

# T

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



June 2007

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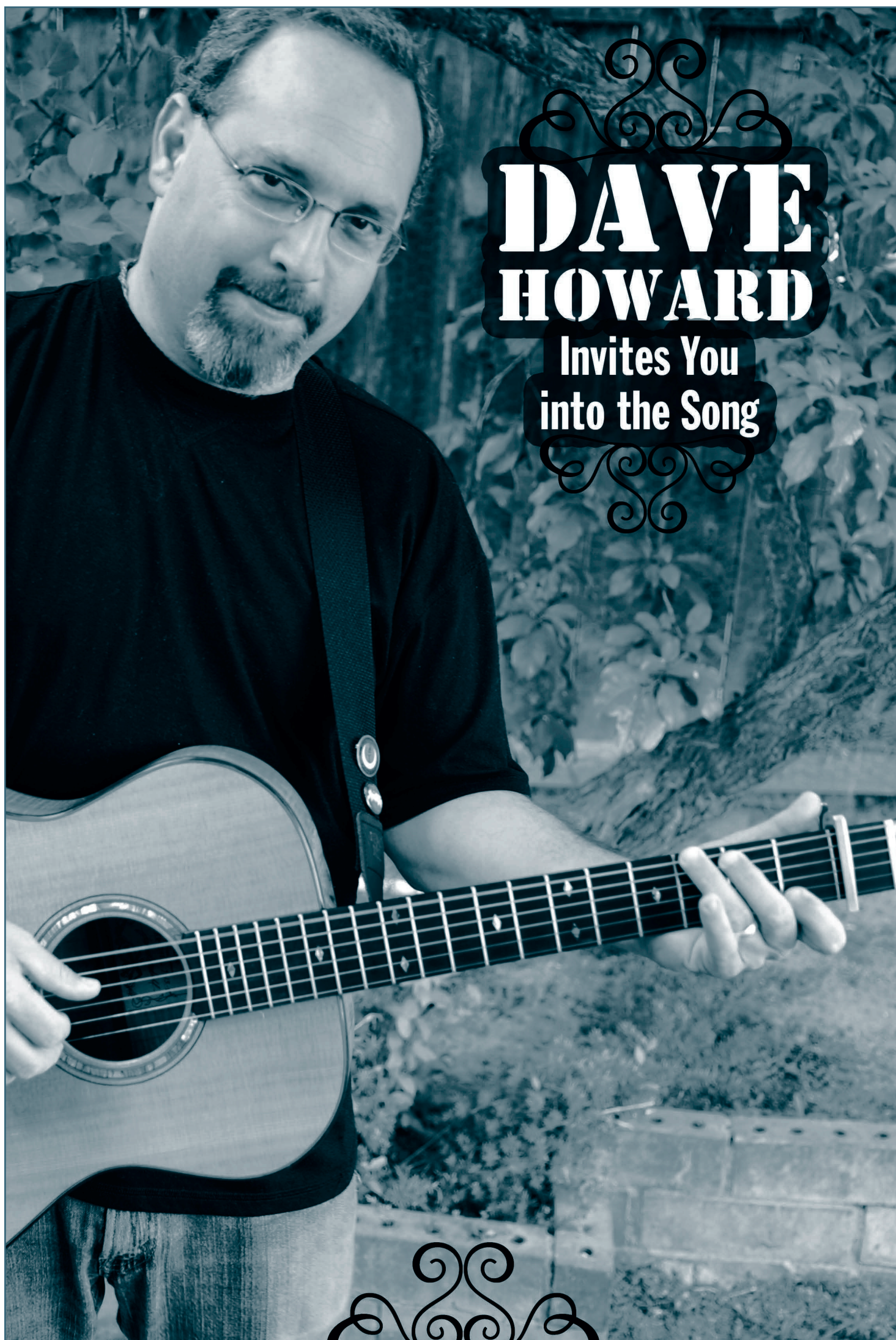
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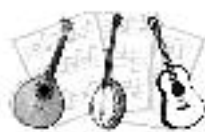
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To promote, encourage, and provide an alternative voice for the great local music that is generally overlooked by the mass media; namely the genres of alternative country, Americana, roots, folk, blues, gospel, jazz, and bluegrass. To entertain, educate, and bring together players, writers, and lovers of these forms; to explore their foundations; and to expand the audience for these types of music.

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**Ukes for Troops Says "Aloha" Across the Miles**

by Mike Alvarez

Until recently, the main thing that Hawaii and the Middle East had in common was sand. Lots of it. Thanks to the efforts of Ukes for Troops, an organization founded by Anita Coyoli-Cullen and Shirley Orlando, the sweet sounds of ukuleles are now being heard in the Iraqi desert. They have sent many cases of instruments, along with instructional materials and accessories, to deployed service members.

Ukes for Troops is Coyoli-Cullen's brainchild. Her daughter served in Afghanistan, and like any good military mom, Anita sent care packages to the entire unit. Shortly after befriending Orlando, owner and operator of Island Bazaar, a Hawaii-themed shop in Huntington Beach, the two decided to send care packages to currently serving units. The discussion naturally turned to ukuleles, so they selected a unit from Hawaii and sent six instruments.

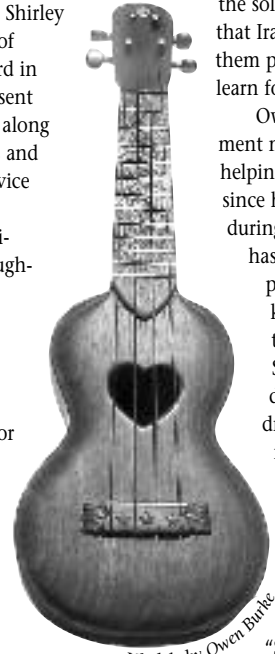
The response from the unit's commander was so positive that they wanted to send more. They matched donated funds from ukulele club members with

their own money and then did just that. Soon, donated instruments from individuals as well as assistance from major ukulele manufacturers enabled them to step up their efforts. They have been rewarded with many e-mails, pictures, and other tokens of appreciation from the soldiers. It has been reported that Iraqi soldiers enjoy hearing them played and even want to learn for themselves!

Owen Burke is a local instrument maker with an interest in helping Ukes for Troops. Ever since his brother was a marine during the war in Vietnam, he has had a great desire to support those who serve. Also known as Buddy Pastel Jr., the drummer behind José Sinatra, he is a prolific designer and builder of drums and stringed instruments. He has constructed a number of ukuleles with unique and original designs. One was conceived especially for the San Diego County Fair, since this year's theme is "Salute to Heroes."

Constructed of Purple Heart wood and appointed with military-themed decorations, the uke will be part of the fair's Design in Wood exhibition, on display from June 8 to July 4. When the fair is over, Burke wants to donate the uke to the VFW. He is currently designing a ukulele for the Veteran's Hospital.

Ukes for Troops has shipped more than 1,000 ukuleles abroad and it is reported that the number of requests now exceeds the donations. Their website is [www.ukesfortroops.com](http://www.ukesfortroops.com).



Ukulele by Owen Burke

**Errata**  
In last month's article about Greg Douglass, he no longer teaches at Scotty's Music in Escondido. It is now called the Music Playce.

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# San Diego Is Still Swingin' to the Moonlight Serenade Orchestra

by Steve Thorn

Have ten years actually gone by? In 1997, San Diego was in the midst of an energetic revival of swing music and lounge. Big Time Operator was drawing SRO crowds at the Catamaran. Local disc jockey Jim Call's lounge happenings at the Hanalei Hotel were a mixture of fez-wearing gentlemen, ladies sporting Bettie Page hairdos, and cool sounds emanating from the likes of Toledo, Skip Heller, and Peggy Claire's Swingin' Affair. On the local airwaves, KPOP-AM radio had a Saturday night show, *Jump, Live, and Wail*, devoted to old and new swing recordings.

The swing kids' and lounge lizards' scene ended with the new millennium. The Catamaran began to book other forms of music, the Hanalei is the now the Crowne Plaza, and KPOP traded in Louie Prima for Al Franken and a progressive talk format. KPOP is now called KLSO (seriously!).

Or did it really end? Martini lounges continue to abound, ballroom dance classes are filled with enthusiastic students and *Dancing With the Stars* consistently makes the Neilsen top ten. Perhaps the greatest indication of swing still "swinging" in San Diego are the 90 or more patrons hitting the dance floor in East San Diego every Thursday night to trip the light fantastic with the Moonlight Serenade Orchestra, named after the Glenn Miller torch classic. Playing on a platform overlooking the Lucky Star Chinese Restaurant's attractive ballroom, MSO evokes memories of a time when big bands made their mark not only on this continent but around the world.

On any given evening, MSO is an all-volunteer big band made up of more than 20 musicians and an alumni of over

25 past members. "The band has always been made up of volunteer talent, except for those few emergencies when we need to hire a key player for a particular gig," said Ross Porter, a San Diego native who serves as MSO's male singer and publicity manager.

"I think it began that way, in the 1980s. We have a formula for compensating the restaurant, allocating the gate receipts, and saving a bit for sound equipment. Our mission is essentially to perform ballroom dance music and attract audiences for this great slice of Americana. I think that everyone volunteers because they like the music and it's a chance to perform and improve."

MSO began in 1996 through the efforts of Maridia Harrington, a dynamic figure in the local music community. "I first heard about a band that played in Chula Vista, at a coffee house in the E Street area near the old downtown section," said Porter. "Later I learned that the Moonlight Serenade Orchestra had started out as the Chula Vista Community Orchestra, begun by a few musicians. They kept the band going because of a deathbed promise. Maridia, who had become an active member, made a promise to the founder that she would put as much time into the band as he did ... something like 15 years ... and to her credit Maridia made it through at least seven of those years, leading the band and taking care of almost every administrative task until she left in 2004. Without Maridia, the band would have died along with its founder. But with her, it got better, the name changed to MSO, and she connected us with our steady gig at the Lucky Star ... that began in February of 2001."

Porter said he came on board in early 2001, "about the same time they began to play at the Lucky Star. The band had a



few early gigs there and elsewhere in San Diego. As a practicing swing dancer, I heard a couple of their performances and soon wondered where the guy singers were. I gave my card to Maridia one night, and in a few weeks she called me to come to rehearsal. My situation was locked in after about a month, once she found out I was a good emcee.

"About the same time, Bob Tutelman came on as the lead tenor saxophonist. He and I helped round up the members of the band for a meeting after Maridia announced she was leaving the MSO. About a dozen of us met, agreed the show must go on, and allocated duties under an emerging set of bylaws and a board that met regularly."

A native of the Bronx, Tutelman grew up in a musical family. Now retired from his profession as an engineer who developed closed-circuit television camera systems, Tutelman has time to devote to his orchestral duties. He believes a successful big band is one where everyone is on the same page, both literally and figuratively. "It's a team game, exactly like football or baseball," said Tutelman, "and when it all comes together, it's a great feeling."

Porter echoed Tutelman's sentiments. "The ability of a band of musicians to produce this music offers me a glimpse of dedicated teamwork, and I enjoy co-creating something so complicated and hopefully harmonious. The Depression

and World War II were times when the people of this country had to pull together and work against tough times for shared ideals. The teamwork that's necessary for a band to play musical arrangements is one expression of a shared vision. The songs evoke the romantic hopes of a generation whose ideals continue to resonate today."

On Sunday mornings Porter performs before a different microphone on *Big Band Brunch*, a radio program heard over Jazz 88.3 FM out of San Diego City College. A long running institution at the station, *Big Band Brunch* also included as its past hosts Scott Waxler and the late Bob Gibb. "After Bob died," said Porter, "Maridia went to the memorial service and heard the KSDS staff lamenting the loss of Bob's great musical knowledge, whereupon she approached them and suggested that I might be qualified to replace him. I started programming the BBB in early 2004 and though my taste is a little different from Bob's - I think more melodic and less modernly strident - the station has retained and perhaps increased its *Big Band Brunch* audience. There's another great big band program that airs on Saturday mornings, *Ilda Garcia's Rug Cutters Swing Show*, which is also a lot of fun to listen to."

Expect to hear anything and everything during the musical "courses" served up on *Big Band Brunch*. "My choices run to shorter cuts and numbers that would be recognizable for anyone who lived through the Big Band era of the '30s, '40s and '50s," said Porter. "Some of the era's small groups and vocalists are featured, plus modern bands whose CDs appear in the KSDS library. The staples are Dorsey, Basie, Ellington, Goodman, Lunceford, Miller, James, Shaw, Kenton, Herman, and a few personal favorites like Elliot Lawrence, Claude Thornhill, and Hal Kemp. Sometimes I have a theme, like D-Day when I featured European swing of the '30s and '40s in addition to World War II favorites. Sometimes I'll do a close-up on a particular band, but usually I strive for an enjoyable and listenable variety. People tell me that they can do anything to the program ... gardening, reading, even having coffee or brunch. I like to think there's something nourishing about the music that I play."

In addition to the nourishing element of the music, what role did the big bands play in twentieth century culture?

"Growing up in the San Diego of the '60s, I had parents and grandparents who had lived their entire lives here and easily reminisced about life during the Depression and World War II," said Porter. "Stories about the old days fascinated me, and there were a couple of good radio programs that offered a good sample of swing music like *Don Howard's Golden Era of the Big Bands* Saturday mornings on KOGO and Chuck Cecil's long-running *Swingin' Years* weeknight slot on KFI. After about age 10, I listened religiously to these programs up until high school. I also became the family curator of the 30 or so 78rpm record albums in our possession and began buying re-issues at Tower Records or wherever I could find them.

"Rock and Roll didn't interest me until



Dancing to the Moonlight Serenade Orchestra at the Lucky Star Restaurant

my college years, and I was not of the generation actively confronting the establishment powers that dragged us into Vietnam. Like many who graduated high school in the Class of 1976, I was in a sweet spot of trying to bridge the generation gap and build constructively on the revolutions of sexuality, civil rights, and feminism that rocked our childhood. In my case, as the youngest of four kids, I let my older siblings fight with my parents and by observation and appreciation I figured out how to get along and bridge the generation gap. It should also be said that my parents, though not exactly "cool," were enlightened, harmonious, and supportive in very basic and generous ways. Kay and David Porter were socially active and responsible, and our home life reflected an active commitment to civility and community. So the family stories gained credence and I got to a place where I could pretty well envision how life was in the San Diego of World War II.

