

# T SAN DIEGO ROUBADOOR

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



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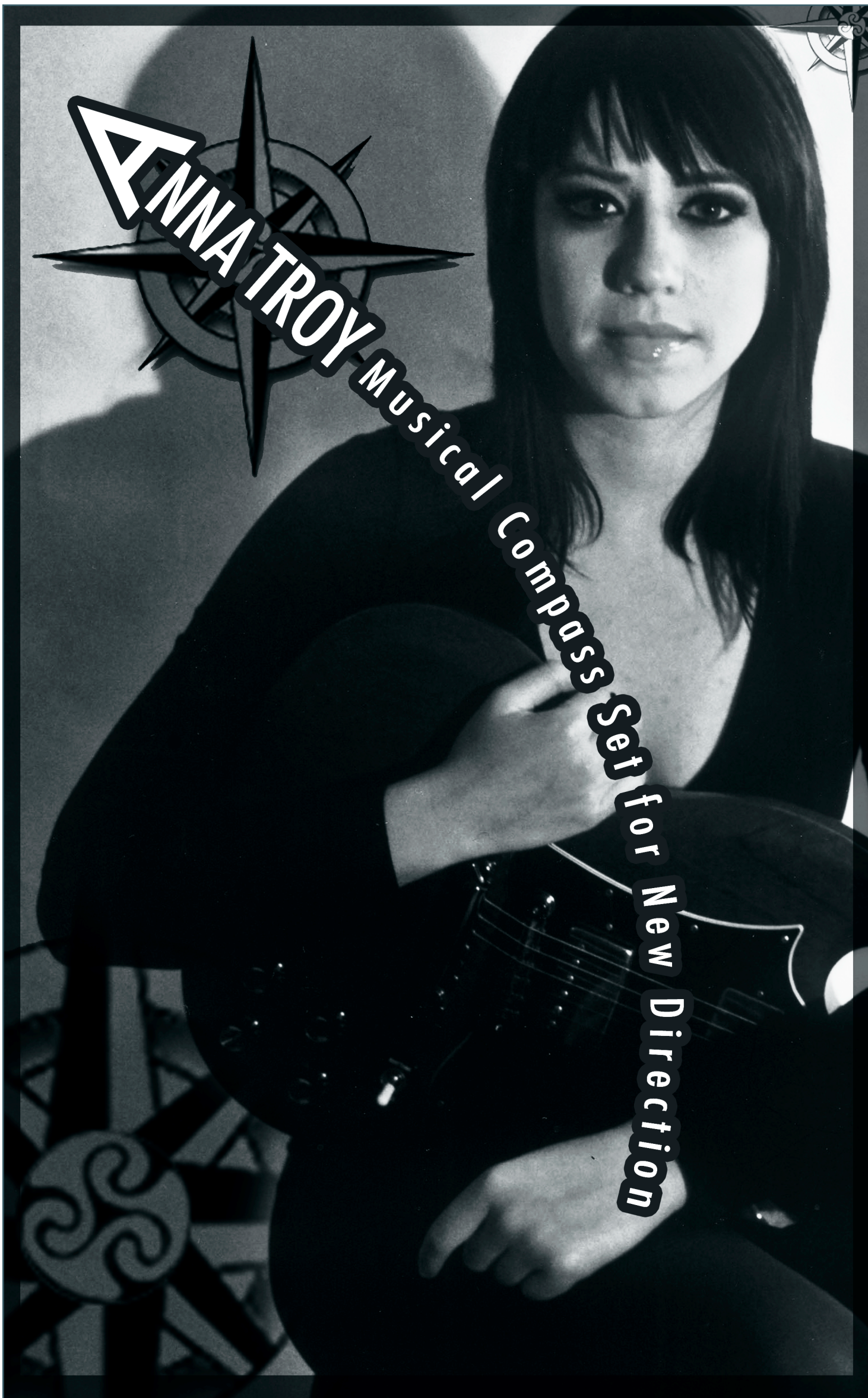
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## CONTRIBUTORS

### FOUNDERS

Ellen and Lyle Duplessie  
Liz Abbott  
Kent Johnson

### PUBLISHERS

Liz Abbott  
Kent Johnson

### EDITORIAL/GRAPHICS

Liz Abbott  
Chuck Schiele

### ADVERTISING

Kent Johnson

### BUSINESS CONSULTANT

Joanna Schiele

### DISTRIBUTION

Kent Johnson  
Dave Sawyer  
Mark Jackson  
Indian Joe Stewart  
Dan Long  
Paul Cruz

### STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Steve Covault

### WEB MASTER

Will Edwards

### WRITERS

Mike Alvarez  
Peter Bolland  
Lou Curtiss  
Will Edwards  
Paul Hormick  
Frank Kocher  
Jim McInnes  
Terry Roland  
Raul Sandelin  
Sven-Erik Seaholm  
José Sinatra  
Steve Thorn  
D. Dwight Worden  
John Philip Wylie

Cover photo: Bill Richardson

Cover design: Chuck Schiele

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

# STEVE WHITE:

## UNIQUE INSTRUMENTS FOR A UNIQUE PERFORMER

Photo: Joanie H.



by Paul Hormick

Steve White is like no other singer songwriter on the planet, or anywhere else for that matter. Most often performing solo, he sings, plays guitar – often laying down some hellacious blues slide licks – and plays harmonica. And, while he is performing this musical high wire act, he carries on the functions of an entire rhythm section by playing percussion with his feet on a specifically designed and constructed rhythm board.

Such an idiosyncratic performer would want musical instruments to fit his specific needs. And now, after decades of serenading crowds in concert halls and cafés the world over, White has a pair of guitars that were specially designed and constructed to fulfill his demands as a performer.

Back in December of last year while White was on a concert tour of the Czech Republic, a luthier friend, Petr Samek, asked him what he wanted in an electric guitar, what sort of bridge, electric pickups, and other specifications White wanted for the instrument that would suit his style. When White returned to the country last month, Samek presented to him the electric guitar of his dreams. The guitar even includes a sound chamber, a hollowed out part of the body and something quite unusual for an electric guitar. "He put that in there because it's part of my style," says White. "I'm not only doing percussion with my feet. I use the top of the guitar for rhythmic effects. I tap it with my hand for percussion. We're still working on getting the sound right on the chamber, but so far the guitar is just screaming good."

The other instrument came from Joe Striebel, a luthier in Germany that White met two years ago at a music festival. This guitar is an acoustic that White describes as a cross between the two American guitar manufacturers Gibson and Martin. It is somewhat smaller than most guitars to make traveling with the instrument easier.

In 1997 the San Diego Folk Heritage chose White as one of its Magnificent Seven, the cream of the crop of local singers and songwriters. He has continually been recognized, largely by his fellow musicians, as one of the best live performers in southern California. Despite the recognition and accolades, success in the southland has not been in hot pursuit of White, and he has earned his daily bread and paid the bills by performing mostly in cafés and coffee shops since his arrival here in the late eighties.

That all began to change in 2000, when White developed a promotional relationship with AER amplifiers. His work with the company took him to the National Association of Music Merchants, commonly called the NAMM show, in Anaheim, and several similar conventions in the eastern states. The promotions also took him to conventions throughout Europe and a few places in Asia, such as Singapore. Through a little luck, pluck, and serendipity, White booked some performance dates at a few concert venues and music festivals in Europe, mostly in the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, and Italy. Audiences responded with enthusiasm, much more so than they had here in the States.

In the years hence, each time that White was scheduled for a trip to promote the AER amplifiers overseas, he booked concerts in

and around the countries in which he was promoting the amplifiers, often staying in Europe for several weeks. The response in Europe has been so good that he is now booking concert tours on his own, in addition to his work with AER. In the last six months he has embarked on three tours of Europe, the most recent being a series of concerts and club dates through the Czech Republic and Germany.

Just as his performing schedule has taken him all over the world, White's next recording session is planned for as far flung a place as you can get from San Diego: in the chilly climes of Iceland. While the aurora borealis shimmers in the sky and the steam rises from the volcanic island's hot springs, he'll be hunkered down in a recording studio that has been carved out of a cave in a mountain close to its capitol of Reykjavik. White's most recent disks feature him as a solo performer, just him singing and playing as you would hear him in his solo act, but the upcoming disk will feature White with an entire band. "We'll have a number of musicians on the recording, but it will still be me and a celebration of what I do, which is Americana," says White. "There'll be blues, country, reggae, a little bit of everything."

White has always had the ability to write songs that tickle the funny bone. He covers such subjects as man's best friend from the viewpoint of the dog or the trials and tribulations of the bus driver for a ladies mud wrestling team. Largely absent from his recent recordings, the new disk will feature a number of these wry tunes, which White hopes will bring a smile or a laugh to his listeners.

Performing internationally, traveling overseas for a top of the line recording date, all with tailor made instruments. Every musician aspires to such achievements, and White agrees, "I'm living the life that I've always wanted to live."

Don't miss Steve White and Jack Tempchin at Dizzy's on July 18.

## Lou Curtiss' Birthday Rant



Well, I'm going to be 70 years old on July 2. How do I feel about this new stage of old fartism? Well, it's sort of like Smiley Burnette becoming Gabby Hayes (Yer darn tootin'). I've always felt like I was the comical sidekick to the San Diego music scene, like the guy running the Medicine Show and giving Gene or Roy a place to sing. Now, the slick guy in the suit who runs the saloon, or maybe the bank (i.e., the guy in town with the money), has impounded my wagons and called on some folks with a different kind of snake bite remedy to take over the show. Well, I just go on to another kind of wampus, that being putting together all the music I've presented and accumulated into a collection that will be preserved in the Library of Congress and the UCLA archives. All those San Diego State Folk Festivals (even though the folks at SDSU, when approached about doing some kind of 40th anniversary presentation of my shows out there told Joel Henderson, who was speaking on my behalf, that I was a troublemaker and they wanted no part of me) will become part of the nation's premier Folklore Collection as will the collection of tapes made at the Adams Avenue Roots Festivals (even though the folks at the Business Association haven't wanted my services these past two years in putting it together). It seems like lots of folks are giving me a little credit for bringing some good music to San Diego and putting the local entities that sponsored me in a somewhat better light. I hope that's the case. At any rate we all know how those old cowboy movies turn out. Gabby gets his wagons back, the show goes on, and everyone rides on down the trail. Or is that only in Hollywood?

—Lou Curtiss

Happy birthday, Lou, from your friends at the San Diego Troubadour!

## Errata

1. The title of Peter Bolland's column last month should have been 10,000 HOURS
2. In the story about the Buddy Blue tribute album, the local band butterFace, which contributed a song, has a singer and guitarist named Jerry Rig. The article erroneously listed him as a bass player.

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# JERRY RANEY: Back to the "Glory" Days

or How to Get to Be Alone with a Dozen Mexican Girls and a Stack of Fats Domino 45s

by Raul Sandelin

The Farmers have just finished their last set and the Downtown Café in El Cajon is starting to empty. A middle-aged guy who's been gyrating in front of the stage all night, screaming proclamations that no one could hear because of the music, suddenly has his chance. In the fading din and quiet shuffle of midnight, he yells out, uninterrupted: "Who ever knew the greatest band in the world came from El Cajon?" He's wearing a Beat Farmers shirt that, like him, has seen better days. Certainly, the objective observer might take this boast by a partisan fan in context, especially considering the fan's well-oiled state at this weary hour. But, his claim that the greatest band in the world came from El Cajon should not be dismissed without further contemplation. Why, you ask? Because it's true!

Sure, one may point to those other groups like the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, but their fame was also buoyed by lucky timing. There is no way John Lennon or Mick Jagger would've become who they were if it weren't for the fact that they broke right as the '60s generation was itself breaking free. The pop-pop-pop of the JFK assassination set in motion a series of cataclysmic social events that made the young musical talent of that generation matter a lot more than usual.

