Ron @ O'Connell's Open Mic

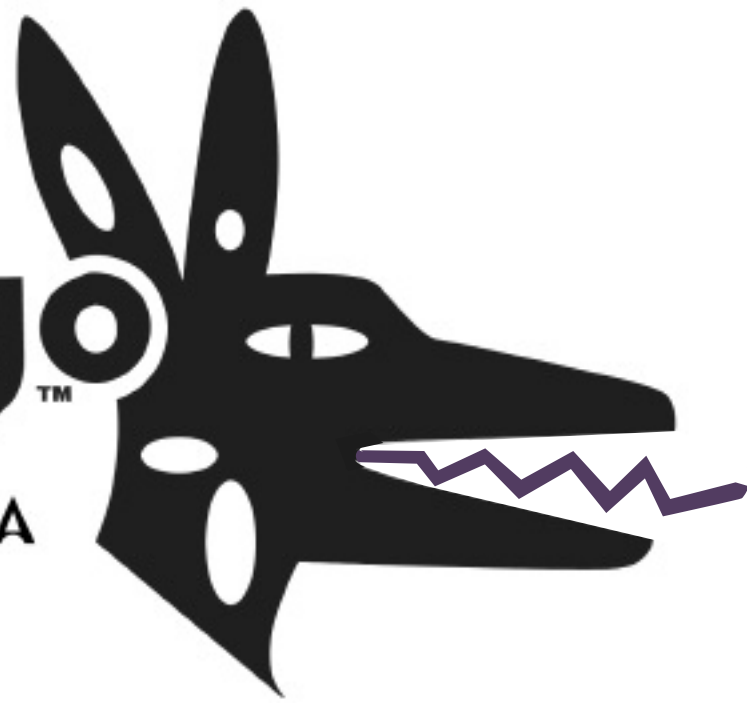


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