"Twentieth century culture is shot through with American music, from start to finish; it's impossible to consider it without popular music. The history of our popular music - as a developing genre, as a business proposition, as a seed of our vision and ideals - sheds much light on our state as a society. The last hundred years have not lacked for comment on these things; social critics have blamed popular music for almost every conceivable evil for generations. From my viewpoint, popular music's increasing stridency and cynicism after 1950 - in contrast to its simultaneous descent into treacherous sentiment - was sad because it cheapened popular culture. Intellectually, in college I grew to appreciate the new energy that the Beatles, Rolling Stones, the Doors, Jimi Hendrix, and others brought to music, inspired of course by the blues. But there was too much noise and anger for me, not enough melody, harmony, or teamwork to justify the great ravings of the massive crowds. It all seemed so forced, what you were supposed to do if you were a youngster. One thing I did take to heart from the '60s was the notion of 'doing your own thing.' I tested it by making 'my thing' something fairly uncool and watching how others responded. As the years roll by, more and more people tell me how much they like big band music, how good it makes them feel."

MSO, which also features the female vocalizing of Barbara Toombs, perform every Thursday from 7 to 9:30 p.m. at the Lucky Star Restaurant, 3893 54th St., near the intersection of 54th Street and University Avenue. Reservations, which are strongly encouraged, can be made by calling 619-229-8228. (Visit the MSO website at [www.themso.com](http://www.themso.com)) In addition to the annual MSO summer picnic (date and location soon to be announced on the website), the big band will perform at a gala for the Spreckels Organ Society on September 18. For information, visit the Spreckels Organ Society at [www.sosor-gan.org](http://www.sosor-gan.org).

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Photo: Bill Richardson

Lou Curtiss

**LOU CURTISS SOUND LIBRARY DIGITIZATION PROJECT**

Russ Hamm and I are starting in on the work of transferring the material in my library to digital format. As I told you previously, the Grammy Foundation gave us a grant to do just that. Mostly the material we will transfer will come from the series of festivals we did from 1967 thru 1987 at SDSU (festivals 17, 18, and 19 of the 20 festivals were held in other locations) as well as selected material from its successor, the Adams Avenue Roots Festival (mostly the more traditional and roots artists). Along the way we also did three blues festivals (in 1979 and 1980 and again in 1995; interestingly, the 1979 Blues and Black Music Heritage Festival was the first festival I put together in the Adams Park location, which would become the site of the Roots Festival some 14 years later). After this material is transferred to digital format, the archives will go to the Library of Congress Archives in Washington D.C. and to the UCLA Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology. Hopefully there will be a location, besides my own collection, where this material can be stored and studied here in San Diego, such as the SDSU Library, but no one has come forward from that organization with any interest nor has any other San Diego institution of learning come forward either, at least not yet. Just a few weeks ago the fortieth anniversary of the first festival at SDSU passed and no one mentioned it, except for me. Next month, on July 31, Folk Arts Rare Records will be 40 years old as well (around the same time that the Lou Curtiss Sound Library started to come together).

You'll note that I said "mostly" the material will come from the festivals, but there is another quality portion that will come from a series of concerts that took place mostly in San Diego (here I go, using that mostly again), which I was involved with in one way or another. In some cases it was only because I was there, or helped set up the chairs, but mostly it was because I wound up with the tapes and I'm a notorious pack rat when it comes to stuff like that. I used to go to concerts at a bookstore called the Sign of the Sun on the corner of College Avenue and Adams Avenue near El Cajon Boulevard. The store was owned by Harold Darling who later ran the Unicorn Theater and the Green Tiger Press. The store catered to the students at San Diego State, carrying textbooks (new and used) and magazines of a political and artistic bent. Harold also sold recordings of traditional folk songs and blues and various kinds of ethnic music. And then there were the concerts we have on tape that feature Bessie Jones, Jean Redpath, Jean Ritchie, Guy Carawan, Rev. Gary Davis, Jack and Marilyn Powell, the Chambers Brothers, an early incarnation of the Scottsville Squirrel Barkers, Hedy West (all from the summer of 1962). I remember seeing so many others at the Sign of the Sun (Mississippi John Hurt, Ramblin' Jack Elliott, Skip James, Slim Critchlow, the New Lost City Ramblers, Rosalie Sorrels, Mike Seeger, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, Gunter Schmitz, Janet Smith, Roger Perkins and Larry Hanks, and Rita Weill), however the tapes haven't surfaced. Maybe one day they will.

There was also a series of concerts I put together at my shop starting in the early 1970s that will be archived, which includes people like Jim Ringer and Mary McCaslin, Ray and Ina Patterson, U Utah Phillips, the Old Hat Band, Fiddlin' Red Simpson and the Old Scratch Band, Sam Chatmon, Sam Hinton, Harmonica Frank Floyd, Thomas Shaw, Jane Voss, Tom Waits, Sandy Dutky, Jack Tempchin, Roger Belloni, W.B. Reid, Del Rey (then known as Lani Kurnik), Walt Richards, John Bosley, Gala Parish, Molly Stone, Robert

# Recordially, Lou Curtiss

Jeffrey, Hank Bradley, Art Rosenbaum, Bill Staines, Ruthie Gorton, Kenny Hall, Martin Henry, Ray Bierl, Ted Staak, Guy Carawan, the Fern Street Irregulars, the Normal Heights Lounge Lizards, Holly Tannen, Clabe Hangen, Johnny Walker, Dave Page (Gregory's grandfather), Hunt and Peck, Wayne Stromberg, and so many others. Three or four years later we moved the concerts to Orangos restaurant on Washington Street and continued for a couple more years with the same kind of people. After that time and between the end of the last Folk Festival and the first Roots Festival we did some house concerts on Robinson Street in Hillcrest, and during the whole period from the 1960s forward there are tapes from coffee houses like the Heritage in Mission Beach, where we helped Bill Nunn and later Bob Webb book people like Big Joe Williams, Sam Chatmon, and others (I have a terrific tape of Kenny Hall playing with the Krudd Family at the Heritage). Another tape that has survived features bluesman Johnny Shines playing acoustic at an Escondido coffee house called In the Alley.

I also have recordings from the Bifrost Bridge, Land of Oden, and the Candy Company, various church social halls, school auditoriums, and outside picking sessions from just about everywhere. Besides myself, people with tape recorders in those days included Richard Schurch, Dennis Squier, Jerry Weddle, Jack Van Olst, Bob Pillow, and a few more I'm leaving out because I just can't remember and others I haven't talked to yet (but I know they have stuff).

Now comes the stuff I'd like to be able to add to the library. Two or three years before the first San Diego Folk Festival at SDSU was held, the San Diego Folksong Society put on a Folk Festival out at Cal Western University (then in Point Loma). It featured Sam Hinton,

Hedy West, the Kentucky Colonels (with Clarence and Roland White), Bess Lomax Hawes, and Stu Jamieson, and someone must have taped some of it. Those tapes belong in these archives. There should also be traditional music taped at various San Diego music events, including stuff we missed at our own festivals, that belong in these archives. We have a lot of material and it'll take us awhile to digitize it, but it would really be nice if some of you came up with recordings from some of the other area festivals. For instance, we would not have even began this project if the San Diego Folk Heritage hadn't allowed us to use their non-profit status to apply for this grant and for that we are ever grateful. This is an organization that has put on a fine series of concerts and festivals of their own. It'd sure be nice if someone provided us with tapes of some of their events to include (particularly the more traditional artists) in the digitization. I have nothing in my library that was recorded at the Old Time Cafe in Encinitas either, although there were many fine traditional and roots artists who appeared there. I could go on and on and I'll probably think of six things I forgot right after I send this off to Troubadour Central. As we go along with this project, you'll be hearing more about it here.

Now, speaking of traditional music, let me tell you that the good folks at the San Diego Folk Heritage will be hosting the Sam Hinton Folk Celebration this year on Saturday, June 9, at Old Poway Park. The festival features Trails and Rails, Wood 'n' Lips, Chris Clarke, Jean and Butch Hibben, Allen Singer and Dane Terry, Johnson, Bosley, and Morin, Greg Campbell and Tom Boyer, Larry Robinson, and oh yes, Lou and Virginia Curtiss. And it's all FREE. Don't miss it.

Recordially,  
Lou Curtiss

## San Diego Folk Heritage presents the **Sam Hinton Folk Celebration**

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- 10:30am **Wood 'n' Lips**
- 11:10am **Trails & Rails**
- 11:50am **Chris Clarke & Friends**
- 12:30pm **Jean & Butch Hibben**
- 1:10pm  **special guests Lou & Virginia Curtiss**
- 2pm **Allen Singer & Dane Terry**
- 2:40pm **Johnson, Bosley, & Morin**
- 3:20pm **Greg Campbell & Tom Boyer**
- 4pm **Larry Robinson**
- 12-1:15pm **Special Music Workshop** with Walt Richards & Paula Strong  
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by Chuck Schiele

It's funny where the world takes you if you let it. The older I get, the more I realize how jazz isn't so much like "life" itself as it is more about the "journey" of the life path. In both life and jazz, one should prepare, jump in, accept the changes, and even explore them, letting the whole thing become what its supposed to be.

In that I've been increasingly mesmerized by Miles, Coltrane, and every last name in the monster book of jazz. I find myself in my car cranking up Blue Note Records, astonished at how much room there can be within the adjusting boundaries of music because of jazz.

And with that I am grateful to know some of the players who were "there" when the jazz music form was still in its fevered incubation.

Shep Meyers was there and he's still trekking through his busy career, right here in San Diego, having moved from New York City where he worked with some of the world's greatest musicians, arrangers, composers, and music publishers. His impressive list of credits include recording with Ella Fitzgerald and playing with other musical greats such as Woody Herman, Billy Daniels, Julie London, Terry Gibbs, and Anita O'Day, as well as comedians Lenny Bruce, Steve Allen, Redd Foxx, and Henny Youngman. Shep served as conductor for comedian George Burns, singer/puppeteer Shari Lewis, and Johnny Carson at the Sahara Hotel in Las Vegas.

Shep was an arranger for the Radio City Music Hall Symphony Orchestra and Chorus under conductor Raymond Paige and chief arranger Rayburn Wright. He also composed, arranged, and conducted the music for more than 500 radio and television commercials. The television commercials that Shep scored were nominated for seven CLIO Awards (the Oscar of television commercials) in just 11 years. He also served as musical director and conductor for the 90-minute "CLIO Awards Special" on CBS-TV in 1974.

Shep's latest CD, *Solo Thoughts*, is a solo jazz piano recording, featuring 15 standards and one original, available through cdbaby.com. Visit [www.shepmeyers.com](http://www.shepmeyers.com) to learn more about Shep's extensive career.

I recently chatted with Shep and asked him to highlight his career.

CS: Let's begin with the logical place of how you got started?

SM: I grew up in Fair Lawn, New Jersey, a suburban town about 14 miles outside of New York City. My mother played piano for her

# Improvisational Dialogue with Shep Meyers

own pleasure. When I was seven years old, she taught me a couple of songs that I learned by rote, and that led to formal piano. I learned notation and started playing on my own when I was about 14. I would play occasionally during high school assembly programs, and I was part of a Dixieland band called the Knights of Dixieland." We won a band contest at the Capitol Theater, and the prize was a basement full of a soft drink called Super Coola - I mean cases and cases of the stuff.

After that my attention turned to big bands and modern jazz. There was a piano teacher in the town next to ours who had studied at Juilliard with the great Teddy Wilson, and I started studying with him. He showed me jazz piano voicings, and I started listening to the greats: Art Tatum, Nat Cole, Fats Waller, Thelonious Monk, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie, and Bud Powell. I would go to New York City every chance I got. At that time, you had to be 18 to get into a club, and I had a fake draft card. I was able to hear all the greats play in person. I heard Duke Ellington's orchestra at the Savoy Ballroom in Harlem. I remember standing right in front of the band and listening to the saxophone section, and for some reason tears started streaming down my eyes. I had never heard anything so beautiful, and that sealed the deal. I became a "lifer." Listening to Ellington and Count Basie in person opened up new avenues of music for me. I started writing music with a passion.

Then came college. My father thought music should be a hobby, not a vocation, so off I went to the University of Pennsylvania to the Wharton School of Finance and Commerce. Jimmy DePreist, who was a fine jazz drummer, had a quintet with great visibility. Jimmy Garrison, who later played with John Coltrane's group along with McCoy Tyner, was Jimmy's bass player. I arranged music for my

jazz octet, which was the opening group for the annual concert, and I wrote arrangements for Jimmy's big band as well. James DePreist went on to become one of the world's finest symphonic conductors.

CS: Your days as an arranger in New York are quite impressive. I mean downright tremendous, actually.

SM: After the University of Pennsylvania, I moved to New York City and enrolled in the Manhattan School of Music to study composition with Vittorio Giannini and instrumentation with Nicholas Flagello. Then I really lucked out. I played an audition at Radio City with a female vocalist who sang a trio arrangement of "Summertime" that I had sketched out for her. The audition was for Raymond Paige, the conductor of the Radio City Symphony Orchestra and Chorus. Paige loved the singer's voice and decided to put her on the show they were currently rehearsing. The only fly in the ointment was that all of his arrangers were already assigned to other projects. Paige asked me if I could write an arrangement to "Summertime" for the orchestra, and I said yes. To make a long story short, I wrote it, and everybody liked it, and Mr. Paige hired me as part of his arranging staff.

I guess I was the only composition student with a symphony orchestra and chorus at his disposal every month. I did arrangements for the Rockettes and the assorted show stuff. Ray was an orchestral genius and helped me immensely. He would look over my scores and make suggestions and recommendations before I turned them in to the copyists. He was friends with guys like Henry Mancini, and Ray later became the director of the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York.

As far as composing, arranging, and conducting, some years later in 1968, I started a production company in NYC to compose and

produce music for television commercials with Larry Rosen. This gave me the opportunity to compose, arrange, and conduct music in virtually every style and genre. I wrote for practically every instrument you can think of:

kalimba, sitar, harmonica, harp, strings, brass, woodwinds - you name it. There were hundreds of recording sessions, and I was blessed to conduct some of the world's finest musicians in my orchestras. The nice thing about that time was that I had a hand in the musical concept, and wasn't just an arranger for hire. Big difference.

CS: So you're a New Yorker, working in the New York scene and then you came to San Diego. How was your integration into the San Diego scene? Where has it taken you?

SM: I came to San Diego April 1, 1977, from New York City. I took a low pressure gig in a restaurant in Escondido and then through the Musician's Union joined a jazz combo with Kevin Lettau (vocals), Lori Bell (flute), John Leftwich (bass), and Scott Elam (drums). We would go all over San Diego County to perform at venues like preschools, elementary schools, high schools, special schools, colleges, and convalescent homes. We played for people age three to 103. We would perform, and they would ask us questions about our instruments and backgrounds. This lasted about a year and a half and was a lot of fun. After that, a couple of agencies/production companies approached me, and I became a bandleader, playing private parties, museum and corporate events, playing everything from solo piano to conducting big bands for corporate pop concerts and award shows.