Conversely, the Beat Farmers received the historical luck (yes, I'm being sarcastic) of riding the wave of Reagan's "I've got mine" generation in which everything human was turned into a corporation and the media was consolidated to the point at which Larry King and Judas Priest were pitted against each other for the same ad dollars.

But, a band shouldn't be judged by its generation. That is a matter of chance. So, let me repeat, "The greatest band in the world came from El Cajon."

San Diego County has always pitched a healthy ante into the world music scene: the Bostonia Ballroom, the Kingston Trio, the Cascades, Gary Puckett and the Union Gap, Iron Butterfly (whose name was twisted a bit by the ever-derivative Jimmy Page – Iron to Lead – Bug to Blimp, etc. – to arrive at Led Zeppelin), and more recently Blink-182 and (you thought I'd forget, huh?) Adam Lambert. But, it was the Beat Farmers that won not only international fame but, more important and with decisive ubiquity, the hearts and minds of the local music scene at the same time.

Again, the greatest band in the world came from El Cajon. However, this article really isn't about the Beat Farmers. So, I'm not sure why I led you around the page with this tangent. This article is really about Jerry Raney. Co-founder of the Beat Farmers, sure. But, also a local legend before his most famous, aforementioned tenure.

Raney was born in 1951 in El Centro. And the dueling beauty of El Centro and El Cajon continues to weave its way through Jerry's musical tapestry. It's important to note the year Raney was born, not because rock musicians are always forthcoming about their age, but because his birth coincides with the dawning of rock 'n' roll itself.

"Our family was poor," Jerry confirms, "and we didn't have a TV." Listening to the radio then was the cheap fix that connected the young Raney to the outside world. And, the radio of the 1950s was increasingly dominated by rock 'n' roll, by Elvis of course, Ritchie Valens, Buddy Holly, and Chuck Berry. The latter had a powerful sway on the young boy while his mom became a big Elvis fan. Never short of things to do in cosmopolitan El Centro, Jerry soon joined a Fats Domino fan club. Still only eight or nine years old, he was the only boy surrounded by a dozen teenage Mexican girls. "We'd sit around in this room, listen to Fats Domino records, and dance." Being the only boy, Jerry got his dance card punched regularly.

An avid music listener (and dancer) at a

young age, Raney and the family moved to El Cajon in 1964, just when the Beatles were shattering the charts. He was in 8th grade and that same year made friends with two classmates who would themselves have formidable careers of their own: Jack Butler of the Bratz and Private Domain and the great, late rock critic Lester Bangs.

Two years later at 15, Jerry picked up the guitar while attending El Cajon High. He remembers a friend had an acoustic guitar and a Beatles book. The idea of both singing and playing soon took hold. Within the year, he started his first band – the Persuaders. "We were a dance band and got a few gigs around the school," Raney remembers.

Over the next two years, Jerry studied his craft, weaving through bands including Thee Jesters before finding a permanent place on the roster of the Dark Ages. The Dark Ages regularly played the Hi-Ho Club where the Boardwalk at El Cajon's Parkway Bowl is now located. The Hi-Ho Club seated 800 people. Plus, there was a chain of them with clubs in Riverside, Yuma, Oceanside, and Jerry's hometown of El Centro. The Dark Ages would "tour" the five clubs, playing current hits from the edgier side of popular music. It's also important to note that El Cajon was not London or L.A. or the Haight in 1968. So, when the stage manager of the Hi-Ho Club dimmed the lights, hit the strobe, and the Dark Ages played Love's *Da Capo* album in its entirety or "live" Yardbird's songs with extended, improvised solos and interludes, the 800 ticket holders were left hypnotized by these first plunges into psychedelia. Besides Jerry, the Dark Ages included his good friend Jack Butler on bass and, occasionally, the third musketeer Lester Bangs on harmonica who would sit in and blow harp on some of the elongated blues jams.

By 1969, the Dark Ages morphed and fused into Raney's second most famous band: the local super group Glory. Jerry and Jack Butler, who had now switched to rhythm guitar, joined forces with Iron Butterfly's original rhythm section – Jack Pinney on drums and Greg Willis on bass – and singer/percussionist Mike Millsap to lead the San Diego music scene through its post-Cream blues rock/hard rock/ muscle rock era.

Glory's five-piece configuration – akin to the Stones, Yardbirds, and company – relieved Jerry of any singing responsibilities and he went through his self-described

"gunslinger" phase as the band's fast-fingered lead guitarist. "There was a rivalry going on between Allen Green of the Drones, Danny Weis (also from El Cajon and formerly from Iron Butterfly), and me."

There was even a period that Jerry was wooed away from the band to take his own shot at stardom. He auditioned in Los Angeles and won the job as Norman Greenbaum's touring guitarist following Greenbaum's release of the double-gold "Spirit in the Sky." Unfortunately, the life of a superstar soon wore thin. The band was cloistered on Greenbaum's farm in rural Petaluma, California, while Greenbaum fed goats, avoided practice, and soaked up his instant fame. Bored and disillusioned, Raney headed back to San Diego before Greenbaum hit the road. Fortunately, Glory's first guitarist chair was still waiting for him.

Not long after this short-lived stint, Glory played a gig that would later prove pivotal in Jerry's career: In 1972, the ASB vice president at Grossmont High School was a fellow musician and self-proclaimed malcontent named Dan McLain, who was organizing a "music festival" at the high school. Glory was booked to headline. As so often occurred at Glory shows, the crowd got a little too wild and the idea of an annual Woodstock festival on the Grossmont campus was never discussed again. But, Dan and Jerry met each other for the first, but not the last, time.

Glory recorded a live album – *On the Air* (1970) – at the then "underground" KPRI studios as well as many demos and singles. They headlined locally for 10 years, opened for Steely Dan and ZZ Top, but were never able to secure that elusive recording contract. At one point, the five-piece even became a sextet, adding Bruce Morse as a second drummer. By the mid-1970s, singer Mike Millsap left the group and Jerry found himself in the singer/guitarist role, something he had first enjoyed as far back as his teens. The group reincarnated as a quartet, sometimes a trio, before finally breaking up around 1978 at a time when early-'70s strut-rock was being challenged by punk, reggae, retro-rock, and rockabilly.

Following Glory's demise Jerry, Jack Pinney, and Greg Willis dove back into their pre-Glory, pre-Butterfly youth, starting the roots trio the Shames. Playing what in 1978 were considered older songs, the Shames put their journeymen's treatment on a set list that included everything from Elvis to Ray Charles. They played the top clubs in

San Diego – My Rich Uncles, the Bacchanal, and Jerry Herrera's Spirit Club (then still the Palace). Their goal was definitely to get signed and Raney began writing many new songs including future Beat Farmer hits such as "Selfish Heart" and "Buy Me a Car." The trio became a local success and gigged regularly for four years before finally calling it quits in 1982.

The rest is the Jerry Raney history that has become public knowledge. Jerry happened to run into the former ASB VP from Grossmont High School, now a veteran of the Penetrators, the Crawdaddys, and the Snuggle Bunnies. In 1983, they formed a band first called the Mobile Musical Pleasure Unit then Dude Raunch before settling on their final name. They picked up a couple guys from the Rockin' Roulettes, started playing the Spring Valley Inn, then, as the fan base grew, took over Bodies near SDSU.

"Everything happened naturally," Jerry says of this time, so naturally, that he admits, "The next 12 years are kind of a blur."

Then, in 1995, the whirlwind ride of endless touring, recording, MTV videos, CMA and David Letterman appearances, and haggling with record execs came to a sudden stop when Grossmont High's former ASB vice president died at his drum kit in Canada.

After Country Dick's death, Jerry formed Raney-Blue with Beat Farmer Buddy Blue, Powerthud with Beat Farmer Joey Harris, then the Flying Futos again with Buddy Blue, which finally evolved into the Farmers.

The Farmers were three quarters of the Beat Farmers for a while until Blue involuntarily quit to go gig with Country Dick. BF bassist Rolle Love simply quit and stayed above ground to pursue new life adventures after 25 years with the band. The Farmers, in addition to Jerry Raney, are now Joel "Bongo" Kmak on drums, Chris Sullivan on bass, and long-time friend Corbin Turner on vocals and percussion. In a way, they still are the Beat Farmers given that all of the members come from the Beat Farmers' extended family. Bongo grew up with Dan McLain/Country Dick; Chris Sullivan played bass with Dan/Dick in the Penetrators; Corbin Turner has somehow managed to cross the divide into the netherworld and bring Dick's voice back from the grave. And, of course, you have founding Beat Farmer Jerry Raney. At the same time, the Farmers are not the Beat Farmers (see CD review in this issue).

This is a new phase of Jerry Raney's 40-year career. When a middle aged guy yells out that the greatest band in the world came from El Cajon, he's probably flashing back to the Beat Farmers of 1985. But, Jerry was there too in 1985, in 1975, in 1968, and here now in 2009. So, if the greatest rock 'n' roll band in the world came from El Cajon, where in the who's-who of rock 'n' roll does that put that band's founder?



Jerry Raney (far right) and Glory



Glory's live album, *On the Air*, 1970



The Shames: Jack Pinney, Jerry Raney, Greg Willis



The Beat Farmers: Rolle Love, Jerry Raney, Dan McLain (Country Dick Montana), Joey Harris



The Farmers: Corbin Turner, Chris Sullivan, Joel Kmak, Jerry Raney



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# Recordially, Lou Curtiss

MR. LOU GOES TO WASHINGTON



Lou with Dick Spottswood and Chris Strachwitz

It was the annual meeting of the Association for Recorded Sound Collections (ARSC) and it was to be held in Washington DC May 28 through the 31st and I was going. Now I've held the reins of what I've always considered an important sound collection, worthy of preservation, for a lot of years but I only became aware of these folks after I got my Grammy grant a couple of years ago (even though they've been around for about 40 plus years). However, in looking over the membership roster, I certainly did know a lot of the people, many of whom have visited Folk Arts Rare Records, to talk old music with me, and many others whose names I'd seen on LP and CD liner notes during the time I've been a collector of records and related stuff (about 55 years) and shop owner (about 42 years).

Rolling into DC from the Dulles airport,

passing the turn off to Lee Highway (had an old time fiddle tune named after it: "Lee Highway Blues," a good sign) and checking into the Liaison Hotel in the shade of the Capitol building (right on the hill) and walking right into a workshop on the technical side of archiving, which included all those folks who know what is needed, how to keep your older machines (which you absolutely need to keep in good shape to play older formats like reel to reel and even wire recordings) in some kind of good order. A lot of the technical stuff was a bit over my head but I sure am grateful that there is an organization that gets people together to talk about this sort of stuff because we, who are on the music side of all this, sure need the folks who keep our access to what we care about in good working order.

Friday morning we went around the other side of the Capitol building to the Library of Congress for a tour of the archives' Music Division, the Folklife Center, and the Reading Room, as well as a discussion with the folks there about our archiving and digitization project of the material in the Lou Curtiss Sound Library. Aaron Bittel (from UCLA, who is acting as a co-sponsor with us and the LoC) joined us in this meeting and tour of the place that will become one of the depositories of my collection.

From then on it was back at the hotel, talking and listening shop, with acquaintances old and new. On Friday afternoon my "partner in digitization" Russ Hamm, UCLA's Aaron Bittel, and I conducted a workshop called "A Partnership for

Preservation: The Lou Curtiss San Diego Folk Festival Collection, which, with the help of slides and reminiscing (from me), we told all these folks (most of whom are in the know) about what we are doing (preserving my collection), what we have done (presented festivals and concerts for over 40 years), and who has supported us and not supported us along the way (not dwelling on the latter). During the discussion period of the presentation, Chris Strachwitz (of Arhoolie Records and a major West Coast collector) commented that "Lou Curtiss has never been one to be afraid of the powers that be (his financial source) when it came to presenting traditional and roots music and giving that music a place in his festivals above that of the so-called folksinger songwriters." That was a good way to end the presentation with an upbeat comment by a person with an awful lot of respect in the music community, and who I have worked with from time to time going back to the 1960s (he helped me bring blues singers like Bukka White, Mance Lipscomb, Lightnin' Hopkins, Jesse Fuller, and John Jackson to San Diego, plus norteña groups like Los Hurricanes Del Norte, Santiago Jimenez, Lydia Mendoza, and others, and cajuns like the Balfa Brothers, and Sady Courville and Dennis McGee to San Diego festivals, clubs, and concerts).

After that high point, meeting old friends like Chris and Dick Spottswood and making new ones like Kip Lornell, Kurt Nauck, and the University of North of Texas' Morris Martin, we talked about music ranging from vintage jazz, blues and country, bluegrass and R&B. I had quite a talk with Richard Carlin from Smithsonian Folklife. Then there were the workshops. Mostly, I stayed with the music side of things (although for someone involved with the technical side of collecting and archiving there was a lot to be learned) and I attended workshops on:

- Hoagy and Bix: The Seed of Harvestry
- Charlie Parker and Lennie Tristano
- A Brave New World at the National Archives

- Rhodes Baker's Duke Ellington collection at the University of North Texas
- A panel discussion on the state of jazz radio
- Bluegrass and the rise of independent record labels in Washington DC following WWII
- R&B and the rise of independent record labels in Washington DC following WWII
- The World of Sound: The Story of Smithsonian-Folkways

That's what I heard and did. I wish I could have been in town a day earlier for workshops that included:

- Late and Post-Ottoman music in New York in the 1920s (Greek, Armenian, Turkish, West Indian Immigrant)
- Life and music in the Harlem Jazz Age, independent record labels in the British blues revival, lost television
- Broadcasts from 1946-1972, access to historic field recordings at the Library of Congress Folklife Center, the fight for copyright reform and what it means to you (see last month's "Recordially"), plus one on the state of audio preservation in the United States and what are the next steps, and a whole lot more.

It was back to Dulles on Sunday and back to San Diego with a whole lot of ideas and thoughts about next year's meeting of ARSC in New Orleans. If you have an interest in archives of one sort or another and like to be around people who know a lot about what you care about, I encourage you to get in touch with these folks at P.O. Box 543, Annapolis, MD 21404 or at their website. You won't be sorry.

#### A COUPLE OF SUGGESTIONS

A one-hour film titled *For the Record* examines the activity of record collecting from the positive view of 16 major record collectors. Filmmaker Leah Biel made this film (available on DVD) as her thesis for a Master of Fine Arts degree from Brooklyn College in New York. It's a good way to see what this record collecting stuff is all about and if you're already a collector, a good way to explain the profession of archeophony and phonographic history to your critics



Photo: Bill Richardson

Lou Curtiss

and significant others.

There are a whole bunch of CDs on the Buzzola label of stuff sorted by subject. Some of them include *Sugar in My Bowl: Hard Drivin' Mamas - Vintage Sex Songs 1923-1953*, *Outside the Law: Gangsters, Racketeers, and the Feds - Vintage Songs 1922-1947*, *You Done Me Wrong: Vintage Country Cheating Songs 1929-1952*, *Kicking Hitler's Butt: Vintage Anti-Fascist Songs 1940-1944*, *Got a Light, Mac?: Vintage Songs About Smoking 1926-1954* (a couple of chewing songs in this one), *Like an Atom Bomb: Apocalyptic Songs from the Cold War Era*, *Junkies, Jivers, and Coke Fiends: Vintage Songs About Drugs 1926-1952*, *High Rollers: Vintage Gambling Songs*.

The packaging and notes are good and so is the remastering. Check out their catalog on the web or write them c/o Chrome Dreams, P.O. Box 230 New Malden, Surrey KT3 6YY, United Kingdom. Good fun stuff.

I'd like to do another benefit concert for the sound library project. My idea this time is to present a cajun band on one show, a norteño conjunto, a bluegrass band (preferably early '50s stuff), an Irish Ceili, a blues band (maybe Tomcat), a group with Eastern European origins, and maybe something Hawaiian or Far Eastern or some Jazz. Any volunteers or folks with ideas?

I guess that's it this time around. Keep your nose clean.

Recordially,  
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Photo: Dan Chusid

# TIME TO PUT VERONICA MAY ON YOUR TO DO LIST

began playing the coffeehouse circuit.

When she was approached by the Gaslamp's Irish pub, Dublin Square, her career took an unexpected, but positive turn. Told that the pub was only interested in booking trios, she rifled through her rolodex. Veronica May and the To Do List was born shortly thereafter.

The current lineup includes May on guitar and vocals, Jeff Johnson on bass, Simon DasGupta on drums and Megan Jane on Guitar. Together, they cover a lot of musical ground and cover it well. At one of their shows you will hear rock'n'roll, funk, jazz, soul, quiet ballads and just about everything in between. Late in the evening having heard just about everything imaginable I fully expected the quartet to cover a few oompah band favorites (fortunately they didn't). You name it and they can probably play it. Humming along like a well oiled machine this band is in synch.

"We all practice on metronomes when we are away from each other and sometimes we use one when we in practice (together). Simon and Jeff have always done that and I picked that up from them. I think that is why we are such a tight knit group (sound-wise)," May said.

"Simon has a very distinct style on drums. He is a solid player that uses a lot of colors and textures. Jeff's thing is more melodic. He doesn't just play the root notes. I think the sound that Megan has brought in has helped to separate us from other artists. She is not your typical guitar player. We had a totally different sound before she joined us. I don't know how you would label our music at this point."

Their music, most of which May writes, has a certain freshness to it. Their percussive melodic sound is uniquely their own. It is noteworthy in large part to May's powerful voice, the music's frequent tempo changes and the wide variety of styles that they draw from. May's aforementioned percussive guitar playing also sets them apart.

"The finger independence and dexterity comes from playing the piano," May said. "The rhythm comes from having a percus-

sion background. Percussion was my minor in college. A few years ago I met this young prodigy name Maxwell Hughes. He did it a little bit after getting it from Tommy Emmanuel and Cathy King. I wanted to do this song which requires a snare sound and I just couldn't get it. So, I went to the hardware store and I got some Velcro for my guitar, but that didn't do the trick. I went back and found some sandpaper and that is how it all started."

May's "Sandpaper Song" was recorded on her first LP and remains one of her most requested whenever she performs. She has written a number of others that take advantage of her unique guitar playing style. She draws more upon her insightful lyrical ability on signature songs about relationships like "Scarecrow" and "Tree and Swing". Originality is something synonymous with their sound.

You would never guess this after seeing them live, but May has not always been comfortable with her role in the spotlight.

"When I started playing I would often close my eyes and not interact with anyone. Since then I have learned how important it is to connect with your crowd. I have learned a lot about stage presence, but I am still not quite there. I like certain aspects about recording and certain aspects about playing live, but I think playing live is definitely more fun. I have also learned a lot about music in general. The more I learn about music the more I realize there is so much I don't know. There is so much to learn and you can never learn enough."

Through the years May has learned a lot about life in general and a lot about herself. A year ago, she was diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder and hospitalized for 12 days.

"About a year ago I had my first manic episode. Being on medication has completely changed the way that I write. It has changed the way I play and settled me down a lot. It has also changed my stage presence and really toned my music down. My music (now) is a lot more structured. I think I owe a lot of that to having the break and getting help. I should give you some of

my previous music. You would say wow! I have no idea where this is going. The average listener likes to expect something. When I came out and finally told people that I had Bipolar Disorder, I had about six people call me in confidence saying they had it too. They were glad to know somebody else who had it that was comfortable talking about it. I worked through it using my music. I honestly don't know if I would have been able to without it. At first, while I was hospitalized they wouldn't let me have my guitar. People tried to talk to me, but I was just locked in my own head. I wish I could have cried. When I finally got my guitar I played one chord and I just fell apart, but that is what I needed. It definitely saved my life in a literal sense. I think a lot of people would say that music saves lives in either a metaphoric or literal way. It was definitely there for me as were my friends."

Songwriting and singing provides an emotional release for May just as it does for many others. She also finds it to be her preferred method of communication.

"People sometimes tell me that I am not always a very good communicator, but that if I can do it through music I am dead on. If

I can write a song to express how I feel then they understand how I feel, but if I just try to talk to them they have no idea what I am talking about. So, if I can communicate through song I would much rather do that."

There is no lack of communication within her band however. May enjoys the chemistry there and the fact that everyone is striving for the same goal.

"One of the things that I am blessed with is that all of our band members have the bigger picture in mind. I think all musicians have the dream, but it is about making it a reality and believing in yourself. I know we can do this."

Still looking for a venue to call home, Veronica May and the To Do List perform occasionally at Humphrey's, U-31 and the South Park Bar & Grill. She also hits the road frequently and will be playing at the Outwest Music Fest in Colorado in late August.

Look for a new 11-song CD to be released in November which will feature May on piano as well as guitar. Until they get their webpage up and running the best place to find additional information about Veronica May and the To Do List is on their MySpace page.

by John Philip Wylie

The guitar is not generally considered to be a percussion instrument.

Unless, as I found out, you place one in the hands of Veronica May. If you stumble upon one of her performances prepare for the unexpected from this 2008 SDMA winner. Prepare also to be completely entertained. I first had that pleasure at Little Italy's Art Walk the last weekend in April.

Wanting to hear more I headed out on a Tuesday evening in late May to U-31 on University Ave. in North Park. There I watched May and her three bandmates called the To Do List entertain a largely lesbian audience. Being male, straight and fairly conservative it was not exactly your run-of-the-mill assignment. But I am generally open-minded, the music was good and the clientele seemed to barely notice me even though I was possibly the only straight male in the entire audience.

May grew up in Colorado and after being in several bands launched her solo career at the age of 20. (She actually started her musical career on piano at three and quickly discovered that she had the gift). A few years after adopting the guitar as her primary instrument, she relocated to San Diego in the winter of 2006-07 and immediately




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by Paul Hormick

Using a boatload of well-oiled grooves and improvisations, local musicians Mike Alvarez and Greg Gohde have teamed up to perform pop and rock classics, old standards, a smattering of jazz tunes, and a few original compositions with their inventive juxtaposing of their two instruments: cello and bass. As their instruments are geared to the low end of the musical spectrum – Alvarez plays the cello, the lowest-voiced instrument in a string quartet, and Gohde plays the bass, often the lowest-voiced instrument in any ensemble – they call their collaboration the Bass Clef Experiment. A combination of two baritone instruments might be expected to have the woofers working overtime and to produce some low rumblings and not much more, but the duo's music is quite tuneful, expressive, and often quite surprising. A melody turns into a groove, and then turns back to a tune. Riffs pass back and forth between the two instruments freely, like a game of musical shuttlecock.

Gohde and Alvarez (In full disclosure, Mike Alvarez is a contributing writer for the *Troubadour*.) had known each other for a long time before forming the Bass Clef Experiment in 2006. Alvarez had been a customer of Classic Bows, Gohde's violin shop, since the early 1990s, when Gohde had first opened his store. "Mike had been coming into the shop for years, and one day he gave me a copy of one of his homemade recordings," says Gohde. "I listened to it, but it was more of what I read in Mike's bio that got me interested in playing with him. One of the persons he listed as an influence was Jeff Beck, who is one of my favorite musicians. So the next time he came in the store, I said let's get together and jam."

Alvarez was skeptical. His interests are in progressive rock, and he just assumed that Gohde, a classical bow maker in a shop of violins, violas, and sheet music for Mozart's string quartets, had musical tastes quite different from his own. But Gohde told him that he was into rock music and that they shared a lot of the same tastes. Their first jam session went well, and right off the bat the two knew that they had the right chemistry. Alvarez says, "The music just came to us pretty easily, and so it was obvious that we didn't need a guitarist or a drummer. Things worked with just the two instruments. And the biggest reason we've remained a duo is that it continues to work."