But my heart was in jazz and in late 1986, I got an emergency call from a manager at Croce's. Seems their pianist didn't show up, so Peggy Minafee, a singer, gave him my phone number, and I played there solo. He asked me if I could play the following day, so that Ingrid Croce, the owner, could hear me. I said yes and ended up playing solo jazz piano for lunches, brunches, and duos for happy hours. And then, Ingrid gave me the chance to organize and play with a quartet on Tuesday nights. I hired Anthony Ortega on saxophone (who I knew from NYC), Dave Marr on bass, the late Dick Lopez on drums, and me on piano. Some days, I played jazz at Croce's for ten hours. Twenty years later, I'm still there on Tuesday nights with my jazz quartet (8pm-midnight).

CS: Okay, since you're pluggin' away . . . for the benefit of all the real-deal jazz snobs out there, what's the gig, exactly?

SM: The personnel changes every week, so the music's always fresh, and I get a chance to play straight-ahead jazz with some of San Diego's finest musicians. It's still the best musical situation of my career.

CS: Your CD is lovely, and I enjoy that you let it be what it is in its purest form, which is something jazz doesn't always do these days. How did the *Solo Thoughts* project come about?

SM: Most of my work in recent years has been playing solo jazz piano and, thankfully, it has been well received. A lot of people, including my son Benjy, the late Tommy Flanagan, who was one of the all-time great jazz pianists, and some of my fellow San Diego musicians like Kamau Kenyatta and Dave Curtis encouraged me to attempt the project. In early 2006 Danny Campbell approached me to come to his studio and do some solo piano stuff and following Kamau Kenyatta's advice, I played the same way I would if I were playing in my living room. I didn't plan any of the tunes and just played what came to mind at the time.

CS: That keeps it pretty real, doesn't it?

SM: After a couple of sessions, I went on hold, unsure about whether it was good or bad. Then, on one October afternoon, I had lunch with my dear friend Mike Wofford, who is one of the great jazz pianists of all time, and I



Shep Meyers

asked him if he would listen to what I had recorded and give me his honest opinion. I told him that I was reluctant to spend a lot of money unless the music was worthwhile. I trust Mike completely, and knew I wouldn't get a "friends and relatives" kind of reply. His validation sealed the deal, and I went for it. So far, the response to *Solo Thoughts* has been wonderful. I have always been sort of a behind-the-scenes kind of musician, and being "out there" is a first for me. It's a very exciting time. Very trippy. . . .

CS: You spent much of your life with a keyboard under your hands. What's it like to be a jazz "lifer"?

SM: To me, playing jazz music is like going to the pulpit in a house of worship. The music is sacred. It is definitely a gift of the universe. Playing jazz music can heal illness. The expression of jazz music may be one of the last real freedoms we have. Most of the "real" world doesn't understand that going to play jazz isn't like going to work. We love what we do for a living. Our job is a labor of love in an era when most people hate what they do. So we are extremely lucky people who get to follow our dreams. I consider playing jazz very fulfilling, and I'm privileged to be a part of it.

Jazz as an art form is continually evolving. As one of the older guys, I'm knocked out by the fact that so many young people have embraced the music of my generation. I couldn't ask for a better validation of the music. Young people in their teens listening to Bird and Diz, Coltrane, and Miles. Colleges are offering degrees in jazz studies. A kid can learn in four years what it took people my age a generation to learn. The jazz literature is so vast that a person can read and play a John Coltrane solo or learn a new tune that has been printed out on a computer. We had to learn those tunes by ear in jam sessions in the lofts of New York City.

CS: What do you think about jazz in San Diego?

SM: San Diego has, in my opinion, always had a vibrant jazz scene. It has always been a place where a young person can get his stuff together so that he or she can take it to New York or Los Angeles. A young jazz musician in San Diego can get the opportunity to play with the best musicians here so that they can learn and grow. In other places, a young person has to wait in line to play with the better musicians. I'm here, and I'm happy.

The Shep Meyers Trio will be appearing with Eleonor England at Lestat's on Friday, June 1, 9pm. Shep Meyers' *Solo Thoughts* is reviewed in this issue. See page 17.



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by Raul Sandelin

"You have to start with one good channel," Beston Barnett explains, a goal that seems easier said than done as we hang halfway in and halfway out of his crowded North Park garage. It's apparent that this guy could use some bigger production budgets so that the crowded one-car enclosure doesn't have to quadruple as a sound booth, control room, photo studio, and record company archive-slash-storage space.

Welcome to the nerve center of Art Hurts Records.

Yet, despite the cramped conditions, everything is actually neat and tidy. Everything is in its right spot. And, I can tell that Barnett is a fastidious organizer as well as producer. As he speaks, I notice that nothing there is clutter (everything has a purpose!), and that that "one good channel" is something akin to an antique piece of crystal. It's something Barnett stores away for safekeeping to be pulled out only for the perfect occasion.

He points to the mic hanging alone in its compact acoustic closet. "That mic cost \$1,500 on eBay." Then, like a landscape painter, he leads my eye from the mic to the cabling to the analog pre-amp, which itself leads, via more cabling, to more boxes that I don't quite understand before finally patching into the home computer where the final mix-down is done.

Barnett discusses that "one good channel" as if it's some precious gift, a fragile butterfly that could easily fly away, a last gaze shared by dying lovers, something so ephemeral that it must be honored with an almost religious piety. If that one good channel, that one analog channel is established, then the tracks that are recorded on that one good channel can be overdubbed digitally while retaining the warmth and clear lines that so define analog recording. It isn't that digital recording is

inherently cold and overdriven. It's that the time isn't taken to establish that analog-type of sound for each track before they are mixed together.

Ironically, if Barnett's initial quest is the creation of that one, perfect analog channel, he becomes very much a part of the digital age soon thereafter. Besides doing much of his final mixing digitally, his whole philosophy seems driven by an era in which computers have interlinked the entire planet.

"I store all my music on Napster. Then, when I listen to it like any other paying subscriber, I actually am paying myself royalties," Barnett laughs, knowing that it's no way to get rich. The point is that he's not afraid to embrace technology even if he starts with that one, good analog channel.

As his story unfolds, it makes even more sense to call Barnett a musician belonging to the Age of Communication.

Beston Barnett was born in 1973 in Toronto but moved soon thereafter to his mother's hometown of Nashville. To think, however, that country music would be a major influence is presumptuous. Growing up in the 1980s, Barnett was actually discouraged by that decade's contributions to county music. So, except for some early flirtations with bluegrass, Barnett steered clear of the musical genre that put his boyhood town on the map.

"My big heroes were from R&B and jazz — Stevie Wonder, James Brown, James Jamerson, the unsung hero of Motown, Horace Silver, and Thelonious Monk." His real influences were heard by way of older records while the live music all around him in the country music capital went mostly unheeded.

Then, when he was 13, he went to a world music concert in Toronto with his father. From there on out, he was hooked on the rhythms and guitar work coming from West Africa. Soon he was playing West African guitar among the small, overshadowed group of

# Beston Barnett: Art Hurts Even in the Age of Communication

cognoscenti in Nashville.

While in his early twenties, he made his way to San Diego, where he has lived ever since. But, even as the break from Nashville is now complete, Barnett does credit his childhood home for teaching him the value of songwriting. The lifelong "Nashville-ish" lesson he learned was that songwriting is a "serious craft that takes dedication... and even then it takes a miracle to write a good song."

In San Diego, another city hardly known for its world music scene, Barnett developed into a word-class, and internationally recognized, guitarist and proponent of west African music. "Again, we live in an Age of Communication," he reminds me. It doesn't matter where one lives now that the planet is virtually hard wired.

And, this is where Barnett teaches me a valuable lesson, dispelling some of the notions I had held about world music. Many people think of world music as some sort of fusion of various folk musics. According to Barnett, that's not altogether true.

"When Bob Marley first recorded, even before the Wailers, he was basically singing like Otis Redding, an American R&B singer. The music from Ghana, known as High Life, is as much a product of swing jazz and the post-war Latin dance craze as it is African 'folk' music."

Barnett's point is that there's an assumption that reggae, High Life, and the many forms of indigenous music were created locally and reflect the local cultures in some pristine, primal state. The truth is that in this Age of Communication, nothing develops in isolation. And, many musical genres that we dub "folk" are just as much a product of the industrial, post-industrial world that frames them.

In 1999, this eclectic musician with his eclectic view of the world started Art Hurts Records. "The phrase comes from a poem by Gwendolyn Brooks, which reads, 'Art hurts... Art urges voyages—and it is easier to stay home.'" So far, Art Hurts Records has produced 10 CDs, each originating from that "one good channel" that is Barnett's quest, yet each reflecting the cross-cultural pollination that could only occur in this Age of Communication.

In 1999, the new record label debuted with *Chrysalis*, which Barnett had originally released as a series of MP3s at MP3.com. In fact, Barnett was voted best MP3 hip hop Artist of 1999. Ironically, this hip hop album, released by this very unconventional hip hop



Beston Barnett

artist, would receive widespread airplay and be sampled on an array of commercials and TV programs.

Since 1999, Barnett and Art Hurts Records have gone on to release four more collections of Barnett's solo work — either as a solo singer/songwriter or as an overdubbed one-man band. These CDs include *How to Pass Wonder On, On and Up, So Very Near*, and the newly released *Loneliness and Freedom Waltz Together Through the Night*. For someone hardly influenced by Nashville, the singer-songwriter moniker fits him quite well and his ever-expanding talents allow him to cover the gamut of popular song from folk and folk-rock to funk and Latin.

Last year, Barnett's jazz combo, the Beston Barnett Quartet, also released a concept album called *Curious Melodies from the Lost Travel Diaries of Sir Albus Manchild*, an album that packs a worldly punch, fitting in influences from a number of continents while executing the songwriting within a semi-improvisational jazz format.

In addition, Art Hurts Records has released albums by other artists, most notably *The Old Highlife* (2001), featuring Ghanaian musicians Roadmaster and Agyemang, *Bolga Zohdoomah* (2005), the name of a San Diego band dedicated to both the modern and traditional sounds of western Africa, and *Da Rua Dos Ossos* (2006) by Brazilian artist Jujú Duarte. In a format typical of Barnett's Age of Communication, this last CD was recorded in Brazil with almost all the instruments overdubbed later by Barnett in his North Park garage.

It should also be mentioned that the cover art for these CDs is exquisite. In fact, I was very much sold by the look of these CDs long before I had the chance to actually listen to the music inside. This brings us full-circle to one of the functions of the North Park garage mentioned earlier. Barnett produces the cover art by creating large mixed media paintings-cum-collages that he then photographs there in the garage. The result is a pleasant and warm, yet surreal signature style that gives the Art Hurts catalog a definite distinction on the CD rack.

Everything mentioned about Beston Barnett so far would be enough to instill awe. He has covered territory only hoped for in multiple artistic life times. He is equally comfortable as a singer and songwriter, leader of a jazz band, hip hop artist, impresario of western African music, record producer, visual artist, and photographer. (Have I covered them all?) Yet, Barnett is probably best known around town for heading up the Speak Easy Quartet (newly named the Zzymzzy Quartet), one of San Diego's few guitar-based groups dedicated to the Gypsy jazz sound of Django Reinhardt as well as swing jazz that enjoyed its heyday between the two world wars. The Zzymzzy Quartet features Patrick Marion (upright bass), Matt Gill (clarinet), Pete Miesner (guitar), and of course Beston Barnett on Selmer-Maccaferri style guitar. The quartet can be frequently found gigging at People's Food in Ocean Beach, Claire de Lune in North Park, and a number of popular cafes and clubs around town.

Barnett's latest recording project is playing bass with local singer-songwriter Annie Dru. Currently in the rehearsal stage, the duo plans to enter Barnett's North Park garage soon and add another CD to the Art Hurts roster.



Zzymzzy Quartet (formerly Speak Easy Quartet) front: Matt Gill and Beston Barnett; in back: Pete Miesner and Patrick Marion

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# JIMMY DUKE CELEBRATES TEN YEARS OF MUSIC AT DARK THIRTY

by Joe Rathburn  
photos by Joel Siegfried

On May 3, 1998, the Joel Rafael Band performed in a living room in Lakeside to an audience comprised mostly of friends and family of one Jimmy Duke, the owner of the house. It was the inaugural concert of what would become, by many accounts, the best house concert venue in the country, Jimmy Duke's Dark Thirty Productions . . . .

Fast forward to May 3rd, 2007, and a large crowd has gathered in the Lakeside living room cum theater, to see Rafael perform solo. After a short, well-received opening set by his daughter Jamaica (her debut as a singer/songwriter), Rafael does a set and a half of mostly tunes from his superb new CD, *13 Stories High*. Rough mixes played during the break reveal that this is (arguably) his best CD yet. Recorded in Austin, Texas, using a crack studio band, it focuses on Rafael's richly aged vocals and acoustic guitar that stick to the folk path but adds B3, electric guitar, and drums for that alt country edge. *13 Stories High* should expose him to a much broader audience. But I digress, back to Dark Thirty...

An avid supporter of all kinds of live music, and a huge fan of Rafael, Jimmy wanted to take his passion to a new level. Although he was constantly going out to hear live music at San Diego's clubs and concert halls, he felt the need to provide a better listening environment. He envisioned a place where the musicians he loved so much would have a better chance to actually be heard rather than spending their performance time competing with rude and rowdy conversations, televisions, and tinkling glasses.

Jimmy soon set about turning his Eucalyptus Hills home (custom built by himself and an uncle) into a theatre-like setting. The two-story house was designed with nearly all of the floor space opening into a spacious knotty pine-paneled living room with 20-foot ceilings. This became the performance space and main seating area. The wrap-around upstairs loft was designated as a balcony for overflow seating. An outdoor deck along one long windowed wall of the living room added more overflow seating and would also serve as

a holding area for early bird guests who arrived before the sound check was finished and the doors opened. The downstairs master bedroom would serve as the performer's ready room, replete with a full bathroom, air conditioning, and stay-over privileges for out-of-town performers. He later added a tarpaulin cover to the deck to both shade his guests and protect them from rain. He bought lots of extra chairs with cushions and also purchased a few propane heaters and lots of blankets for those audience members who preferred to sit outside on the deck.

He built a stage across one end of the rectangular living room. Jimmy then made arrangements with friend and musician Dan Connor to bring in his sound system and serve as stage manager and house sound engineer. Dan would arrive early, set up his system, do the show, then break his system down and take it home. Eventually, on the advice of his sound crew and others, Jimmy bought a complete Mackie sound system and installed it, hanging the speakers by himself while balancing 15 feet up on a 20-foot ladder. He eventually bought and installed a rank of flood lights with a lighting controller and two follow spots. He bought a Taylor guitar to serve as house guitar for traveling performers who couldn't bring, but needed, a second instrument, as well as several very high end Neuman microphones.