With only the two instruments, a lot of room – as well as a great deal of responsibility – is on Gohde's shoulders. Alvarez says that Gohde does a lot more than just hold down the root note and has moved the bass beyond its traditional role. "He'll pop an extra harmonic tone into a lick or play double stops in order to flesh out an arrangement.

Sometimes he'll do something completely unexpected but never loses the groove."

Gohde plays a fretless electric bass. The instrument combines some of the characteristics of the upright bass and some of the characteristics of the electric bass – which is a fretted instrument – and in many ways has qualities that go beyond either instrument. Gohde says, "The fretless electric is more expressive. You can get more vibrato and a nicer glissando with the instrument. I also like the sound of the string on the fingerboard instead of the string coming down on a brass fret." Indeed, the notes seem to growl sometimes and can often have a muted sound as well.

Gohde has played the fretless bass for decades. He was influenced by his cousin, who lived next door and played the bass, Gohde picked up the instrument during his early teens and spent several years in the basements of his Chicago neighborhood, practicing and playing in bands that played the pop and rock hits of the day. In 1973 he attended a music festival in downtown Chicago and heard the Navy Band "Their bass player was really great and he was playing a fretless," Gohde remembers. "I asked him if it was difficult and he said that it wasn't that hard. So I made a point of getting one for myself." Gohde says that he became aware of the instrument's potential when he heard fretless god, Jaco Pastorius, and his contribution to Joni Mitchell's 1976 album *Hejira*.

A graduate of DePaul University, where he studied music, Gohde has picked up several instruments throughout his life – guitar, violin, viola, mandolin, and the upright bass – and has performed in a wide variety of ensembles, from the San Diego Mandolin Orchestra, the Irish duo of Mark Hayes and Dennis Cahill, and the Northwest Indiana Symphony. But the one constant for him has been the electric bass, the instrument that he feels the most comfortable playing.

Alvarez has been a cellist almost his entire life. He first took up the violin when he was a fifth grader at El Toyon Elementary School in National City. "There was a music director – his name was mister Rossé – who went from school to school in the district in a white bus. I remember it was called the band wagon," says Alvarez. "And out of the band wagon I chose the violin, but playing it and having to hold it up under my neck, I found awkward. So when I saw this big thing in the wagon, a cello, I took an interest."

By the time he was in junior high school Alvarez fell under the spell of the Electric Light Orchestra. The band churned out pop hits, but as part of its act a string section was featured in its ensemble. As Alvarez saw the band jamming on "Roll Over, Beethoven" or another rock and roll number, the cellists and violinists rocked

# THE BASS CLEF EXPERIMENT

## Explores the High Points of the Low End

along with the rest of the band. He now felt that as a cellist he could be included in the music that he loved. In high school he was playing classical pieces in the school's orchestra, but rock music remained his great interest. He would spend hours at home spinning his records of Boston, Led Zeppelin, Queen, or Kansas, absorbing the riffs and licks of the rock guitarists.

He minored in music at UCSD, studying the cello with Peter Farrell. For years Alvarez jammed with his recordings, without a band to perform with. Even with the influence of ELO, playing the cello in a pop or rock band is akin to being the number one surfer in Nebraska. This was also at a time before they started electrifying and amplifying cellos, as they had been doing with basses and guitars for decades. So even if a band had come calling, Alvarez's cello would have been lost amid the clatter and clash of just about any rock band.

In 2000 Alvarez bought an electric cello. Like the ugly duckling turning into the swan, suddenly everybody and his brother wanted to have him in the mix, and he hooked up with a number of bands and individuals. He played with acoustic guitarist Scot Taber, Bridget Brigitte, and the Roswell Six. He was featured on Michelle Shipp's CD *Arm's Length*, as well as numerous other recordings. For the Bass Clef Experiment he uses both his acoustic cello and electric cello.

In their weekly practice sessions, the two musicians work out their arrangements in a fairly casual manner. Choosing a new tune, they toss the melody back and forth between them, seeing what works best and where they might improve on things. Alvarez says, "With just two musicians, we try to get to the essence of the tune that we're covering. And after a while it's instinctive to find out where the heart of the song lies." They have mostly chosen rock and pop hits from the last 30 or 40 years, with the Beatles songbook comprising almost half of their entire repertoire. Gohde says that the strength of the compositions of the Beatles songs made them obvious choices for the Bass Clef Experiment, and putting their new spin on the old tunes is a real crowd pleaser. "People like to hear the familiar songs. We'll be playing "Eleanor Rigby" or "Norwegian Wood," and it's interesting to see how people's heads are turned."

Photo: Lois Bach



Mike Alvarez and Greg Gohde of the Bass Clef Experiment

Over the years Gohde and Alvarez have also written a number of their own compositions. Simply titled Bass Clef Experiment, they have compiled five of their numbers for an EP, which they released last month. The styles run the gamut from funky to really funky, each tune based on a groove that Gohde sets up on his bass. Clive Alexander joined the two musicians for the recording and filled out the sound, adding percussion into the mix. Although they mostly work as a duo, Alvarez and Gohde frequently work with a percussionist or drummer on their live gigs as well.

Alvarez says that their music mixes so well because their musical interaction has

now become an outgrowth of the great friendship that has developed between him and Gohde. "We both trust each other and support each other. And that makes a big difference."

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by Steve Thorn

# ANNA TROY

## her musical compass set for new direction

**M**any musicians find their creative niche early in their careers and are content to stay put. Fats Domino never steered far from the distinctive sound that took him from the Big Easy roadside haunts to Imperial Records back in 1949. And many of us would have felt betrayed if he had.

On the other hand, many performers have reinvented themselves so dramatically that their early musical identities now seem a distant memory. Witness Van Morrison, who grew up in a gritty Belfast neighborhood that made the Beatles' Liverpool seem like the Hamptons by comparison. Morrison's early recordings as the lead singer of Them ("Mystic Eyes," "Gloria") were as intimidating as anything that came out of the British Invasion. But today, he is the quintessential Irish mystic, whose discography of the last 40 years as a solo artist probably speaks more about his obsession with James Joyce and William Blake than his early preoccupation with the records of Howlin' Wolf and Ray Charles.

Former San Diego club bouncer and pizza maker Tom Waits (see *San Diego Troubadour*, January 09) also entered a new era in 1983. That year, Waits recreated himself on *Swordfishtrombones*, shedding his earlier influences of Jack Kerouac and West Coast Jazz. In 2009, Waits is more likely to be seen performing before a SRO Vienna Opera House than singing in San Diego and giving a concert shout out to Sal down at Napoleone's Pizza House in National City.

At age 25, San Diego's Anna Troy is young enough to be the daughter of either Morrison or Waits. However, she too has participated in a voyage toward new musical ter-



The Troy sisters at Dizzy's 2003 (Lindsey on left)

ritory. Judging by the confidence and maturity demonstrated on her current CD, *Wait Another Day*, it's hard to believe that this is the same singer who teamed up with younger sister Lindsey in a teen-marketed project for Elektra Records back in 2002. For a myriad of reasons, Elektra never released the CD. In hindsight it provided Anna with time to visualize what new musical avenues lay ahead.

"I definitely feel that the Elektra experience paved the way for me to have a successful career as a solo artist," said Anna, taking time out from a busy schedule of shows around the city. "I learned so much in the Troys, from writing with top songwriters in LA like the Matrix, to performing on Nickelodeon [channel] and making a music video that aired on TRL. All these experiences gave me the confidence and the knowledge I needed to start my own career. I feel my experience in the Troys was equivalent to someone my age going to college, and when I got out of the band, I had a very well-rounded education in the music industry."

No longer burdened by typecasting, Anna's future lay in gaining a greater understanding of the music of America's past. "I feel my detour into blues is an interesting musical transition, because it is polar opposite from the polished pop stuff I was doing with the Troys. Although the Troys was a great learning experience, there was also a *darker* side to the whole experience. Maybe this is where I get my inspiration for blues, because being on a major label as a teenager can be a very difficult and unusual childhood."

Anna said she and Lindsey "had very little freedom at the time and did not get to experience the care free life that most 15-year-olds get to experience. Instead of hanging out with friends on weekends and going to the beach, we were in LA every weekend for years, being molded into what Elektra thought were the next pop stars. We had little control over our outfits, hair styles, band name, style of music,

which songs were on the album, what kind of songs we wrote and who was in our band. This kind of control over my art and my image was very stifling for me, and once I broke free of it, I was determined to take my career and destiny into my own hands."

Tremendously influential in Anna's development as a songwriter and live entertainer was one of San Diego's most respected blues performers, Robin Henkel. "Robin has been a great friend and mentor over the years. I met him when I was 19 at Lestat's open mic, and the rest was history. We hung out soon after and he was impressed by my confidence as a guitar player. Within a very short time, he was teaching me the most valuable things I have ever learned about playing blues. He is an amazing artist and, I swear, every time I hang out with him I find out about another talent I never even knew he had."

If Anna wished to pinpoint the main area of focus Robin stressed in their time together, it was "the importance of rhythm and the emotion you put into the rhythm. He taught me that with an impeccable sense of timing and confidence, you can make even the simplest chord progression into something that will instantly mesmerize any audience. This is something that I will never forget, and I feel is the most important element in my blues playing and songwriting."

Anna's blues musical recital came in the form of 2006's *Ain't No Man*. The title track, a proclamation of the often-heard quotation ("Men: you can't live with them and you can't live *with* them"), received airplay in San Diego and other markets. The album ended on a raucous note with "Fool for Tryin'," which sounded like somebody spiked the punch at a catfish dinner along the bayou.

Two years later, the *Wait Another Day* CD was released, this time featuring the moniker of a group: the Anna Troy Band. *Wait Another Day* differs from its predecessor in other ways. Power pop and contemporary indie rock are combined with Anna's continuing fascination with the south of the Mason-Dixon line roots music. She is aware of the musical contrast at work.

"I went for about a year without writing many songs. This period of writer's block spurred me to start listening to different styles of music in hopes of finding inspirations there. I delved heavily into the '60s and '70s, listening to the Rolling Stones, the Beatles, the Allman Brothers, Marvin Gaye, Otis Redding, and a lot of rhythm and blues and soul. After listening to record after record of music from this era I just started writing songs, and my second album was soon to follow. I feel a lot of the songwriting knowledge that I learned from working with top songwriters during the Troys days really influenced this record. I allowed myself to write pop songs again, which is something I avoided for quite a while."

On board for the *Wait Another Day* was veteran musician Greg Douglass, perhaps best known for his years with Steve Miller.

"Greg Douglass and I met a few years ago at the guitar shop where he teaches guitar in Escondido. Bart Mendoza was doing an interview on him, and I happened to be hanging out with Bart at the time. I gave Greg a copy of *Ain't No Man* and, after listening to it, he emailed me and told me how much he loved the album. He showed an interest in collaborating with me on songwriting and doing some shows together. It was an offer I couldn't refuse."

Douglass joined the Anna Troy Band when they opened for the Yardbirds at Canes in Mission Beach. "The show went really well and after getting together a few more times over

the summer, he offered to play guitar on my new record. At the time, I only had five songs written for the album, so I asked him if he would help me write the rest of the record. Excited by the challenge, we started cranking out these awesome rock songs instantly. Within three months we had co-written enough songs to have a full length

album, and everyone was in awe at how quickly and easily the songs were coming. We finished recording the album and ended the summer of 2008 with an amazing CD release show and the best night of my career so far: opening for America at Humphrey's. The show went so well that America asked us up for their encore, and the night ended with Greg, Bart, and me on stage with America singing "A Horse With No Name."