Jimmy organized a volunteer crew, which included his then girlfriend (now wife), Linda, and friends and family, who would perform such duties as serving the pot luck buffet from the spacious kitchen, taking tickets, designing and printing programs, creating and running the website, taking pictures, and (later) running the lights.

He eventually hired me to come in and record all of the performances, mostly for archival purposes. However, an artist will occasionally release a CD from the recordings I make for Dark Thirty. Michael Smith, Little Big Men, Kristi Rickert-Peterson, and John Stewart have all released *Live at Dark Thirty* CDs. I even released my own Dark Thirty CD.

From the beginning, Jimmy's goal has been to bring in the best national and local acts and introduce them to as many local music lovers as he can find. He has ventured

far and wide — to the Kerrville Folk Festival in Texas, the Kate Wolf Festival in northern California, and the Folk Alliance Conference in Memphis, Nashville, Montreal, Vancouver, and elsewhere in search of performers. His one criteria is that they had to thrill him. He has to love 'em to share 'em with the folks in his home. He's got a list of performers as long as your arm that he wants to present eventually. However, his favorites keep finding their way back into the lineup. He's constantly barraged by artists from all over the world with requests to perform at his venue.

During the first couple of seasons admission was \$10 to \$15, depending on the artist's stature. He eventually stepped that up to \$15 to \$20. All proceeds have always gone to the performers, which is particularly interesting, since the expenses Jimmy incurs with every show — advertising, food and drink, transportation, programs, piano/keyboard rentals, etc. — come right out of his pocket. For many out-of-town performers, the ticket proceeds don't even cover their guarantee, so the balance comes out of Jimmy's pocket. Despite the monetary losses, Jimmy is determined that the show must go on.

Over and over again, performers who come to play at Dark Thirty comment on what a wonderful place it is to play. Everything about it, they say, from the sound and lights to the accommodations, from the warmth of the audience to the respect for the artist, make it the best performance space in its class anywhere in the country. Ever since Jimmy started back in 1998, other locals have begun hosting house concerts, many of them inspired by the work he's done. One person, who picked Jimmy's brain early on for advice about everything from booking to mailing lists, has even taken it a step further and rents a building to do shows, eschewing local artists in favor of out-of-town acts.

With 10 seasons of exceptional house concerts — featuring music ranging from folk and classical music to jazz — under his belt, Jimmy doesn't show signs of stopping. He sometimes kids about not getting any younger (he recently turned 70), and how much each show takes out of him. However, when he gets up on stage at the beginning of each show to introduce the artist, you can see a gleam in



Joel Rafael and his daughter Jamaica at the 10th anniversary concert last month



Joe Rathburn and Dan Connor



Guests relax outside on the deck



Jimmy Duke, a musician's best friend



Jimmy's wife, Linda, in the kitchen

his eye that says, "I love this too much to quit." We're all glad to see that gleam, because we know what value Jimmy's efforts hold for our community and the world at large. They may seem like a drop in the bucket at first, but upon reflection, the ripples that Dark Thirty House Concerts have sent out into the universe have touched the lives of too many to mention, touched them in such a way that they'll never forget that hard-to-find house in that little place called Lakeside, California, where they sat on the deck at sunset, had a



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# San Diego's Queen of Bluegrass, Emma Radcliffe Still Going Strong

by Dwight Worden

You don't need to know how old she is, your guess would be way off, and hey, you wouldn't believe me if I told you. Suffice it to say she was born well before the Great Depression on a farm, complete with outhouse, no phone, no paved roads, no telephone, or a wood burning stove. Her life is a great flesh-and-blood American story. It began for Emma as a hard working farm gal, rising early to milk a dozen cows for a family struggling to make ends meet in the rugged but beautiful Midwest.

Raised in the small community of Fairfield, Minnesota, Emma was the oldest girl in a family of nine kids and, along with her brothers and sisters, she worked the farm from a young age. Fields were plowed with horse-drawn plows, johnny cakes made from corn and ground on site were baked in the wood burner by the family, and there were always cows, hogs, and chickens to tend. Emma describes her family as poor, but she adds, "we never went hungry as many of the neighbor children did during the tough years."

As a teen she worked as what was then called a "house girl" for a neighboring farm family that was better off, doing laundry, babysitting, and the like. Then, much like the Lily Tomlin character on the old show "Laugh In," Emma worked as a telephone operator, plugging and unplugging lines in a manual switchboard.

From there Emma's life went through the full spectrum of sturdy, Midwestern Americana: early marriage and children, widowhood, a second lengthy marriage, a long stint at professional cake baking and decorating, and then widowhood again. Through it all music, family, and friends have kept her going. Bluegrass music is such an integral part of who Emma is that you can't talk about her without discussing bluegrass. And, you can't talk about bluegrass in San Diego without talking about Emma. Emma's life in bluegrass began when she met her second love and husband-to-be, Amos Radcliffe, in 1972. Since then, and for the last 35 years, bluegrass has been a dominant force in her life.

A sign on Emma's house says "The Radcliffe House of Bluegrass" and, in a way, that says it all. Beginning in 1972 Emma and her late husband, Amos, opened their home to bluegrass musicians every Sunday and Wednesday evening for get togethers. Since Amos' passing in 2002 Emma and her daughter Dee Dee have kept the practice going.

Wednesday night is fiddle night and Sunday night is bluegrass jam night. Emma prepares pies, cakes, homemade donuts, brownies, cookies, chocolate truffles, fresh fruit, homemade bread, and more that she serves each Wednesday and

Sunday to fuel the musicians, putting her considerable training and expertise as a baker to good use. The music is great, for sure, but I suspect the goodies have a great deal to do with the popularity of these events, which have been going on for the past 35 years. You might get an idea of the extent of her cooking when you realize she has gone through five freezers, burning them out one by one, just on the homemade ice cream served!

## WEDNESDAY IS FIDDLE NIGHT

On any given Wednesday you'll find anywhere from three to 15 fiddlers at Emma's House of Bluegrass, along with a few guitar players, a bass player, an occasional banjo, and several mandolins. During the first half of the evening the group works through a series of tunes from the *Fiddle Fake Book*, with a handful of additional tunes brought in by musicians. Led by bass player Al Grennan, the group plays in unison on these tunes. At the half way point, the group takes a food break to indulge in the various goodies Emma has prepared, a tantalizing spread across her pool table. Following the break, the group plays in an informal circle, trading tunes. The music usually runs from 6:30 to around midnight.

## EMMA'S GUT BUCKET BAND

In the early days Emma, Amos, Al Grennan, and some of the Wednesday night folks formed a group called Emma's Gut Bucket Band. (A gut bucket is a bass made out of a wash tub, broom handle, and a thin rope.) The Gut Bucket Band, with gigs at Balboa Naval Hospital, for the Boy Scouts, at weddings, and at a variety of similar locations, always played for free. Nearly two decades of dormancy followed for the band, and Emma's famous gut bucket hung on the wall waiting for more action.

The band was resurrected a few years ago when the Wednesday group was asked to play at an assisted living facility, so Emma reassembled her Gut Bucket Band and took the gig. According to Emma, it was great fun, and before you know it, more gigs were arranged — at local public and private schools (the band has played for school assemblies and classrooms in El Cajon, Chula Vista, National City, San Diego, Spring Valley, Alpine, Encinitas, and Oceanside), at assisted living facilities, homeless centers, community centers, churches, a center for the blind, and elsewhere throughout the county.

Guitar player and vocalist Dave Kelly and SDBS board member Hank Hiskes coordinate the booking for the group, which always plays for free, although donations are accepted. All donations go to SDBS's charitable activities. The band is so popular that it now limits its gigs to no more than two a week. The "Queen of Bluegrass" is one busy lady, hosting Wednesday and Sunday night



Emma's Gut Bucket Band

jams and playing with her Gut Bucket Band twice a week. You had better be in good shape to keep up with this woman, notwithstanding that she is older than many of the nursing home and assisted living facility folks for whom the Gut Bucket Band plays!

Sponsored by the San Diego Bluegrass Society as its school and community outreach program Emma's Gut Bucket Band introduces bluegrass music to schools and community organizations. Through the non-profit SDBS, the band hands out bluegrass coloring books to kids, gives teachers free DVDs of bluegrass lesson plans, and has undertaken a free instrument donation program. So far, two guitars, a violin and bow, and a mandolin have been donated to the YMCA recreation program for returning U.S. vets of the Iraq war who are recuperating at the Balboa Naval Hospital. This month, on June 14, Emma's Gut Bucket Band will play a free concert at the drop in center for homeless children in Hillcrest, where they will be donating instruments and free lessons as well. Each member of the Gut Bucket Band donates their time and talent, with 100 percent of the monies raised going to the SDBS and the band's charitable activities. How's that for a ratio of money raised to good deeds done! And, it's all thanks to Emma.

## SUNDAY NIGHT JAMS

Sunday night is bluegrass jam night, where one finds a gathering of hot players who visit the Radcliffe House of Bluegrass to enjoy a great jam and pay homage to the queen, Emma Radcliffe (and of course to sample some of the goodies). The action starts round 7:30 and goes until midnight and sometimes later. Usually, 10 to 15 players show up, who are predominantly members of local performing bands, making the pace and level of the music quite high. Members of the Virtual Strangers, Second Delivery, Highway 76, the Grateful Hooligans, the Superstrings, Lighthouse, 117° West, the 7th Day Buskers, and others are regulars, complemented by members of L.A. and out of the area bands when they pass through town. For example, the Bluegrass Patriots of Colorado brought the whole band over, as did the Dowden Sisters of Nashville when they played in San Diego.

Emma is truly revered in the local bluegrass community, although she is a humble queen who accepts the adoration somewhat uncomfortably, usually with a shrug. But, then again, she thinks of many things as "no big deal," which the rest of us find quite jaw dropping. Emma, herself, added a new room to her house after she was well past retirement age, doing the framing, dry wall hang-



Emma Radcliffe

ing, painting, and finish work herself. In the last few years she has done her own roof repairs, torn out and replaced walls, poured concrete, and redone a bathroom. "Hey," she says, "on the farm we had to know how to do all this stuff."

Emma's garden is another source of joy and inspiration. She has a wonderful back yard with mature peach and apple trees, a huge apricot tree, a penderosa lemon tree and a regular lemon tree, and of course a full complement of tomatoes, lettuce, onions, and the like. In season her baked goodies offered up on music nights are often made with her own fresh products, rivaling the best offered by the region's top chefs. Emma is as good in the garden and at baking as she is at the gut bucket and considers it all a wonderful metaphor for life. As Emma puts it, she looks around and sees so many people her age who are in nursing homes or other care facilities, who stay at home alone and watch TV, and who live lonely lives as their families have moved on. But Emma is surrounded by her bluegrass family and is out playing gigs with the Gut Bucket Band and laughing and joking with her music pals of all ages every Sunday and Wednesday night.

Emma's philosophy of life is good advice for all of us: enjoy every day, enjoy the people around you, and make life what you want it to be — get in there, roll up your sleeves, and make your dreams come true. It has worked for this fine woman, San Diego's Queen of Bluegrass.

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PETER HALL  
AND MORE...

**FREE ALL AGES**



by Will Edwards

Songwriters can benefit from a good sense of humor. Humor helps make sense of the inescapable bonds of being mortal. Humor is often the catalyst that turns a bad relationship or one's dire economic condition into the same insightful words of wisdom that comprise humankind's favorite songs. Dave Howard has a good sense of humor and he has written many, many great songs – some humorous, some melancholy. His devotion to the craft of songwriting has also been a catalyst, giving rise to wonderful new creative relationships with many of the artists and songwriters who have called San Diego home. Dave Howard's career also smacks of professionalism. He engages the music and publishing industries while continuing to build his own independent story, building verse on chorus, here in San Diego.

Many songwriters in San Diego have said that Dave Howard is a songwriter's songwriter. In the last 15 plus years, he has collaborated with such notable residents as A.J. Croce, Dani Carroll, Calman Hart, Patti Zlakat, Frank Lee Drennen, and Jeff Berkley just to name a few. "I believe in my heart, I'm a songwriter," says Howard. Over the years, he's developed a comprehensive philosophy around writing and performing music that has influenced his friends and colleagues. His panache with creative phrasing and arrangement has earned him a reputation throughout the creative community because his styles are varied and innovative. Gregory Page, A.J. Croce and Berkley Hart are among the list of well-known artists who have recorded Howard's songs. Gregory Page said of Howard's song "The Rain and the Thunder", "It's the best song I've never written."



Photo: Steve Covault

I visited with Dave Howard (in my temporary Del Mar abode) to discuss his past, present, and future. We sat and talked candidly about copyrights, collaborations, and the circumstances in the early 1990s that established a powerful presence for songwriters and singers in San Diego. His appearance and demeanor resist stereotype and I was exhilarated to find that such an experienced songwriter was so enthusiastic about his craft, the venture of independent success, and the possibilities that are taking shape in the foggy future of the music industry after the Internet.

#### THE TALENT BOOM

Dave Howard moved to Escondido in his teenage years. He'd grown up principally in New York playing in local punk rock bands.

By comparison, and after a brief stint living in Chicago, Howard found himself in the significantly toned-down urban setting of San Diego. His initial foray into music in Southern California also presented a significantly more limited range of opportunities than he'd had access to in New York. At that time (in the early 1990s), venues were few and far between, and many of them subscribed to the 1980s' famous pay-to-play model in which bands were expected to pay the venue up front for a large number of ticket sales before even securing their gig. As Howard recalls, the scene that was happening was not the rock scene. It was in actual fact that San Diego's burgeoning coffee house circuit represented the necessary alternative stage where Howard and many of his contemporaries would begin performing and developing their audiences.

---

*"Dave Howard is the real deal.*

*... His songwriting has inspired me as much as John Prince, John Lennon, and John Doe. ...*

*His voice, music, and life are the same. There is no persona, just raw talent that knows no boundaries."*

—Gregory Page

---

One coffee house, in particular, was developing a community of singer-songwriters faster than the others. It was in Poway and was called Java Joe's. Howard recalls that this was where he met many of the San Diego songwriters that he would eventually collaborate with, including John Katchur (who started playing regular Tuesday night shows there), Calman Hart, Gregory Page, and Jeff Berkley. During this period, he developed a distinctive style of guitar playing that complemented his lyrics and got people's attention. He fashioned a unique style of composition that was comprised of contrasts, inventive guitar riffs, and musical metaphors, which illuminated the more subtle meaning behind his carefully chosen words. "When I'd get up and play..., my songs always stood out," says Howard, "because they had [elements like] wit, cynicism [and] vulnerability... there was something in there that was seen as very unique among the crowd I was in with."