Anna said, "Working with Greg has defi-

*"I feel my experience in the Troys was equivalent to someone my age going to college, and when I got out of the band I had a very well-rounded education in the music industry."*

—Anna Troy



The Troys promo shot



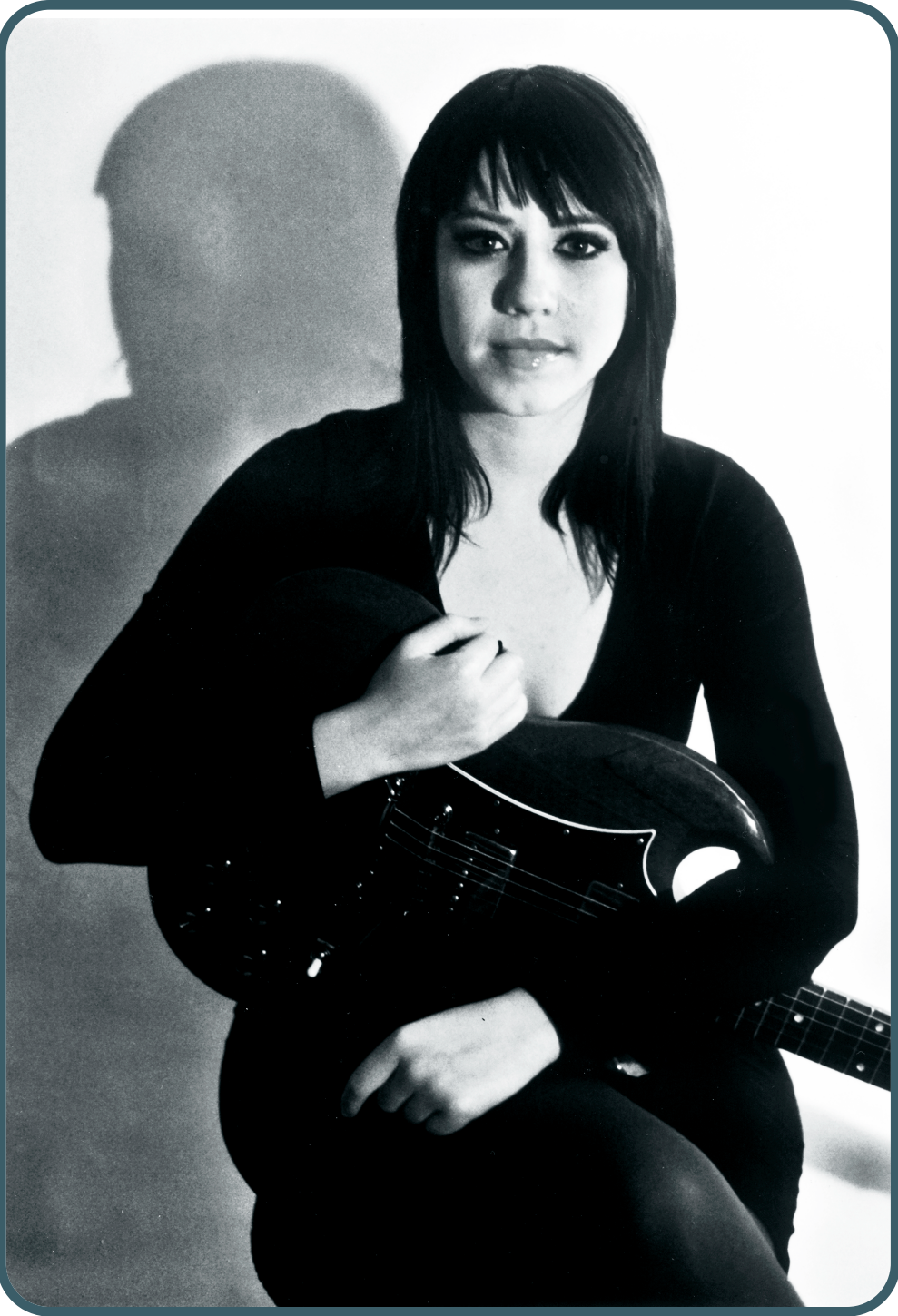


Photo: Bill Richardson

local Blindspot label, Bart Mendoza's company, which is dedicated to getting San Diego musicians heard globally. Like Henkel, Mendoza is there to offer feedback and constructive criticism. But with his multiple titles of musician, record label owner, producer, and freelance writer, he has opened up endless networking possibilities for Anna and other budding talents on the local scene.

"Not only is Bart one of the most valuable people in the success of my career over the past four years," said Anna, "he is also my best friend. Bart has played many roles in my career from manager, booker, publicist, tour manager, guitar player, songwriter, and producer to mentor and part-time therapist. He has been there for me through thick and thin ever since the start of my solo career a few years ago when I released *Ain't No Man*. I give him a lot of credit for the success I have had over the past four years, and I honestly don't even know if he realizes the extent of the importance of his role in my life. It all started with him helping promote an amazing CD release show for *Ain't No Man* back in 2006, and ever since then he has been working diligently on a daily basis to get me press, get me shows at San Diego's finest venues such as the Casbah, and introduce me to such pivotal members of the music scene such as Greg Douglass, Tim Pyles, Mike Halloran, Kevin Hellman, and George Varga."

Anna revealed that wasn't until she met Bart that she "started gaining an appreciation of the music of the '60s as well. I am constantly receiving mix CDs of his favorite music. He turned me on to the Zombies, the Kinks, Otis Redding, the Turtles, the Jam, the Crawdaddys, and, most important, his own bands, the Shambles and Manual Scan. I love Manual Scan so much that I cover a few of their songs, and added my own version of '31968' to my latest album. His influence is very important in the evolution of my music over the past four years, and his endless support has given me the strength I need to push forward in a career that is probably one of the most difficult avenues to pursue, yet one of the most rewarding."

Her tenacious live shows have resulted in Anna earning a residency at the Cat Club, a popular venue located on the Sunset Strip in West Hollywood. "The residency in LA has been really successful. LA is definitely a tough scene to break into, but it also a worthwhile pursuit because of how important LA is in the music business," said Anna. "At some of our shows we have had audience members such as Randy Jackson from American Idol. [We] have gained the attention of Rodney Bingenheimer from KROQ who was spinning 'If You Still Want Me' on his radio show over the month of December. The plan is to continue playing up there as much as possible and build our fan base not only in LA, but up the California coast as well."

For the uninitiated, opportunity awaits. Anna's next CD will be a live album; in actuality, it's really a selection of performances from her best nights over the past few years. A CD release party is scheduled for Thursday, August 6, at Bar Pink in North Park. A recent posting on MySpace showed her current band lineup, featuring Nam Chi Vu on bass, Dan Diaz on lead guitar, and Kurt Kalker on drums.

Who knows what's in store for Anna Troy five years down the road? By then, she could be into hot club jazz and Django Reinhardt. Whether or not this is the case, Anna Troy will be aiming for a new musical direction, and her loyal audiences the lucky beneficiaries.



Photo: Bill Richardson

The Anna Troy Band (clockwise from top): Troy, Nam Chi Vu, Kurt Kalker, Dan Diaz



Photo: Steve Covault

Troy with Robin Henkel on bass



Photo: Dan Chusid

Troy and Bart Mendoza

done. About two-thirds of the way through the song I was in tears. His slide playing on that song was truly one of the most beautiful things I have ever heard, and I realized at that moment that I was working with one of the legendary guitarists in rock 'n' roll history." *Wait Another Day* was released on the



# Bluegrass CORNER

by Dwight Worden



Lots of great bluegrass is happening in and around San Diego this summer. We have the regular meetings providing opportunities for jamming and pick up bands on stage, and a featured band performance:

**1st Tuesday of every month:** At the Round Table Pizza in Escondido from 6:30-9pm, with a featured band performance from 8-9pm. (Sponsored by the North San Diego County Bluegrass and Folk Club) [www.northcounty-bluegrass.org](http://www.northcounty-bluegrass.org).

**2nd Tuesday of every month:** At the Fuddrucker's in Grossmont Center, La Mesa, from 6:30 to 9 pm with jamming and pick up bands. (Sponsored by the San Diego Bluegrass Society) [www.socalbluegrass.org](http://www.socalbluegrass.org).

**3rd Tuesday of every month:** Elks Park in El Cajon from 6:30-9 pm, jamming. (Sponsored by the San Diego Bluegrass Society). [www.socalbluegrass.org](http://www.socalbluegrass.org).

**4th Tuesday of every month:** Boll Weevil at 9330 Clairemont Mesa Blvd from 6:30 to 9pm, jamming, pick-up bands, and a featured band performance from 8 to 9pm. (Sponsored by the San Diego Bluegrass Society). [www.socalbluegrass.org](http://www.socalbluegrass.org).

**5th Tuesdays** (note: Sept 29th is the next month with a fifth Tuesday): Open bluegrass jam at Old Time Music from 6:30 to 9pm. [www.soldtimemusic.com](http://www.soldtimemusic.com).

June 13th saw **Bluegrass Day at the Fair**, which was presented by the San Diego Bluegrass Society and sponsored by the San Diego County Fair. The event presented 11 top local bluegrass bands, including the Full Deck, Driftwood, Prairie Sky, Blue Creek, Needle in a Haystack, Box Canyon, Plow, Highway 76, Gone Tomorrow, the Taildragers, and the Bluegrass Ramblers. In addition, a demonstration of contest-style fiddling was presented by District 7 of the Old Time Fiddler's Association of California, and a band scramble was held, presenting four "scrambled" bands. Judges selected a winner on each instrument, as well as a winning vocalist, and selected "The Picklers" as the winning band in the scramble. The stage was great, the sound was good, and we were right next to the beer tasting event – how can it get any better than that! Bluegrass Day at the fair was held from 11am to 8pm at the Paddock Stage.

The **Huck Finn Jubilee** in Victorville and the **Grass Valley Festival** in northern California, which is well attended by San Diegans, also took place in June over the father's day weekend. The Huck Finn Jubilee is one of the premier bluegrass festivals in the country, presenting some of the top talent in the field. [www.huckfinn.com](http://www.huckfinn.com). The Grass Valley Festival, presented by the California

Bluegrass Association, is also a long-running favorite that presents outstanding talent. [www.fathersdayfestival.com](http://www.fathersdayfestival.com).



Highway 76

June 23rd also saw the SDBS's fourth Tuesday of the month featured band night, highlighted by a special opening performance by local kids on bluegrass. It is truly great to see this music we love in the hands of such talented and enthusiastic youngsters. This kids' show was followed by a great feature performance by Highway 76.

And, **Summergrass** is coming to San Diego in less than two months. Held over the weekend of August 21-23 at the Antique Gas and Steam Engine Museum in Vista, Summergrass has a stellar line up this year of top national bluegrass bands as well as a strong complement of local and regional bands, along with workshops, camping, vendors, children and family activities, and the highly regarded Summergrass Kids Camp for children. For info and tickets: [www.summergrass.net](http://www.summergrass.net).

July 10th brings the **Lovell Sisters** to San Diego in an appearance at Acoustic Music San Diego at 7:30pm. Call (619) 303-8176 for tickets and more info. Or, [www.acousticmusicandiego.com](http://www.acousticmusicandiego.com). And, you can see **Lighthouse** on July 1 at the Friendly Grounds coffee house in Santee, 9225 Carlton Hills Road, from 7-9pm. And, you can catch Blue Creek as the featured band at the North County Bluegrass and Folk Club first Tuesday of the month event at the Round Table Pizza in Escondido from 8-9pm. **Gone Tomorrow** is the SDBS Featured band for SDBS's fourth Tuesday event at the Boll Weevil to be held on July 28.

And, don't forget that every Sunday is **Bluegrass Brunch** time at Urban Solace, located at 3823 30th Street in North Park. The Bluegrass Brunch presents a different live bluegrass group every Sunday from 10am to 2pm, and the food is scrumptious!

So, be thankful there is so much great Bluegrass in San Diego for you to hear and enjoy this summer. I hope to see you out pickin'!



Radio Daze, continued.

song alone worth whatever you'll pay for the Assumptions. This is the Pretenders on steroids.