Jeff Berkley, of Berkley Hart, recalls those early days and the immediate impact of Howard's contribution. "Dave was writing up a storm when I met him at the Metaphor Cafe in Escondido. He heard me play and eventually asked me to join him at his weekly Tuesday night gig at the Camelot Inn in San Marcos. It was like going to songwriting school. I learned by playing percussion. It allowed me to crawl inside of Dave's tunes – learn why he did certain things and why he didn't do certain things. I learned how to read a crowd and craft a set based on the emotional waves the audience is going through. Dave has all of that instinctively. I learned to rely on my instincts by playing with him for months and years. We played a ton together and it was the best thing for me at the time. I miss it."

# DAVE HOWARD

## Invites You Into the Song



Jeff Berkley and Dave Howard at Claire de Lune

#### LOST VERSES

As the scene grew around Java Joe's, Howard and others were developing reputations – mostly as performing singer-songwriters. However, Howard persevered as a songwriter, foremost through collaborations and by encouraging other performers to cover his material. This approach was largely unique, inspiring a deeper attention to the songwriting component of being a singer-songwriter. Eventually, Java Joe's moved to Newport Avenue in Ocean Beach and more artists came and went. Howard continued co-writing with mainstays like Calman Hart, John Katchur, and A.J. Croce. He recalls that everyone in the singer-songwriter scene, at that time, had their own special flair and was contributing their own piece to the fabric of the music scene. Howard became aware that his forte lay with the crafting of songs and he delved into it even more passionately.

On one occasion Howard remembers driving home after a performance, tapping his hands on the steering wheel and singing out lyrical bits and pieces as they came to mind. By the time he'd gotten home, he had a chorus. He'd sing it over and over to keep from forgetting. His first thought was to share his new hook with Croce who promptly started throwing together verses and filling the musical gaps between choruses. "[Croce] is very economical with words," Howard says, reflecting on his collaborator's approach to songwriting. The

economy of words was apparently the right fit. In the end the two finished a song titled "Summer Can't Come Too Soon," which Croce ultimately released on his CD *Transit* in 2000.

Often such collaborations would begin with a simple invitation and then take a direction all its own. As Howard familiarized himself with the habits and tendencies of other songwriters, his own craft developed. He'd start looking at half-written songs, lost verses, and left over choruses. Sometimes the map was vague and the route to a song's fulfillment was a winding road. "I wrote 'Something to Fall Back On' with Calman Hart," Howard recalls. But, down the road, it was actually Jeff Berkley (Hart's singing partner) who learned the song and started playing it as a cover during performances. In the end, it was chosen as the title track of Berkley Hart's 2002 CD release by the same name.

#### COVER ME BAD!

Over time the products of Dave Howard's collaborations have been disseminated via the careers of many local singer-songwriters and musicians. Some, like Dani Carroll who moved to Nashville in 2002 and A.J. Croce who has well-established international distribution, have helped spread Howard's influence and songs far beyond San Diego. However, his vision of sharing in the songwriting process has also helped writers to see the potential in working together. "I



Photo: Gail Donnelly - Sedholm

*"[Playing with Dave] was like going to songwriting school. ... It allowed me to crawl inside of Dave's tunes. ... I learned how to read a crowd and craft a set based on the emotional waves the audience is going through. Dave has that instinctively."*

—Jeff Berkley

lockbox. If you just put that picture in a locket then no one ever knows who your sweetheart is," Howard says with a warming smile.



Photo: Steve Covault

**THE SHAMEY JAYS**

After a distinguished history in the San Diego music scene, Howard is returning to his musical roots. Through the creative exchange of ideas, he has directly opened doors for new creative projects; his newest project is a rock band called the Shamey Jays (<http://www.myspace.com/shameyjays>). The line-up consists of solid San Diego talent, including, of course, Howard (vocals and guitar), Matt Silvia (vocals and guitar), Jerry Rig (vocals and bass), Spud Davenport (drums), and Neil MacPherson (keyboards). This new assignment gives Howard the opportunity to play through some classic covers of his own selection. The sound strays from the singer-songwriter genre, but it's a direction he is really excited about. In fact, he fled our interview in a hurry once he realized he was in danger of being late to band practice! Their first live concert has yet to be played, but you can catch them live this summer. Here's the scoop:

**June 29: Mueller College of Holistic Healing**  
4607 Park Blvd., S.D. 92116  
(619) 291-9811

**August 3: Mission Bay Boat and Ski Club**  
2606 N. Mission Bay Drive, S.D. 92109  
(858) 270-0840

For more about Dave Howard, go to <http://www.hiddenagendamusic.com> and <http://www.myspace.com/davehowardmusic>.

If you care to comment on this article, email [will@willedwards.net](mailto:will@willedwards.net)



*"I believe in my heart I'm a songwriter."*

—Dave Howard

want to make this song my own... it's an honor," says Howard.

One would expect that each collaboration would teach Howard more about his craft, but what one may find surprising is that it also teaches him about his own finished songs. "Until you hear someone else do your song, you really don't know anything about your song," Howard explains. He welcomes the chance to see his compositions through the lens of another artist's interpretation. Only then can he evaluate the song's strengths. "Does this song stand on its own?" Howard asks. Many collaborations between songwriters in the past have spawned entirely different creative directions, simply due to altering perspectives. "Think about someone like [Bob] Dylan. Yeah, he wrote 'It's Alright Ma (I'm Only Bleeding),' but he also wrote 'Forever Young.' He also wrote 'If Not for You'. What would that song be like if George Harrison had never covered it? What about 'I Shall Be Released?' What would have happened to *that* song if the Band hadn't covered it? You really have to understand that a song is not meant to be held in a

think the most influential thing I've done is that I've invited people into music, and I've invited them to learn the songs [saying] 'learn my song, cover my song,'" says Howard. This cooperative approach stands in sharp contrast to the often-competitive environment in which singers and songwriters find themselves. Howard understands where that competitiveness comes from, but for him the creative exchange yields the greatest rewards. "When an artist comes to me and says, 'I want to cover this song, I



Photo: Steve Covault



# Bluegrass CORNER

by Dwight Worden



## SPECIAL BLUEGRASS KIDS SHOW



The San Diego Bluegrass Society will hold its fourth Tuesday event (June 26th) at the First Baptist Church of Pacific Beach (4747 Soledad Mountain Road) instead of at the Boll

Weevil in order to accommodate a special kids' program. The evening begins at 6:30pm with the usual open mic, followed by a kids' performance from 7:30-8pm, and the feature act from 8-9 pm. The featured band is the Saline Fiddlers from Wisconsin, a 30-piece high school fiddling band that has a CD out and is on a national tour. SDBS is doing what it can to promote bluegrass to the younger set, so grab your kids or grandchildren and bring them to this special event to see what bluegrass is all about.

## BLUEGRASS DAY AT THE FAIR

Saturday, June 23, from 11am to 9pm brings the return of Bluegrass Day at the San Diego County Fair, sponsored by the SDBS, the North County Bluegrass and Folk Club, and the Del Mar Fair. Eight top local bands will perform throughout the day, with an old time jam at 1pm and a band scramble at 2 pm. Sign up for the old time jam or band scramble or volunteer to help to get free fair admission and parking. For more information, visit the SDBS web site and click on the calendar at [www.socalbluegrass.org](http://www.socalbluegrass.org). To sign up contact Les Preston at [les.preston@cox.net](mailto:les.preston@cox.net).

## NEW BLUEGRASS BAND IN TOWN. San



The Shirthouse Band in Balboa Park on Earth Day

Diego has a new bluegrass band, the Shirthouse Band, comprised of Rich Craig, Pete Lauterbach, Mary Birkett, and Steve Anderson, who are already out and playing. Contact this great new band at: [theshirthouse-bluegrassband@cox.net](mailto:theshirthouse-bluegrassband@cox.net) or at 858-449-5824.



**MISSY RAINES COMING TO SAN DIEGO.** Speaking of great bands, the new Missy Raines band, Missy Raines and the New Hip, will be making a special appearance on June

8 at Acoustic Music San Diego in the church at 4650 Mansfield at 7:30 pm. Six-time winner of the International Bluegrass Music Association's "bass player of the year" award, Missy is a great bluegrass bass player and is considered by many to be the best there is. Members of her new band include three hot young talents: Michael Witcher on dobro and lap steel, Megan McCormick on flat pick guitar and electric guitar, and Ethan Ballinger on mandolin. The New Hip is making some of the greatest music you will ever hear - very innovative and bursting with talent. Although grounded in bluegrass, the New Hip and its players move into a new sphere all their own. If you like only hard core traditional bluegrass, this may not be the group for you, but if you love great music and great musicians who have earned their chops in bluegrass, don't miss this special appearance. For info and tickets visit: [www.acousticmusic-sandiego.com](http://www.acousticmusic-sandiego.com).

## A BLUEGRASS CROOK IS BROUGHT TO JUSTICE.

Several years ago a fellow named Raymond Boze (who also used the alias "Matt Roe") engaged in a series of scams against the dobro community. Sad to say, but in a very un-bluegrass way Boze created a multi-faceted scheme to defraud people, focusing on dobro players. He sold instruments he didn't have, took money to build instruments he never built, promoted phony events, sold subscriptions to a nonexistent magazine called *Resonator Guitarist*, used false names, and repeatedly lied about his activities.

Now, thanks to the hard work of several

members of the bluegrass dobro community who took the time to file complaints and to follow up, Boze has pled guilty to felony mail fraud, admitting his fraudulent conduct. He will be sentenced in August. In custody since his arrest in September 2006, his sentence will likely include a period of imprisonment and an order to make restitution to his many victims. A sad story indeed that someone would violate the trust of this small, close-knit community. But, at least the criminal in this case has been brought to justice.

## BLUEGRASS HARMONY SINGING

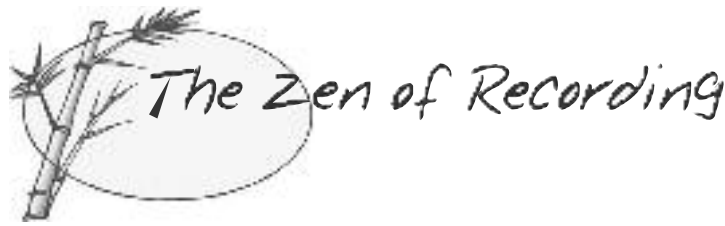
Singing is at the center of nearly all the great bluegrass tunes. Yes, there are the classic instrumentals, such as Earl Scruggs' "Foggy Mountain Breakdown," but for the most part multi-part singing is central to the best bluegrass music, past and present. The lyrics - often built around themes such as death, loss, and hard times - add layers of emotion to the song in ways that are heightened and complemented by the instrumentation and by the way the harmony singing is structured. That signature bluegrass "high lonesome" sound is what sets bluegrass apart from country and other genres of music. So, how exactly is it done? Let's take a look.

First, let's go over just enough music theory to be sure we can understand what is happening in great bluegrass singing and, for that matter, in most other styles of singing. There are seven notes in every scale, with the eighth note being the octave of the first note, at which point the pattern starts over. So, in any given key there are seven different possible notes in the same octave that will be in tune to that key, and it is from these seven that the singers must choose (if other notes are used they are called "accidentals" or sometimes "passing notes"), although they may also choose from these seven notes in a different octave. And, singers may jump back and forth from octave to octave. The lead singer sings the melody, which travels through the unique sequence of these notes, making up the melody for that song. So, once these melody notes are staked out by the lead singer, how do the harmony singers know what to sing?

Key to harmony singing is creating chords with the voices. One can play chords on a piano, a guitar, or on most other instruments, and singers can also sing chords. Chords are notes that sound pleasing when played or sung together. Why certain notes sound good together and some don't has to do with their wave patterns; one needs to investigate the physics of the sound waves of each note to really get at this issue, which is beyond the scope of this article. But anyone who has played an instrument knows that some notes sound great together and some don't.

In bluegrass the basic chordal unit used for singing is the major triad, or three-note chord, made up of the one note in the scale (the root note), the third note in the scale (the 3rd) and the fifth note in the scale (the 5th). These three notes are what make up three-part harmony. These three notes played together make a pleasing chord sound. In bluegrass singing, usually but not always, the lead starts on the root note. Then, bluegrass singing places one voice above that lead line usually singing the next of these three notes above the lead, normally the third. This harmony line is called the "tenor." Typically, the third voice sings the first available note of the three notes in the triad below the lead, which is called the "baritone." Yeah, I know, "tenor" and "baritone" mean something else in other forms of music, but this is what they mean in bluegrass.

Bill Monroe, the father of bluegrass, popularized a particular style of bluegrass singing that arranged these three notes of the triad in an interesting way. Rather than the tenor singing the next available note above the lead, Bill Monroe had the high singer sing the "high baritone" above the lead. This means that the high singer would sing the note that is one octave above the baritone, which itself is below the lead. This isn't easy to do, but it's beautiful and creates that tension in "high lonesome" singing that is so typical of great bluegrass. Give a listen to some of the Bill Monroe classics and see if you can hear this "high baritone," and if you are a singer try it yourself, you'll surprise yourself how "authentic" you sound! Keep Pickin'!



by Sven-Erik Seaholm

## RANDOM WISDOM (ISH)

Each month, as the deadline for turning in this column looms like green/gray clouds over Tornado Alley, I inevitably begin to run through a list of potential topics in my ever-crowded mind. If there's a new product to review, then it's fairly easy to know where to start. Sometimes, the topic is so involved that it would take multiple entries to cover it all, and I generally steer clear of them until the time seems right. Other times, there are little things that I think readers might find helpful, but there's not enough meat on the subject's bones to support a whole article. What follows is a collection of these tidbits. I hope you find something in here that helps...

### DON'T SAY "NO"

I'm sure we've touched upon this before, but it certainly bears repeating. If someone has an idea that means something to them, why not try it? Maybe you don't hear shaker on this song. If after your saying so, the client still wants to do it, give them the four minutes it takes to record it and play it back. You may find that you were right overall, but that it actually sounds really cool in the bridge.

Another benefit is that the artist feels more involved in their own project. Lots of producers can play a variety of instruments more proficiently than their clients. That doesn't necessarily mean that they should. After all, your name goes on the back. Their name goes on the front.

### CREDIT WHERE CREDIT IS DUE

Speaking of names on the back of things, you'd be surprised how little but seemingly obvious things can be forgotten as the artwork approaches the eleventh hour. At some point during the sessions (during a break, of course) it should be decided between you and the client what your role should be credited as. If you are the producer, it should say so. If yours has been a primarily collaborative relationship, then the credit should be some variation upon "Produced by You and the Artist." Discuss where this credit will be placed. Producer credits should ideally be placed in three spots: on the back of the album, inside with the technical credits, and, finally, on the disc itself. This isn't always possible, but it's always good to have that dialogue.

### SOMEDAY IS NOW

Some people love to talk about how they'll eventually make their own recordings, once they a) build a totally sound-proof and acoustically perfect personal studio; b) acquire the holy grail microphone that the Guitar Center salesperson has convinced them they can't live without; c) have every single other piece of gear on their shopping list; d) attend an expensive recording program in Florida; e) (enter suitable excuse here)...

I started with two cheap portable cassette decks. As I came upon each additional piece of gear I could afford, I used it until I knew everything I could find to know about it. I also used to record a lot of cover songs, that way the technical stuff interfered less with the creative process. Eventually I was able to apply what I had learned to my own recordings and, ultimately, those of others.

DRUMS ARE RECORDABLE WITH FEWER THAN EIGHT MICROPHONES  
I get a lot of questions about this one. So let me break it down as follows...

**One Mic:** Take your best all-around mic (a vocal mic or an SM57 is totally fine) and put it in front of the drum kit about four feet away, at approximately

the height of the top of the bass drum shell. I like this for "vintage" sounding drum loops, and it also works great when recording band rehearsals.

**Two Mics:** a) If you have another similar mic, then put the bass drum mic a bit closer (about a foot away), lower its height, and point it at the center of the drum. Put the second mic at the height of your ear, about four feet back, slightly left of center and point it at the center of the snare. By moving it subtly from this position, you can dial in how much of what cymbals, toms and room tone you like.

b) A variation that the Beatles used on a great many recordings was to hang this second mic over Ringo's head at a height of about six feet.

**Three Mics:** a) Leaving the bass drum as is, put the left mic up about five feet up and four feet back at about "8:00." Point it at the left side of the snare. Put the other mic at the same height and distance at "4:00" and point it across the kit at the floor tom.

b) Or, put one on the snare (an SM57 is best) at one inch above and one inch toward the center, pointed at the center of the drum. Try to keep the high hat toward the back of this mic as much as possible. Leave the bass drum and overall kit mics mic as previously described in 2a.

**Four Mics:** Same as scenario 3a, with the added snare of 3b.

**Five or Six Mics:** a) Same as four mics, but add a mic on the floor tom and if a sixth is available, the rack tom. These should be positioned similarly to the snare mic, but with a slightly steeper angle. Make sure the drummer is comfortable with your placements!

b) If the drummer has two rack toms, you'll have to place mic six between them and a couple of inches higher.

**Seven Mics:** Same as 6b), but with



Sven-Erik Seaholm

dedicated rack tom mics or with a room mic, eight feet back or down a hall.

*What I use:* Bass drum - AKG D112; Snare - Shure Beta 57; Overheads - Shure KSM44s; Floor Tom - E/V RE20; Rack Toms - SM57s

## SINGERS NEED LOTS WATER

Vocalists should drink lots of water all day on gig days and vocal session days. After every take, encourage the vocalist to take a drink. They will last longer and have truer tone. Dairy, greasy foods, smoke, and alcohol should be avoided.

## TAKE FIVE

If you need to address a technical issue, let the artists take a break. It's anxiety-inducing to have them waiting in total silence or hearing you tinker away at something. You should also walk outside the studio from time to time, so that you can regain perspective and give your ears a rest. That said, stay on task and set an exemplary work ethic so that your sessions are as productive as possible.

## DON'T TAKE YOUR PRIVILEGE FOR GRANTED

Lots of people wish they could be doing what you're doing. The artist has placed their dreams and their trust in your hands. Love their music as if it were your own.

*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

## PARIS WHEN IT FIZZLES

The United States, with its four-branched tree of government (Executive, Legislative, Judicial, and Clandestine) is still thought by some — especially in two areas of Iceland — to be a model of perfection. But lately our lofty perch seems to have begun to crack, threatening us all with a harrowing plunge into the buttery depths of an abyss known as Global Derision. All because we have continued to persecute and imprison people for their own beliefs.

It is not my intention (and many would say beyond my ability) to get all political in this column, which I treasure nearly as much as the faithful among you who read it and successfully use it as a guidepost for your own lives. But when the government attacks someone in the *entertainment industry*, well, in my opinion they've finally put their noses in unsoiled laundry and should rightfully be ashamed of themselves, even be forced to stew in their own vile flaccidity, or words to that effect.

Even as you read these words, the supremely talented (though admittedly ferret-faced) Paris Hilton is probably doing undignified hard time simply because she stood, walked, even danced for what she believes in. The official charge has something to do with violating probation in regards to some sort of trumped-up drunk driving charge. Even if the charge is true, it must be said that Paris, who is rich nearly beyond belief, has led a life of glamour and privilege since the day she burrowed out of the womb and, because of her environment, naturally believes that she is above the normal behavioral dictates of society. And because of that belief, Uncle Sam gets mad at her and brutally locks her up.

Paris, if you are reading this — and I know you are, you little muskrat — please know that our hearts are with you. You will rise again, stronger, surer of yourself, perhaps even a bit more funny looking. And believe me, if I could trade places with you in that all-women's prison for a day, a week . . . I very well might jump at the chance.

Now, on to other breaking news from the world of entertainment.

No sooner was the man behind the movie rating system, Jack Valenti, freshly in his grave, than his surviving minions proposed another brainless sanction designed to protect this great society upon whose tainted teat we nurse.



The gently twisted Mr. Sinatra

Cigarette smoking in a motion picture may henceforth automatically brand an R rating on that film's furry flank.

You see, smoking is not only adult, but it's bloody dangerous, and public viewing of the act on a movie screen is likely to perpetuate and prolong its very existence.

My question to the MPAA is this: what about the more lenient ratings that will still surely be granted to movies that contain certain more egregious examples of incorrect behavior? Yes, we'll still be seeing things in PG and PG-13 movies like MURDER (James Bond, for instance) and BESTIALITY (any romantic drama or comedy featuring Julia Roberts), won't we?

Truth be told, the item that has been foremost on my mind and in my heart I've saved for last this time. My musical partner of more than two decades has decided to retire.

Troy Danté's real name isn't really (as reported elsewhere) Trojan Danté Castrato. It was and will always be Jan Tonnessen, and I want to publicly thank him now for the wonderful times and beautiful music he created and, more important, his friendship. Thank you so much, you delightful Dane.

And I'd like to apologize to him publicly for the many mistakes I committed over the years both personally and professionally.

But I won't do that, 'cause it would be like saying I did something wrong, and I've got to hold onto the last little bit of dignity I delude myself enough to believe I possess.

Anyway, the Troyless band and I will be making our initial offerings at the Ocean Beach Street Fair and Chili Cookoff this month on the 23rd at 2pm, when we'll dedicate our set to you, Troy.

Our travels together were grand . . . Australia, Santee . . . You vacationed often in your beloved Denmark; I felt I was there with you as I watched *Reptilicus* on TV . . . Remarkably, through everything, we both managed to keep out of Paris . . .

A rare breed indeed.



# RADIO DAZE

by Jim McInnes

## SUMMER TUNES

Whenever summer rolls around I think of the music of past summers...mainly because I don't remember the future summers yet!

A short list:

**Summertime Blues** by Blue Cheer. One writer called these guys "the avatars of ugly speed rock." Play the album (*Vincebus Eruptum*) frontwards or backwards and it sounds the same! Reminds me of 1969...summer school...on acid...even though the song was a hit in February.

**Alone Again Or** and **You Set the Scene** by Love. God, how I love this album (*Forever Changes*). This came out in the Summer of Love, aka 1967. The music is a melding of standard folk chord progressions played on Spanish guitars, fuzzbox guitar leads, and punchy horn sections, all overlaid with a gorgeous orchestral sheen. The whole record is terrific. I picked these two particular songs because they just popped into my fingertips!

**In the Summertime** by Mungo Jerry. Mungo Jerry? Stupidest band name since *Mumblin' Jim*, Jack Nicholson's band in the psychedelic schlockfest *Psych Out*, back in '68 or '69...or '67. Irresistible tune, though. If you ain't humming this after hearing it once, you're probably dead...or at least deaf. I

can't imagine something so catchy and skiffle-y becoming a hit here in the corporate/private equity era.

**Barcelona Nights** by Ottmar Liebert. I got this CD (*Nuevo Flamenco*) right after we bought our house in Tierrasanta. For many summers I'd play it whenever we had water volleyball parties. It's one we always take on tropical vacations. Liebert's gypsy flavor will always put a smile on my soul.

**Summertime** by Big Brother and the Holding Company. I think this is one of Janis Joplin's best performances, which is remarkable because the band sounds like it's playing a different song and somebody forgot the tuning fork.

**My Sharona** by the Knack. This song still grabs my attention. You couldn't swing a dead cat over your head in the summer of 1979 without hearing this baby. The Knack were a fantastic band. They were tight and put on a great show. I partied with them a couple of times that summer. They died a horrible death because their manager told them not to talk to the press. I saw him two weeks ago. He asked if I'd like fries with my fishburger.

**Summer** by War. This song was the first new track ever to appear on a Greatest Hits compilation, something that's now taken for granted. It's slick and goes down easy. The message is simple: "Let's have a picnic, let's go to the park..." It's the kind of song designed to be played only in the summer.



Jim McInnes

And it works! I can't imagine hearing it at Christmas, because that's where you hear all the songs designed to be played then. Genius!

**Summertime Blues** by the Who. This one makes Blue Cheer's version of the Eddie Cochran hit sound like *Rod Torkelson's Armada* (featuring Herman Menderchuck), an analogy you wouldn't understand unless you were a fan of TV's "Kids in the Hall."

**Cumbia Del Sol** by the Blazers. I fell for this song the very first time it came on the radio (KPBS) while driving home from a Tom Jones concert(!) It's got an unstoppable rhythm, a hook to live for, and a timbale solo. If you don't want to dance when you hear this, you're probably dead...or at least deaf. They play a lot in San Diego and often start the show with this baby. Check out the album, *East Side Soul*.

If I had more room here, I'd mention **Summertime** by the Jaymies, **If You Want to be Happy** by Little Jimmy Soul, and most of the Beach Boys, circa 1963-64. Oh, and the Beatles recorded some great songs too, didn't they?

Happy summer tunes to you.

**Phil Harmonic Sez:**

*"Credentials are not the same as accomplishments."*

— Robert Hall



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**Friday 15** Skunk Apes (punk-rock)

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**Thursday 21** Car Show III w/ Tom Bashem (comedy music)

**Friday 22** Gezer (classic rock)

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# John Cruz Makes Waves

by Paul Hormick

Hawaii comprises a string of eight islands way out in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. It's way out there. If there were a freeway from here to there, you would have to drive for three days to end up on the beaches of Waikiki. Despite its remoteness and small size, Hawaii has produced a number of notable individuals. Musicians such as Don Ho and Sol Hoopie were from the island state, as was the patron saint of surfers, Duke Kahanamoku.

You can now add the name John Cruz. Cruz is a singer-songwriter who has made quite a name for himself on his native island, and is making waves in the other 49 states as well. He is the apotheosis of casual, at home in a pair of shorts, flip-flops, and an unbuttoned shirt. This guy could give Jimmy Buffet lessons in the laid back lifestyle. His songs are similarly breezy and unencumbered by complexity. He himself has said of his music that you will not find more than four chords in any of his songs. Simplicity itself.

Not surprisingly, both of Cruz's parents were involved in music. His mother, Doreen, sang in bands during her teens and early twenties, and his father, Ernie Cruz senior, is a well-known country music performer. His six brothers and sisters all sing or play music in some fashion. The list of other music lovers in Cruz's life includes aunts, uncles, neighbors, and friends. Cruz recalls, "At home we had music on all the time. The record player was the focus of the house. Every week my mom would bring home new records, mostly soul records: Motown, the Supremes, Aretha Franklin, Marvin Gaye, Teddy Pendergrass. We were getting the good stuff."

A good listen to one of Cruz's records reveals these roots. One tune might sound a little bit country, like something his father might play, and another has a little bit of the Motown influence that he got from his

mother. His singing is a soft rumble — a little like easy listening meets rock and roll.

Although Cruz had grown up with music, it wasn't until his college days that he began to develop as a singer-songwriter. In 1983 he enrolled in the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, and by 1986 he was part of the music scene in New York City. Even during the days when it was still illegal, he spent many an hour busking in the subways, all the while performing as a latter day troubadour in Greenwich Village coffee shops and playing in a variety of bands.

It was during this period that Cruz explored other avenues of performance besides music, becoming an actor and working with dance companies. He was often found in the leading role of a production, specializing in ethnic characters — playing everything from American Indian to Chinese immigrant. His tour de force as an actor was playing the lead in David Henry Hwang's (of *M. Butterfly* fame) *The Dance and the Railroad*, which took him all the way to the finals of a collegiate drama competition.

True success came to Cruz when he returned to Hawaii to help his brother Ernie record an album with Ernie's popular band the Ka'au Crater Boys. While working with his brother, Cruz released an album of his own titled *Acoustic Soul*. Cruz's debut release hit Hawaii like a typhoon. More than 100,000 copies of the disk have been sold, and that's just in Hawaii.

Cruz starred on the stage, but it took a while for him to make it into film — and he's not acting in this one. Last year Leslie Cole Truglio, a former CNN music segment producer, released *Made of Music: The Story of John Cruz*, a film about Cruz and his life of music. The 70-minute documentary is a warts-and-all look at Cruz, including his bout with and ultimate success over his addiction to crack cocaine.

Cruz is an admittedly unprolific song-



John Cruz

writer, averaging about one new tune a year. *Acoustic Soul* hit the record shelves 12 years ago, so the time was right for his latest effort, *One of These Days*, which was just released and is perhaps a bit more pop than Hawaiian. Cruz is naturally excited. He says, "It's really going to be good for me. It's just going to expand my world again."

John Cruz will be at the Belly Up in Solana Beach on Monday, June 4, 8pm. For further information, visit his website at [www.johncruz.com](http://www.johncruz.com)



## Coming to the North Park Theatre this Month

### Dougie MacLean Band



Dougie MacLean is considered by many to be Scotland's pre-eminent singer-songwriter and is certainly one of the country's greatest musical treasures. MacLean tours the world with his unique blend of lyrical, roots-based songwriting and instrumental composition. He has built an international reputation as a songwriter, composer, and extraordinary performer, which has led to concerts and festivals worldwide.

Tuesday, June 26, 7:30pm

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Friday, June 15, 8pm

All shows held at the Birch North Park Theatre, 2891 University Avenue. For tickets: [www.birchnorthparktheatre.net](http://www.birchnorthparktheatre.net) or 619/239-8836.