The producer/guitarist on the Assumptions is former Frank Zappa "stunt guitarist," Mike Keneally. When I heard Mike was attached to this project on guitar, keyboards, and vocals, I realized that Layne Sterling had become more than a fan of great music ... she's writing it and singing it, too. She told me that Keneally made her play every song on this album on acoustic guitar before he'd agree to participate.

Kudos, too, to the tight rhythm section of Jon Kanis on bass and vocals, and Brian Cantrell, drummer extraordinaire.

The album is crisply recorded and mixed by one of the best engineers I know, Mike Harris. The CD and LP artwork and packaging is stunning.

Find out more about the band at [myspace.com/theassumptions](http://myspace.com/theassumptions), and on their Facebook page. They have tracks streaming on one of them.

Don't assume I'm mistaken...get the Assumptions!

## The Zen of Recording

Sven-Erik Seaholm's column will return in August.



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# Hosing Down

by José Sinatra



José Sinatra completes a self-portrait

## NO CULTCHA?

The results of a recent poll (which I made up one morning after finishing the first draft of my long-planned exposé on the aberrant relationship of Wayne Newton and late 20th century Las Vegas) left no doubt that the average San Diegan is robustly opinionated when it comes to the Arts. The less-than-average San Diegan was opinionated as well but lacked robustness. Somehow, the greatest confluence of opinion belonged to the *above average* San Diegans, of whom 98% responded identically to what the downtown publication *The New York Westie* labeled the survey's most cosmopolitanly audacious question: what city motto does San Diego need to thrive in pre-22nd century Ameriworld?

"New York Can Only Wish It Were San Diego" was the near-unanimous idea from respondents of all races, religions, political parties, and all but one sexual preference. A sizeable percentage of responses from the merely *average* San Diegan featured essentially the same slogan but incorrectly used the verb *was* and were disqualified, likewise nearly all of the *below average* responses, which either contained misspellings or were not accompanied by the one dollar registration fee.

As to the question of the *one thing* the Arts in San Diego needs most, the only response that seems worth a damn (thank you, Sara L., of Lakeside) was, unsurprisingly, "We need more street fair music festivals than just one or two every month."

Oh, that hit the head through the nail all right. World-class cities such as the Big Ol' Dusty Apple seem to have them daily—even hourly—and a lot of them don't even feature Gregory Page, yet still they thrive, expand, breed . . .

So it's clear that this Diego we affectionately called "San" has its work cut/sliced/puréed out for it. But if there ever was (I mean *were*) a *citech* that thrives on challenge, this town has its picture in the encyclopedia illustrating *can do* (even if it's among the footnotes of the entry on dementia). When someone says, "No way!", San Diego responds, "Curds and!" and that's what I've always found so innocent, so uniquely . . . *delicate* about this very special place.

Although I refuse to take the time to pinpoint the exact year, I recall getting quite a charge when some modern savant in our city government had his/her first threesome with Tourism and Construction and—without even a bit of courteous foreplay—began a diabolical plan to brainwash San Diego into believing that it actually is New York, reborn.

Channel 39 moves to a great big skyscraper downtown, with a big NBC (corporate!) sign on top of it and a (pathetic) ice-skating rink down below, streetside. How New York can you get? If only Letterman hadn't jumped ship . . .

Then, after skating, the vacationing visitor will ask a local, "Where do I catch the train [okay, *trolley*] to the East Village?" Boy, that one's stumped too many natives for me to believe. Please note, friends, the correct answer is, "Catch a trolley? That's so not cool. The Village is up the street and a couple blocks to your right. Shall I hail a cab for you? You don't look lame to me."

Wow. Gaslamp. East Village. The

docks. "Where do you live, man?" "East Village." "Cool."

Uptown. "Later, dude, headin' uptown." "You ain't *walkin'* that whole mile, are ya?" "Yeah, prob'ly stop in Middletown for a sub. I mean, a *hero*."

Little Italy. Do I take the Coaster there? Is Mountain View our Harlem? Rancho Santa Fe our Hamptons? Tijuana our Canada? Hillcrest our Queens? How long 'til Market Street west of Fourth becomes the "West Village"? Fourth and B and Wahrenbrock's will be on the "North Side." How long 'til the Convention Center develops twin towers? Mark my words, a melting pot of political pawns.

Instead of the Hudson, of course, we've go the *San Diego River*, and it was on its moist banks that San Diego's Art Community—or, rather, those who were invited—witnessed the face of the future during the third weekend of June. The dry run was intentionally kept away from the media, since the event had nothing to do with crayons or computers. The art here involved voices and strings and melodies and was rumored to have been bankrolled by Michael Lang of Woodstock legend.

Bleachers and Port-o-Sans were installed along a mile-long span on the river's North side in Mission Valley, basically from Qualcomm Way west to the Lower Bronx (the foothills of Linda Vista, actually, near Fashion Valley). The overgrown Islands along the river were cleared and each hosted its own stage. Displaced transients were recruited as security, vendors, and public relations officials under threat of incarceration or deportation, and most were thrilled with the opportunity to become productive members of society for two days. "It was the music that made it all worthwhile," said Luis G. by phone from the deportation station the day after. We had to give back the uniforms but they gave us five dollars and two free hot dogs and water and when Madonna went on, on Staten (the mainstage, on the island just west of Mission Center Road) Saturday night, she was so close I could smell her tatoos."

HudSanRiverFest was a clearly a success, and word has it that Lang has obtained permits for its official debut, the first of many scheduled for the first, second, third, and fourth Saturdays of each month beginning in October. "We're just starting out," says a spokeswoman for the event, continuing, "I mean, we're not about to go head-to-head with the Over-the-Line tournament, Street Scene, Adams Avenue, OBOKEE, and stuff. I mean, not yet. By this time next year, though, they're mud. They can't get Madonna. They can't get Britney, the Stones, McCartney, so many others we've already signed. We know what we're doing here. We're New Yorkers, for godsakes!"

It is rumored that a large portion of the permit revenues will go toward condemning (through eminent domain) several of the nearby condos, which are to be refurbished as "sky boxes" and "hospitality suites" for various "government entities."

Councilwoman Donna Fry, according to a source, is smelling something fishy here. The promoters back East couldn't care less, since Fry, in their words, "Ain't no New Yorker."

Not yet.

# RADIO DAZE



by Peter Bolland

## ASSUME NOTHING!

I met Layne Sterling a number of years ago. At the time, she was a single mother raising her young daughter, Sara. They lived just west of my dump on Reed Street in PB. Layne had aspirations of becoming a model. She was working as a sales person at a Fashion Valley clothing outlet.

Good people.

We went to a bunch of concerts together over the next two or three years, often seeing Cheap Trick. We both loved Cheap Trick. She also loved Pink Floyd and a sh\*tload of other acts, too. In other words, the woman was (and is) a big rock fan, like millions of people. But she never showed the slightest interest in playing an instrument or singing, despite her having previously been married to a musician...which is why I'm here to tell you about *The Assumptions*.

When Sterling e-mailed me several months ago, telling me she'd recorded an album of original material, I thought, "Oh, no, I hope I don't have to let her know what I think." I have heard too many of my friends' attempts at making records...most of which were terrible (just imagine those first-round contestants on American Idol.)

Oops! My bad!

*This is one of the best recordings I've heard this year!*

It's as though the Assumptions just materialized, fully formed from the brow of Zeus! (Whatever THAT means.) The true story is less cosmic, however.

When I spoke with Sterling a couple of days ago, she told me that, during the hundreds of concerts and backstage hangouts she'd attended over the years, she'd been like a fly on the wall, observing and taking mental notes, saving the information for future reference.

Obviously, Sterling has an excellent memory.

From the first seconds of the first track, "Velvet Warning," I knew this album would kick ass . . . (and not just because my wife, Sandi, who listened to it first, told me it did!) This song is a hit single. It reminds me very much of the Pretenders. When I mentioned that to Sterling, she agreed, although she told me that, because she loved Chrissie Hynde so much, she deliberately avoided listening to the Pretenders for four years before writing this record in 2005. Same goes for Joni Mitchell, who's also a major influence on the sound of the Assumptions.

Which brings me to track three, "Deep Dish Sonic Sage," another potential hit, which reminds me very much of Mitchell. Sterling's vocals are closely miked and breathy. The arrangement by Sara Sterling makes this number absolutely gorgeous.

Another masterpiece is track five, "Better Late Than Never." The arrangement and layered vocal hooks make this

Continued on previous page.

PHILOSOPHY, ART, CULTURE, & MUSIC

# STAGES



by Peter Bolland

## THIN PLACES

If there is one universal theme that runs through the world's religious and mythological wisdom traditions it is probably this: that there is an invisible plane hidden from us by the visible plane, and that the invisible plane is in fact the source of the visible plane. Some call the invisible plane God and personify it as a conscious being. Others resist personifying it and prefer thinking of the source as Tao or Brahman. For them, it is the hidden order of the world, the logos, natural law, the ground of Being behind the veil of the phenomenal world of forms. As such, it is not subject to the vagaries of belief or disbelief. It simply is. No need to argue. Arguing about definitions of ultimate reality is like arguing about driving directions. If I MapQuest directions to Disneyland from my house and you MapQuest directions to Disneyland from your house, we will both have very different sets of instructions. But I'll see you at Disneyland.

Whatever God is, the mystics tell us, is beyond all concepts and words. Naturally, being thinking animals with a belligerent streak, we construct thoughts about God, then bind our egos to our thoughts arguing with anyone who threatens our precious ideology. But, as Lao Tzu reminds us, "the Tao that can be spoken is not the eternal Tao." And in the tradition of Zen Buddhism, all our thoughts and words are merely "fingers pointing at the moon." Only an idiot would confuse a finger with the moon. Hungry? "The menu," as Alan Watts says, "is not the food."

If there is a reality deeper than the one our senses present to us, and if this deeper reality is in fact the source of the perceptual world, how can we access it? In primal culture, it was the shaman who traveled at will between the two realms. He was gradually replaced by priests and institutionalized religion. Then it was the guy who sold you that little bag of mushrooms at Burning Man.

What if we could make conscious contact with the Real, the source of the phenomenal world, without going to mass or choking down illegal fungi? What if there were places where the two worlds shimmered into one, where in the midst of our everyday, mundane existence the transcendent broke through, even if only for a moment? The ancient Celts called these "thin places."

Thin places are everywhere. For the Celts they were often found in wilderness—this sacred lake, that rock outcropping, the mountain summit at dawn. In the Carlos Castaneda books, Don Juan called them power spots. We've all felt them. Triggered by a fortuitous arrangement of natural shapes, scents, sounds, colors, and textures we slipped for a moment out of our busy minds and into the still and quiet stream forever flowing around us—a stream our busy minds block from our everyday awareness—and we experience an expansiveness, an aliveness, a deep and abiding significance far exceeding the beauty of the perceptual field. Although an unrepentant atheist and materialist to the end, even Freud, as a scientist, had to acknowledge this "oceanic feeling."

It happened to me just the other day in of all places the frozen food section of Costco. What would normally be a somewhat unpleasant situation, a crowded big box store with all the architectural charm of a bomb shelter, suddenly became the stage for an unfolding of unintended and beautiful humanity. I felt what I can only describe as a deep tenderness welling up in me as I looked at the people around me, awash in our abundance, unconsciously kind to one another, bravely living our lives despite the odds. The little retired ladies with their white plastic aprons and hairnets serving chicken fingers and pot stickers to eager

children, the slicked-back hair guy in the golf shirt talking loudly into his Bluetooth as he crashed his cart into mine, the teenagers from the church camp or maybe the halfway house loading their flatbed cart with enough food to feed a village. In the way they carried themselves I saw their quiet, unsung heroism. Life didn't turn out the way any of us expected it to. But here we are on a Tuesday, living it as bravely as we can. I saw a woman, who the Dept. of Health would categorize as morbidly obese, put her arm around her 14-year-old daughter in a way that taught me, more than any sermon or learned book, about the redemptive power of love, and how it is only in the way we treat others that we ourselves are healed and forgiven for our weaknesses, no matter how glaring or hidden our imperfections. Suddenly there were no strangers here. I knew these people. I was these people. I stopped. There was water in my eyes. I had stumbled into a thin place.