### Allan Holdsworth Trio with the Mike Keneally Band



Allan Holdsworth is widely regarded as one of the twentieth century's most prominent guitarists. An innovator in both jazz and rock, Holdsworth's unique guitar

voice and style has been pushing the limits of the electric guitar since the early '70s. An inductee of *Guitar Player* magazine's Hall of Fame and five-time winner in their reader's poll, he is renowned for his work with the likes of Tempest, Soft Machine, Bruford, and U.K. His extensive 25 years solo catalog, exemplified by classics such as "I.O.U.," "Metal Fatigue," "Road Games," "Sand," and "Wardenclyffe Tower," Holdsworth will be joined by Chad Wackerman on drums and Jimmy Johnson on bass.

Mike Keneally Band



Long acclaimed as one of the worlds most creative and intense guitar players, Mike Keneally's talents as a vocalist, songwriter, arranger, producer, and multi-instrumentalist are nearly unequalled in rock music. Keneally has released 13 albums of his original music since 1992 and has built a body of work of remarkable inventiveness and originality.

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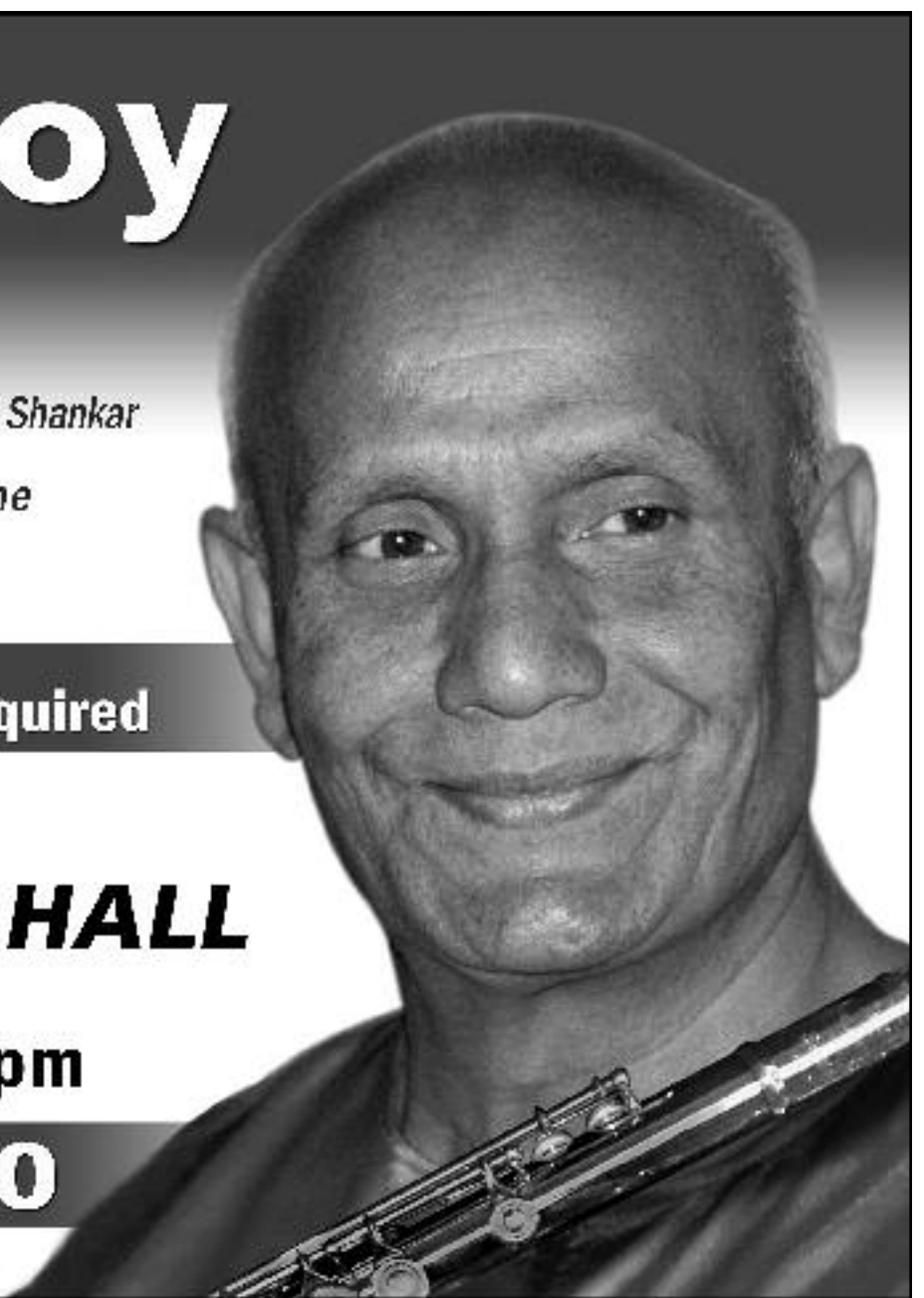
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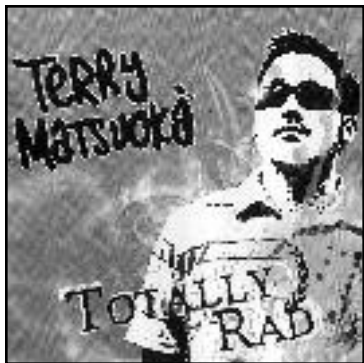
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## Terry Matsuoka Totally Rad

by Craig Yerkes

If you're tired of watching super serious songwriters with perfectly messy hair and strategically ripped jeans, assuming that their odes to break-ups and/or childhood scars will keep you riveted to their every word, I say it's time you pop open a cheap beer and get stupid with Terry Matsuoka. If ever there was a disc I have reviewed that could be summed up completely by the title alone, *Totally Rad*, Matsuoka's new recording, would be it. As a matter of fact, maybe I should just stop writing. There are some seriously rough edges on this disc (in the form of errant hand drum hits, buzzing and slightly out-of-tune guitar strings, low-rent production values, etc.), but there is just too much fun dripping off this stuff to make any of that a problem.

"El Cajon," "They're All Busy Now," and "You'd Be Surprised" fall nothing short of bar room sing-along masterpieces. The melodies in these three tracks contain gems of sublime simplicity that should make many professional songwriters beat themselves up for not being able to come up with stuff this catchy. I have never seen this artist live, but I would assume that these tunes, in particular, have crowds raising their glasses, swaying and singing their guts out. Not that Mr. Matsuoka sounds a whole lot like Social Distortion, but the overall vibe and the way he can create classic "bar-room anthems" is very similar to Social D. "Sour Cream and Chives" is equally genius in its youthful giddiness as Matsuoka spins a sublimely nerdy, groovin' acoustic rap with hilariously random pop culture references (the bits about Dokken and Sam Peckinpaw almost made me fall out of my chair!). What in the hell do I even call this music? I don't know, but it sounds 100 percent San Diego to me. Amazing things can happen when someone who doesn't care if his voice is not American Idol caliber or if his strings haven't been changed in months plugs in and just throws the music down.



## Tom Brosseau Grand Forks

by Allen Singer

Tom Brosseau's hometown is Grand Forks, North Dakota. The town's flood of 1997 is the metaphorical setting for the songs on this atmospheric CD. The first cut, "I Fly Wherever I Go," sets a haunting tone, opening up an emotional response that never leaves the listener. Brosseau's plaintive vocal quality, sometimes defined as androgynous, seductively takes you along for a journey through what will become the town's brush with its disappearance, caused by the flood. Along the way we meet some of the townspeople and experience some of the events Brosseau remembers.

These songs are sung in a stark, flat but descriptive way that evokes and recalls Brosseau's town and childhood. This town is a symbolic place we've all experienced but that we may not have really allowed ourselves to feel. In one song, he mentions the river, but it's just a foreshadowing of what's to come.

Brosseau writes as a chronicler of the events by laying out the settings and time as universal themes. Each human experience is offered up as a warning, a suggestion, and a guide to open up the listener's emotional reaction to what may be just around the bend of the river. Brosseau uses the past as future, shaping the words as keys to open up your thoughts. At times he employs a feeling and story fragments to feed your unease by taking you further on this slice of life-tone-poem-journey to near disaster.

Brosseau's singing and writing hints of Jimmie Rodgers and Woody Guthrie. The musical arrangements and melodies mimic the songs of the Great Depression and 1930s-era standards. The CD was produced by local musician Gregory Page and co-produced by L.A.'s John Doe. Brosseau's use of instrumentation and arrangements mirror some of the musical styles of the two producers. The storytelling recapitulates Ernest Hemingway's "less is more" style of writing. The themes are reminiscent of John Steinbeck's "every man" epics. When Brosseau sings the song, "Here Comes the Water," it's so matter of fact, it's almost anticlimactic.

At the conclusion of *Grand Forks*, the listener has experienced a world that may be new to some people, but it really defines a universal experience. Brosseau's small town, with its town folks, stoic settings, and odd occurrences, all contribute to our understanding of the reality of living through a life-changing event. People's lives continue, the town comes back, and the river recedes. Brosseau's new CD is a fine piece of work and then some.



## Sue Palmer Sophisticated Ladies

by Paul Hormick

Sue Palmer's newest CD, *Sophisticated Ladies*, shines the light on the talents of the women who make music with her. There are contributions from individuals challenged with the Y chromosome, but the emphasis is on the ones who wear the skirts, the heels, and the curls.

I put *Sophisticated Ladies* in the disk player one night during dinner, and about midway through our listen my wife remarked that she liked the variety of tunes. Indeed, the disk's selection ranges from swing standards and slow, sultry blues to barrel house and full-tilt boogie woogie. Throughout, Palmer's playing remains right on the mark, with the right touch for each style.

Deeja Marie, who has worked with Palmer for years, sings with élan. Even on "Gotta Gimme Whatcha Got," the most raucous number, she doesn't strain or bellow. Her voice seems to dance along with the song. I wished that I could hear the drums better, however. Sharon Shufelt drums with snap and pizzazz, and I wanted to be able to hear more of that.

"Interlude," an instrumental, is a Palmer original. Like other tunes she has written, it's fresh and clever. This number features Palmer and a cache of other soloists, including Daniel Jackson, San Diego's Dean of Cool, wrapping up the tune with some hot supreme saxophone.

As the CD title suggests, Palmer and her Motel Swing Orchestra cover "Sophisticated Lady," with their efforts taking this Duke Ellington standard to a new level. Scott Paulson plays the lead on oboe, and the instrument brings out the bits of Ravel, Debussy, and other twentieth-century composers who influenced Ellington. The result is something wonderful, which I've never heard in any other version of this classic. April West pulls the composition back to its jazz roots with her full round trombone.

Palmer usually saves the best for last, wrapping up her recordings with a real gem, and she does the same here. She and Danya Carroll team up for "As Time Goes By." I know I'm going out on a limb here, but I feel confident when I tell you that this is the best recording of "As Time Goes By" that there has ever been.

Old Blue Eyes, Nat Cole, I don't care. This one is the best. The combination of Carroll's knowing, even singing backed up by Palmer's caring stride will bring a tear to your eye, make you contemplate the ironies of love's imperative, and have you remember that beautiful lost sweetheart who broke your heart.

CD release on June 10, Belly Up Tavern, 8pm.



## Alfonso Espriella Trazos de Ser

by Mike Alvarez

Alfonso Espriella's debut solo CD *Trazos de Ser* has a modern electric sound that sets it apart from this publication's usual acoustic fare, but that would be a poor excuse to overlook this album. It's got great energy, impeccable production, and enough hooks to satisfy any fan of modern pop, alternative rock, and good music in general. This music is firmly rooted in its influences while also being very forward-looking. Although the majority of the tracks are sung in Spanish, the music is smartly written and arranged, giving it a universal appeal.

The Colombian-born Espriella is a singer, songwriter, and multi-instrumentalist who has made San Diego his home. On this album, he sings, and plays the guitar and keyboards. There is a good mix of hard rockers, moody ballads, and everything in between, yet for all its variety it is also quite a cohesive collection. The opener, "La Ola," immediately launches into a danceable funk vibe with a heavy rock edge. "La Flor" is a song that takes the listener on a real journey, starting slowly and building in intensity as it develops. Were my Spanish any better, I'm sure I'd find the lyrics reflected by this progression. Other standouts are the raucous "Separate" with its infectious Latin piano riffs, the dramatically emotional "Lo Que Aqui Ya Esta," and the rhythmically propulsive "Sed."

While neither a belter nor a crooner, his vocals are soulful, conveying messages that transcend language. He has found a voice that occupies a perfect place in the arrangements. As a singer he is no less compelling than when he sings in English, as on the tracks "In Desire," "Beautiful," and the closing bonus track "The Space in Which We Live." Many recognizable names from the local music scene can be found in the credits of this album, and it is all the better for it. All of the instrumental performances are spot on. One cannot help but be impressed with the mixture of guitars alone. So many different sounds and textures are orchestrated to create a very solid foundation. Add to that the crack rhythm section, the tasteful keyboards, the sophisticated vocal arrangements, and even some live strings. The result is a sound that is at times rock solid and at others, ethereally spacious.

The album was recorded and mixed locally at Strate Sounds by Alan Sanderson, who can count the Rolling Stones, Elton John, Weezer, and Fiona Apple among his clients. The sound is sparkingly clear. Each instrument and voice is distinct and intelligently placed in the mix.

Esriella covers a lot of musical territory in *Trazos de Ser*. Like a seasoned traveller, he picks up what is relevant and important along the way and tells his tales with a singular voice. I highly recommend this CD.



## Lisa Sanders Last Night in Roseburg

by Chuck Schiele

San Diego music veteran Lisa Sanders speaks out again with her new release *Last Night in Roseburg*. The work features her seasoned vocals, the introspective twist in her writing style, along with the impressive company in her performance and co-writing collaborations. The opening track "Texas" is such an example being co-written with Susan Gibson whose own credits include writing for the Dixie Chicks. It's a dreamy song, evocative of the slow-motion drowse that comes over someone who's been on the road for a long time, thinking about everything in his or her life.

The range of sound goes from a few solo songs to full productions, ranging in style from honky tonk, to R&B, to a hint of gospel, a bit o' blues all the while piggy-backing on the folksy sound of Lisa-pop. By looking at the roster of talent (too many to list) I kind of expected this to be kinda loud. But actually, it remains rather quiet. Gentle without trying to be. Casual and understated as opposed to trying to take over the world through over-arrangement. It feels good.

"Gold" is one of the highlights for me in this collection of groovy tunes. It's the sexy tonk that makes you down a whole beer in a two-second swig, slam it on the bar, grab the first girl in sight, and start diggin' a hole on the sultry dance floor. Lisa sounds marvelously urgent on this track. Of all the tracks, this one courses her vocal talent through an ambitious slalom of melodic themes. I got out of my chair and cranked it (the true barometer of emotion). Dig it. Interestingly, the tune was penned by none other than San Diego's Marc Decerbo.

"Daddy" is also a serious highlight. Here's Lisa alone with her song, her guitar, and her voice, which has proved over time to be a very comfortable place for Lisa as well as her fans. This solemn take finds the lonesome road into your heart as she recalls things that will, in turn, resonate within you as a listener, recalling certain moments in your own life. It takes about two minutes to notice the lump in your throat, and then it's over. Her ability to do this is like your ability to drink water.

*Last Night in Roseburg*, co-written with Jenny Yates (Garth Brooks, Keb' Mo', and more) is an introspective ballad, stripped naked to the production bone. It is a simple, no fuss, mix. CD release at Lestat's on Saturday, June 30, at 9pm. [www.LisaSanders.com](http://www.LisaSanders.com).

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## Robin Henkel Awesome Possum

by Raul Sandelin

Robin Henkel is a guy who continually figures out ways to thread the smallest needle with the thickest piece of rope. His musical journey is a hazardous one — playing Delta blues from the environs of Sun Diego with a pedigree that might offend some purists and connoisseurs. After all, remember Winton Marsalis' comment that white men couldn't jump or play jump blues or jazz or whatever the comment was (I'm always misquoting people anyway so I might as well not stop here). The irony of Marsalis' remark is that it's too often true. Just look at the long string of cakewalking and Al Jolson retreads, from Mick Jagger to David Lee Roth on the early VH1 hit "Ice Cream Man." However, when listening to Henkel's latest CD, *Awesome Possum*, it suddenly dawned on me why: most white guys try to sing the blues while attempting to co-opt the black historical soul. The result is what I call "cakewalking," a term coined by African-Americans in the nineteenth century to describe whites who tried so hard to act black. Henkel, on the other hand, plays blues through his own mojo, his own soul conjured up along a long journey that took him from a childhood in a Seattle trailer park to a number of genres and incarnations on the Dago scene since the 1960s and finally to acoustic blues, which he has been tending for over a decade now. The result of this journey is that it's not forced. Henkel's music flows naturally and is more sophisticated than his audience while replete with every variety of hook that'll keep his audience entranced and wanting more. *Awesome Possum* is a mix of covers and originals, featuring various configurations of Henkel alone and in small-group situations.

The CD starts out with "Sweet Home Chicago" followed by Blind Boy Fuller's "Walking My Troubles Away." Henkel fronts himself with guitar and vocals on both. Track three changes direction. Now accompanied by Ben Hernandez, Henkel jumps into a Hound Dog Taylor "house-rockin'" blues. The guitar work is fast and driving and the duet creates a sound more fitting of several musicians than just two. Henkel continues his faster-than-the-eye guitar grooving on a number of tunes including the original "I Got My Feet to Ramblin'" and the classic cover "Roll and Tumble Blues." Surprises throughout, such as the almost childlike "If I Was a Truck," remind us that music and entertainment used to be for the whole family. "Buffalo Gals" gets an original going over and finds a Caribbean, almost-Calypto backbeat supporting Henkel's ever-present Dobro. The supporting cast varies from song to song. Besides Henkel, Ben Hernandez is present on much of the CD. And, it's through this blend of musicians that Henkel is able to weave so many different flavors of

continued, adjacent ↔



## Saba Elbo Club

by Simeon Flick

The designation of singer/songwriter carries such a stigma nowadays, doesn't it? There are so many of them out there...and since they're generally prejudged to be sorely lacking in volume, harmonically repetitive, and possessed of a lugubrious lyrical sensibility, it's easy to see why most acoustic solo artists ultimately opt for the safe yet often convoluting shelter of a band both at the gigs and in the studio. Add those burdens to all the hats an independent singer/songwriter must wear—booking agent, manager, producer, salesman—and it's a miracle anything ever gets done.

Enter Saba Berenji, or simply Saba (Sabaloo if you're entourage), CEO of Spinster Recordings, friend and svengali to label mates Steph Johnson and Joanie Mendenhall, and a San Diego Music Award favorite for years running.

On her latest release, *Elbo Club*, you can hear the subtle battle the songs wage to evade the aforementioned "stigma" without throwing the baby out with the bathwater. In Saba's case, the "baby" happens to be the very two things that define a singer/songwriter: her skillfully evocative voice and her heart-on-sleeve tune-smithing. In fact, it's the moments where these elements are allowed to dominate that this CD really shines.

Anyone who's ever seen Saba by herself at Lestat's will instantly cotton to the stark strains of "Isn't It Something?" and the acoustic guitar/vocal version of "Open Road" at the end of the record; her voice sounds inches from the microphone, portraying a flayed heart that's just minutes past a breakup. "There Wasn't Here" and "Even Less" take a step up the production stair without burying the exquisite emotional paths of mourning a distant ex-lover under excess sonic soil. "Fuel" ratchets the production values up even more with well-orchestrated strings, beautifully layered harmony vocals, and crunchy rock guitars. With the possible exception of "Someone Like You," which paradoxically alternates from a robotic, overly autotuned vocal sound to some delectably lush indie guitar riffs, *Elbo Club* does a formidable job of being both pleasing to the contemporary ear and food for the commiserating soul.

Available at <http://www.aware-store.com/artist5201>

Robin Henkel, continued

his own into a fabric that is still Americana-blues. Yet, even if some of the material revisits the songwriters and players who lifted themselves out of the swamps and cotton of the red-earthed South, the soul that drives the vehicle is Henkel's own rough-and-tumble musical journey. And, for that reason, it sounds eternally fresh and new.

*Awesome Possum* CD release at Dizzy's, June 10, 7pm.



## Wilma Lee and Stoney Cooper Big Midnight Special

by Lou Curtiss

The long-awaited, by those in the know, collection featuring all the recordings made between 1947 and 1964 by this superb duo accompanied by their group the Clinch Mountain Clan, Wilma Lee is, without a doubt, one of the greatest of all female country singers. She has a wonderful emotion laden and expressive voice that's always raised the hair on the back of my neck. Stoney is also a good singer and together they produce some superb harmonies.

Coming out of West Virginia (where Wilma Lee made some recordings with her family, the Leary Family, for the Library of Congress in the late 1930s), their sound always straddled the line between bluegrass and honkytonk country, featuring Wilma Lee on rhythm guitar and Stoney on fiddle. The early sides feature them accompanied by Dobro, mandolin, and bass, while the later sides feature electric steel, lead guitar, and drums. But whatever the arrangement, their music always had an irresistible rural intensity.

Although they didn't write much of their own material, they made whatever they sang their own whether it was a traditional song or a song from the repertoire of the Carter Family, Roy Acuff, Bob Wills, Lonnie Glosson, or the Louvin Brothers. For the first time all of their early recordings they made for Rich-R-Tone in 1947 are available in one place, including four fantastic unissued sides. In 1949 they moved to Columbia where they continued to record some of their finest work, including the spine-tingling Johnny and Jack composition "What's the Matter With This World?," some incredible gospel songs like "Walking My Lord Up Calvary's Hill," "Thirty Pieces of Silver," and a great version of Hank Snow's "Golden Rocket" with some hot electric guitar by Gene Jenkins. From this Columbia period are also three unissued acetates from Wilma Lee's own collection. In 1955 the Coopers moved to Hickory where they stayed for nine years and had their first big country hits with songs like "Come Walk With Me," "Big Midnight Special," "Don Gibson's "There's a Big Wheel," and others. Many tracks are making their first appearance on CD, and those that were reissued before sound so much better given the Bear Family touch and because original masters were used whenever possible.

The set comes with a 48-page book with notes by Bruce McGuire, including comments from Wilma Lee along with never-seen-before photos, lots of other details, and complete discographical information. Wilma Lee has always been one of my favorite country singers. I've always thought that any female who aspires to sing country should be force fed Wilma Lee, Molly O'Day, and Rose Maddox. This set is one of those that I'd have to call essential.



## Matt Ellis Tell the People

by Jody Wood

*Tell the People* is Matt Ellis' third full-length album since 2000 and he's no stranger to a little international press here and there. I had no idea until I checked out his website. I'd never heard of the guy to be honest. But I did sit down and listen to this CD a few times before I dug up any background on him and I can see why he's gotten some attention from critics and fans alike.

After a couple of listens I really began to appreciate this collection of 11 songs from the Australian singer-songwriter. I started to relate to "How Far to Go" a little too well on the first go around and had to skip though it instead of bumming myself out. I guess that means these are songs people can relate to. The second listen had me staring into nowhere in some sort of hazy introspection. I liked the feeling so much I repeated the song repeatedly until the feeling faded.

Ellis moves seamlessly from rollicking to whispering on the track "Hey Mr." He seems to have one particular American figurehead in mind when he sings, "Hey mister, did you get that picture? We don't want your system or what you've got going on?" I like where he's going with this musically as well. The chorus is a punchy, almost punk sing-along and it really mellows out during the verses, subbing a tambourine for the full drum kit. The band rides the chorus out with some good slide guitar work thrown in there and the sing-along keeps on going after the music ends, reminiscent of punk roots and home recordings.

"My Mistake" hit me like a double Jack and a ripper. This one sways along soft, sad, powerful, and full of hurt and hope. Its pure beginning leads to the solemn beauty of pain-soaked lyrics, haunting strings, with the song finishing just as sad as sad can be. I found myself motionless, lost somewhere between regret and gratefulness.

Ellis did both a fine job writing and performing the songs, but he also put together a tight rhythm section along with a few extra pickers. Tim Luntzel, who's played with Emmylou Harris and Bright Eyes, held down the bass duties with Branden Harper on drums. Nels Cline, of Wilco, played some guitar tracks along with Tim Young of the Youngs. Greg Leisz handles the lap steel, pedal steel, and mandolin. He's played with Beck and Joni Mitchell. Dave Palmer rounds out the deal on piano and Rhodes. The group complements each other while leaving plenty of space for Ellis' guitar and vocals.

Ellis was born in Australia and grew up in Hong Kong. He's been working out of Los Angeles for a few years now and has toured internationally since his first full-length CD came out back in 2000. He will be playing his next show at the Venice Fest on June 24. *Tell the People* is available on his Myspace page, along with the rest of his releases.



## Shep Meyers Solo Thoughts

by Craig Yerkes

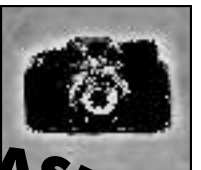
Jazz is a bit like live theater in that one of the most exciting aspects of the art form is the interaction among players. Hence, solo jazz reminds me a bit like one-man theater. If the one doing all of the work isn't able to bring enough to the party, it's gonna be one long, boring party. *Solo Thoughts*, the latest one-man/one-piano offering from Shep Meyers, easily manages to pull off the very difficult task of keeping the music exciting and very enjoyable in an ultra challenging format.

One of the hardest things about the one-man jazz band thing is keeping time and making it all sound fluid. Shep Meyers either has one hell of an internal metronome or else he has a mini Max Roach sitting on his shoulder. This music is dead on, rhythmically, swinging hard when it needs to and effortlessly pushing and pulling the tempos when called for. Only the masters can do it like this. The approach that Mr. Meyers takes on this recording reminds me of a slightly more restrained version of Teddy Wilson with some reminders of early Thelonious Monk. The selection of material and the way the tracks are placed is amazingly effective, incorporating wonderful standards and one very nice original composition. "You Go to My Head" was the perfect choice for track one because it offers up what I feel is the most complete picture of the artistry Meyers is able to bring to these classic tunes. The melody and chord structure are kept pleasingly intact, yet the improvisational, personalized touches are expertly applied in ways that will keep you interested in what comes next. The solo section on this opening track is like a master class in jazz improvisation in the way that the artist seamlessly merges his ultra melodic approach with some higher octave bop and blues runs. While the entire disc truly shines, "I'm Getting Sentimental Over You" and "You Stepped Out of a Dream" are the other tracks that really had me on the edge of my musical seat with their cool and beautiful twists (stellar solos on both). Even the oft-covered, ubiquitous "Autumn Leaves" is done in a way that makes it sound fresh.

Billy Strayhorn's touching and haunting swan song "Blood Count" is a brilliant choice for the closer. This last track had me picturing Mr. Meyers sitting in a lonely bar, playing this beautiful music at closing time, pouring out his heart and soul to the last few patrons. The life of a jazz musician is never lonelier than when the artist has to go it alone, but Meyers embraces the solitude with heart, confidence, and gusto. *Solo Thoughts* leaves you with a feeling that you've just been treated to a wonderful expression of the artists' individuality, blended deliciously with the musical etchings left on his soul by all of the cats the man has ever shared a stage with.

Read more about Shep Meyers on page 6.





# ART WALK IN LITTLE ITALY

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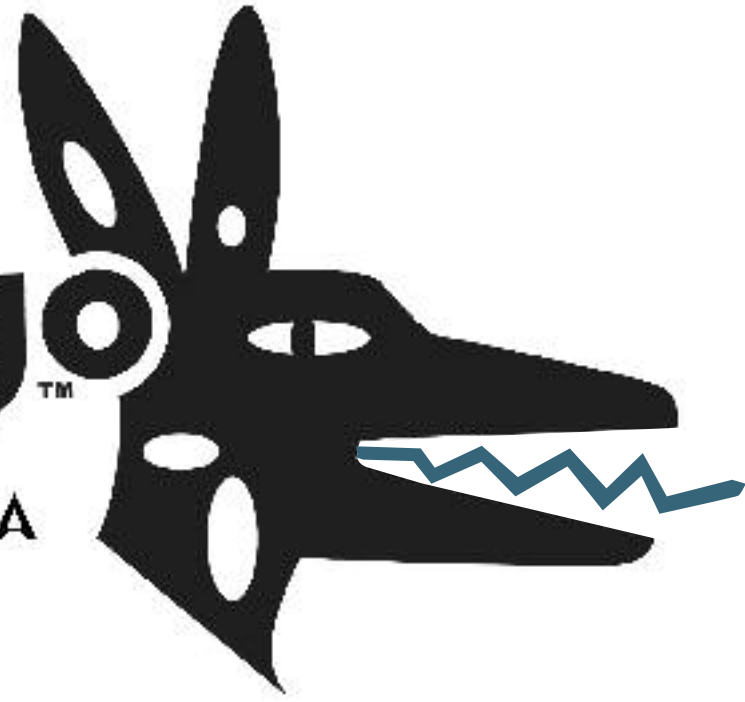
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