What are you supposed to do when you fall in love with everybody? You close your eyes and you silently vow to try to remember this feeling, to hold onto it, but you never can. Soon you're back in your worried mind, inventing reasons to be unhappy, caught in the thick of things.

Driving home you realize it has nothing to do with Costco, of course, or any place at all. Everyplace is a thin place. If you can get it in the frozen food section of Costco, you can get it anywhere. The 18th century British mystical poet William Blake said, "If the doors of perception were cleansed, man would see things as they truly are, infinite." What we need is a big Costco-sized barrel of perception cleanser. What aisle is that on?

But life is thick. We're all so busy. There is so much to worry about. Yet underneath the surface of our glittering lives of achievement and acquisition there is a deep river of beauty. And our toes aren't even wet.

It is the job of the artist to create thin places. Artists must create arrangements of sight and sound that shine light through the membrane between the worlds and illuminate our own infinite significance. Great art grants us the vision to finally see ourselves as we really are, unlimited.

Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart said that he could not clearly define hardcore pornography, then famously added, "but I know it when I see it." What makes a great song? I don't really know, but I know it when I hear it. I call it the hair-on-the-arms test. When the hair on my arms stands up, it's a good song. It's that simple. That's all there is to say. Your soul knows. You can talk about it till dawn, but all your words are just fingers pointing at the moon. Your soul took flight with the opening chord and was in full lunar orbit by the chorus while your mind fell in love with its own cleverness and has been lost in space ever since.

But don't count on the artists to do all the heavy lifting. Our perception of the world is largely a creation of our own thoughts. Our life, which Buddha taught 25 centuries ago, is a creation of the mind. Choose your thoughts wisely. When you feel the thickness closing in, remember to step out of the stream of your busy mind and sink down into what the poet Mary Oliver calls "the soft animal of your body." Feel the subtle energy coursing through you. Hear with new ears. See with new eyes. The ground of Being, that source from which we came and to which we will return, is always with us. Even, and perhaps especially, when you are caught by the bustle and thrum of the marketplace, remember where you came from. In the unrelenting march of your life, from time to time, take a side step into the thin places.

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



# BLUES TRAVELER

## LET US NOW PRAISE FAMOUS MEN



Photo: Christian Lantry

Blues Traveler: (l. to r.) Tad Kinchla, Chan Kinchla, John Popper, Ben Wilson, Brendan Hill.

by Terry Roland

"Let us now praise famous men and our fathers that begat us."

—from Sirach, one of the Apocrypha of the Old Testament

There is a lineage, a succession of real music, handed down from generation to generation. This is known among those who have witnessed the timeless relevance of the culture and authentic art of music. But, it rarely happens in the mainstream pop scene of overnight success. It's a world that will just as easily consign the same artists to overnight failure. It's not easy staying relevant in the music business. It's even harder to be acknowledged for not only surviving but also thriving in the art of the musical passion once pursued in early youth. Like their own forefathers in classic blues-based rock music, Blues Traveler have pursued the raw passion of the music they were raised on throughout their 20 year career.

The Princeton, New Jersey-based band found fame during the turbulent years of the '90s and then side stepped the commercial trappings to rebuild, re-invent, and return back to the raw energy of their early days. This is not new. Artists like Bob Dylan, who still carries the archaic '60s Prophet label, has consistently grown artistically over the last 50 years. Remember when the Beatles stripped away the production heavy music of their late-'60s psychedelia period for the Get Back sessions? We can hardly breathe without mentioning Johnny Cash and his final decade, returning to his own blues-laced acoustic country music with the help of Rick Rubin. Over the last five years Blues Traveler have taken the same path, beginning with their stunning album, *Cover Yourself*, with acoustic reinventions of their own legacy of songs. Last year's follow-up, *North Hollywood Shootout*, extends this natural growth with a combination of electric and acoustic production, still stripped down the basics, giving the band the same spontaneity that drove them into the national limelight in the '90s along with their peers, the Spin Doctors and Wilco. In 1994 they broke into the pop charts with the Grammy-winning "Run-Around," also charting with the infectious song "Hook."

In 1999, with their days of phenomenal pop success behind them, they continued to "do what they do," as drummer Brendan Hill succinctly stated. The tragic loss of bass player Bobby Sheehan to an accidental drug overdose caused them to re-evaluate, soul search, and re-emerge with keyboardist Ben Wilson and bass player Chan Kinchla, the brother of lead guitarist Tad Kinchla. With this new line up they have continued over the last decade to forge new musical territory, deepening their legacy and keeping their live shows exciting with passionate performances.

I recently spoke with drummer Brendan Hill, covering the band's history and their current direction. Brendan showed how this band has stayed vital through their personal unity,

positivity, and respect for the musical torch they have been handed by the other "famous men" of their musical ancestry.

*San Diego Troubadour: With 20 years under your belt as a band, a huge body of recorded work and legendary tours, what direction do you see the band taking today?*

**Brendan Hill:** The new album is a reaction to a direction we started with our last album, *Cover Yourself*. We recorded it in Austin and every thing was stripped down to hear acoustic sounds. We keep things as simple as possible now, not too many overdubs. There's a natural flow to the music. With *North Hollywood Shoot Out* we had the opportunity to work with David Bianco. He had a long list of great artists he had produced and worked with in the past, including Fleetwood Mac, U2, and the Stones. We really wanted to work with him. We had a meeting and agreed to go the for spontaneity. So John only brought in three or four completed songs. The rest were written during the sessions. We'd start with a drum groove, jam, and let things be the way they wanted to be. You know, there'd be a spark of an idea we'd go with. In some of the studio records the spontaneity of the live shows was missing.

*So like other live bands, say, the Grateful Dead or the Allmans, there's a struggle to create what happens in live shows in the studio?*

Yes. That's right.

*Is North Hollywood Shootout a return to the feel of your early studio work?*

Yes. On our first record from 1990, we went

into the studio from playing live songs at a local bar in New York City. There was this enthusiasm, energy, and a raw sound we liked. We'd go in and play. We had to come to terms with the studio and live performance being different animals. A lot of our peers in music were really into jamming and experimenting. In New York City our friends were bands like the Spin Doctors. We liked to jam, but we'd often get complaints that the songs on the albums were too short. But, we'd record the songs and then flesh them out during the live performances. The songs would change, then, with extended jams as we played them live.

*Tell me how you began.*

We first met in a high school jazz band. We were 14. We got together and became a basement band. John took over as singer. Eventually, Bob was playing bass. When we were seniors John moved to New York City and blazed a trail for us. He graduated from high school before the rest of us. In 1987, after we graduated, we moved to New York City. At first we were playing small clubs for rent and food. Any money we made above that went back into the music. We'd buy better instruments and equipment. It was all pretty equitable. We built a following in New York.

*How did you break out nationally?*

David Graham, Bill Graham's son, heard a live tape of us. He sent us a letter. A guy from A&M records came to see us live. We were signed in 1989. Bill Graham had us opening for the Allman Brothers. Later we'd open for Santana and Lynyrd Skynyrd. Then Bill died in the helicopter crash. It was tragic. We learned so much from him. We learned how to make each show something special. Like the Dead, you know, rotating songs in the sets for repeating audiences.

*It seems your music is rooted in R&B, soul, and the hard rock of the late '60s, something an old guy like me can really appreciate. How have you used these influences as a band?*

We all bring different influences mostly from the bands of the '60s and '70s who were still recording and touring during the '80s. I was into Led Zeppelin and the Who. John loved Jimi Hendrix. He wanted to do with the harmonica what Hendrix did with the guitar. He wanted to bring something new that didn't sound like a harmonica. Bobby loved the Grateful Dead. So, we had this stew of influences. Riff rock, some really fast shuffles, music that couldn't fit into a single genre.

*Tell me about your involvement in the Band tribute?*

We're huge Band-influenced fans. We're asked to do a lot of tributes. We totally wanted to do this one. We did "Rag Mama Rag." It was an honor. We also did "Imagine" for a Lennon tribute and "Freebird" for Lynard Skynyrd. I don't know why these songs hadn't been taken by someone else. It was crazy.

*How have personnel changes affected your music?*

We still consider Ben Wilson (keyboards) an

original member. And there's also Tad Kinchla on bass, Chan's brother. We call them both the new guys, but they've been with us for ten years now. We call them both the new guys, but they've been with us for ten years now. Before Bobby passed, we had huge success. The '90s had passed and we lost some steam. Bobby's death was just tragic. When the news guys came on in 2000, we had to re-create ourselves. The music industry had changed. There were the big conglomerates out there, so we decided to start as though we were a new band. We did it the way we did when we first began. We jammed for a while to get the feel. We expanded the sound. Our new bassist, Tad Kinchla, was different than Bob. He had this rolling, flowing feel. Tad has a more syncopated jump feel to the way he plays. As a drummer, I've had to change my playing quite a bit.

*Have you encountered any personnel or professional problems that have affected the band?*

Well, the death of one of our members was hard. It was so cliché to pass away because of drugs. But we've stuck together. We're the same people, we have the same stories, and we've stayed friends.

We're survivors. No matter what happens, we still find it fun. We feel like we're still 17. On tour, we travel on the tour bus and we golf together. We all have families who we miss. After months on the road, we may not see much of each other, you know, seeing the same old faces can get kind of old. But, when we come back together we fall right back into it.

*Has going against the grain of mainstream music cost you anything in terms of commercial success?*

Going in, we became immediate radio darlings. But, after that, you find that people turn on you pretty quick. Being on the "out" thing makes you new in some ways. We just go out and do what we do. We never went through the trends to stay current. We've never dressed up in spandex to play. We've been labeled a '90s band. We've also been called "hippie hard-core." We've been called a jam band, but we also like to rock out. We're not traditional in that way, you know; we don't take acid and then experiment with a song that's meant to be a pop song. We come closest now to the "hippie hard-core" label.

*What in Blues Traveler's future?*

We're breaking up [laughs]. Not really. We'll keep releasing new albums about every 18 months. John's doing some solo work. He's going to record a country record. We're all trying to spread our wings. If you look at John's discography, it's pretty diverse. He's played with everyone from Dolly Parton to death metal bands. We just played Australia. We were at the Byron's Bay Blues and Roots Festival. We'd like to do more international touring. We'd like to play in Africa. It's good because we make new fans. It's nice to have a new fan base.

*Well, Brendan, it's been a pleasure talking with you. I look forward to seeing you in San Diego.*

Thanks. See you there!

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## Middle Earth Ensemble Passage

by Frank Kocher

San Diego's Middle Earth Ensemble plays world fusion music with a Middle Eastern and gypsy flavor. Their first two albums, especially 2006's *Lavender*, featured many songs that placed the band as a favorite of gypsy and other traditional belly dancers. Their new disc, *Passage*, expands the palette to include more eclectic styles and music, while not abandoning the exotic scales, rhythms, and instruments that define their sound.

The group is built upon the pulse of percussionist Frank Lazzaro's work on the doumbek chalice drum, deff frame drum, and other Middle Eastern instruments. Andy Villas-Boas (who also sings) gives the band a solid bass bottom, and the melodies are carried by Michael Mesleh on oud and guitar, Anthony Sarain's wind instruments, and violin, viola, and mandolin played by Robert Rotzler. The disc's 16 songs are a mixture of traditional Turkish music, several established belly dance and flamenco-style gypsy songs, and eight originals.

"Gibraltar" starts things off with an original that features flute weaving in and out of the rhythm of a Mediterranean beat. This is one of several originals on the disc that features a jazzy feel and a departure from Middle Eastern, Turkish, or gypsy forms. "El Helwa Di" follows, a slower belly dance song with oud and violin playing in unison, then giving way to flute, now playing scales that evoke Northern Africa. With "Passage", all band members are again in fine form on an original tune that combines Celtic, Mediterranean, and Spanish flourishes with a bit of oud raga riffing over a drum and tabla beat. For the Turkish traditional dance tune "Uskudara Giderken," Villas-Boas sings and Rotzler takes a dark, gypsy-style violin solo. "Galaciana" is a bright, brisk jazz tune featuring violin and 12-string figures and a soaring flute break, followed by "King Ramzy," another fusion piece that mixes styles effectively. A disc highlight, the structure features a breezy framework that is driven by Lazzaro's beat, with guitar and violin melody, and features a superb soprano sax solo by Sarain.

Though four of the songs feature vocals, these are essentially part of the instrumentation and fabric of the tunes. All of the players are masters of their craft, and the 74 minutes gives each moment to shine.

"Mirayah's Veil" is mysterious and different, with Villas-Boas chanting in English to a haunting violin melody. "Lileta" brings a taste of Spain with percussion, vocals, and rhythms that bring to mind a fiesta. For "Nadya," it is back to a Turkish marketplace for another dance tune, followed by "Ottomar," a gypsy-style ballad with oud and violin weaving a dark spell.

*Passage* offers a montage of many sounds and musical places. It is an enjoyable experience for listeners who are fans of world fusion music and offers an interesting glimpse who are new to this genre.



## Tornado Magnet Double Wide

by Mike Alvarez

When a group called Tornado Magnet releases an album called *Double Wide*, the good times begin even before the first note rings out. The cover art depicts a trailer taking flight while a twister looms in the background. As one might expect, it's a country-rock extravaganza that celebrates the redneck lifestyle even while gently lampooning it. Their portrayal of life in the sticks is playful and often tongue-in-cheek. While firmly rooted in country sounds, they give their music a distinctive rock edge courtesy of some blazing lead guitar work. Along with plenty of guitars they employ instruments like mandolin, pedal steel guitar, keyboards, accordion, fiddle, and upright bass. Some local star power lends support, including Jerry Raney and Joey Harris of the Farmers as well as Cactus Jim Soldi from the Eve Selis Band. This winning combination of talents creates a rich and textured sound.

This is a very accomplished and polished recording with just enough grit to keep it credible. The musicianship is first rate and the songwriting is solid. They generally keep things comedic and lighthearted, which sometimes undermines their efforts at more somber material. Phillip Bensimon's voice is perfect for the characters and situations portrayed in the lighter songs, but his delivery isn't quite as effective for the more serious moments. He's like your good buddy who always has a story to tell. The mere sound of it often was enough to make me want to break out into a grin.

Right out of the gate they sing the praises of fishing and all the activities that go with it. In the song "Hook Up" they unabashedly paint a picture of an idyllic day on the lake with buddies and beer. Things take a turn for the melancholy on "Pistolero," a poignant ballad in which a father implores his son not be like him. A choir of female backing vocalists serves to punctuate the song's emotion. This is followed by another ballad called "Austin City Lights," a wistful vignette of a musician's life on the road. But the mood doesn't remain somber for very long because "Highfield" is a spirited country rave-up with a bluegrass-style intro. The group's whimsical humor comes to the fore once again in "King of the Campus," a track that lets them display their alternative rock side as well as their storytelling acumen.

And what country album would be complete without a love song? "Reminds Me of You" is exactly that – no more, no less, complete with violins! Perhaps the thematic centerpiece of the album is "Rednecks," which trots out all the hallmarks of country life, including NASCAR, mullets, moonshine swilled from mason jars, and tractor pulls. It's all delivered with a deliciously wicked sense of delight. "Whiskey Tango," the most compelling song, is a hilarious account of inebriation's aftermath. These guys have a knack for writing lyrics that seem crude on the surface but are actually quite clever and poetic. Listeners with a taste for country sounds will have a lot of fun with this album.



## The Farmers Fulmination

by Raul Sandelin

Like many a wee lad growing up in El Cajon, I'll admit: I lost my virginity to a very short woman. Like a stiff drink in an East County bar, she stood five fingers high. But, soon after I began frequenting the El Cajon dives, searching for those tall, elusive East County goddesses that the older guys promised were lurking in the neon shadows. Gusser's Lounge, the Grand, the Coo-Coo Club, the Quarterdeck, and Winn Cody's. These were the lush rooms filled with drink and sin where the mysterious East County sirens prowled.

That's why I'm glad the Farmers found one on their new CD *Fulmination*. Standing six-foot-four, pirate patch over one eye, butterfly tattoo, and cowboy chaps sans pants and panties, our feminine archetype provides the ammo for the opening cut, "East County Woman." Jerry Raney croons about the Cajon Zone über-dame while old friend, new bassist Chris Sullivan and longtime drummer Joel "Bongo" Kmak build a web of rhythmic thunder. "East County Woman" revitalizes Raney's lust for the raunch of the Beat Farmer era. But, the groove is now deeper, the music more seasoned, the guitars, well, this is a rock guitar album. Sure, it has moments of subtlety. But, Raney's guitar and amp are set on 13. From the opening track through "Flying Man" through eight other rockers, Raney takes his Les Paul double cutaway on a sonic tornado ride, reminiscent of his 1970s super group Glory. The lyrics follow an autobiography that Beat Farmer fans know well, a life of racing down the asphalt, big women, and big promises. The lyrics are funny, honest, profound. But, there's that old saying, "Song lyrics only take up space between guitar solos." That's the truth of this album: it's Raney's furious guitar, pushed heavily in front of the beat by an equally furious bass and drums. His sound is triangulated between the Fogerty brothers, Jeff Beck, and Walter Trout – swampy, exotic, with the kinetic potential to demolish anything in its path. It's Cowpunk as only Blue Cheer with Alvin Lee sitting in could play it. The Farmers also explore other heroes with the Dylanesque "Your Own Way" and funkadelic "Mr. Dynamite," which is introduced at shows as a song by Sly and the Family Farmers. Respite comes when Bongo Kmak grabs the mic on "Walkin' Back to Lakeside," his voice tinny and old-timey, paying homage to 1940s radio and country legend Hank Snow. On "Mexicali Nights," junior Farmer Corbin Turner drops his vocal chords into his belch-bucket for a baritone tour of that pleasure town south of Calexico. Turner's sightseeing through Mexicali is sweetly underscored by the trumpet of Sweetlips Mysterioso. Still it's Jerry Raney's guitar, shot full of either rabies or trailer candy, that'll surprise and delight longtime fans. Much of the credit goes to producer Sven-Erik Seaholm for capturing a "live" sound on this studio project. The Farmers sound less like they've gathered "in front of the glass" and more like they've plunged into their second set at Pete's Place at 11:45 on a Saturday night.



## Citizen Band Breaker Breaker My Heart

by Mike Alvarez

One expects great things from a band whose lineup contains some heavy hitters from the local scene. Fronted by Jeff Berkley with bass and backup vocals by Marcia Claire, this talented group of musicians creates an appealing sound that is notable for its emotive vocals, engaging harmonies, crisp rhythms, and sinewy guitar work. The melodies are catchy and couched in robust arrangements that showcase how well-crafted they are. Citizen Band plays rock, first and foremost, but they infuse it with stylistic touches of country, Americana, alternative rock, and folk.

Influences abound. One can hear flashes of artists like Neil Young, R.E.M., the Traveling Wilburys, Heart, Crosby, Stills & Nash, and the Byrds in their melodies and delivery. The combination of Berkley's lead vocals and the harmonies spearheaded by Claire sometimes even evoke Buckingham/Nicks-era Fleetwood Mac, particularly on a song like "For Lillian." Lyrically, the songs tend toward the personal and introspective, but they aren't sung with the intent to make them depressing or heavy. These guys make music that is at once fun and entertaining but also artful in its execution.

The songs encompass a variety of styles. "Boomerang Love" is a pretty country ballad with soulful vocals by Berkley who relates the melancholy lyrics with a husky world-weariness. It serves as a nice interlude before "Slide," a perky alternative rock number that could have been the result of a collaboration between Michael Stipe and Crazy Horse. "Love You to the Bone" is reminiscent of Tom Petty's "I Won't Back Down," but it goes in different directions, melodically.

Some other standout numbers include the electric guitar-driven "Broken Man," which calls to mind "Victim of Love," one of the harder tracks from the Eagles' classic *Hotel California* album. It's got a deliciously nasty riff that's fuelled by a relentless bass and drum rhythm track. "In Among the Roses" is a southern rock tour-de-force that wouldn't be out of place in a Lynyrd Skynyrd playlist. The 12-string guitar comes to the fore in "Crush," giving this song a distinct Byrds/R.E.M. flavor, that is, if either of those groups were fronted by Don Henley. The penultimate track is also my favorite. "Waste of Time" sounds like the Beatles went country, complete with a George Harrison-style slide guitar break. It has what is possibly the most engaging melody of the album. It's an unlikely but highly appealing amalgam of Brit-Pop and Americana.

While I cite many points of reference, I don't mean to imply that they are the sum total of their influences and nothing more. Citizen Band avails itself from a cornucopia of classic sounds, then combines and re-interprets them to create a really nice vibe. It might sometimes remind listeners of things they've heard before, but it has the virtue of being brand new music created by a terrifically talented band.



## Josh Damigo Raw

by Will Edwards

Josh Damigo's first full-length record, *Raw*, is unusual. It plays a bit like a diary and a live show rolled into one. The songs thread together and flow well throughout the playlist and the lyrical message typically explores reflections and sentiments on young love, lust, and overcoming personal challenges. So, is this a "been there, done that" record? In short, no it isn't. Permit me to answer a cliché question with a cliché answer. There's more to Josh Damigo than meets the eye.

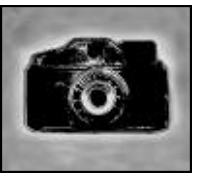
My favorite song on the whole album is "Sleeves." As a cynic, I like it because it reminds me that sometimes we're misunderstood and life is hard. How many of us like a song just because it lets us brood? Track 10, "Rain," echoes a similar mood and ironically the melancholy tone makes me feel... well, better. When I thought about why I liked those songs most, I discovered something unexpected – that most of the other tracks stray into unfamiliar territory for the genre. They're positive and optimistic. Is a singer-songwriter allowed to be so content?

There are many common themes here, particularly songs that describe the kind of young love characterized by long walks on the beach and awkward moments that make for spontaneous laughter. Many of us have come to the conclusion that love is a double-edged sword. Damigo doesn't follow that cliché but instead directs our attention toward the "good times" side of the love story that I was willing to abandon my cynicism (albeit temporarily).

*Raw* ends with a surprise spectacular – a track co-written and produced by Jeremy Rubolino, called "Shooting for the Sun" – and the only track not produced by Aaron Bowen (who also produced Damigo's 2007 release, *Pocket Change*). While Bowen's production style is very conservative, Rubolino's approach couldn't be much more flamboyant. Each approach has its virtues and while "Shooting for the Sun" stands as an obvious reflection of standard pop design, it is a great closing song. In summary, the song is about breaking through and making it. That, too, is a cliché, but it's also at the very heart of why many creative people have created anything at all. Of all the songs on the album, this final track has the best shot at radio success (a fact not lost on Rubolino and Damigo, I'm sure).

Damigo is ambitious and he wears it on his sleeve. Throughout the record, he delivers more natural performances that demonstrate considerable growth vocally and performance-wise over his 2007 EP. His lack of cynicism makes him different and may align him with a broader listening audience. Someone once said, "Country music is great because you can always sing along the first time you hear it." One could say that Damigo often states the obvious as a songwriter, but on the other hand that, makes for a lot of common ground with his listeners. On track seven Damigo admits, "Come on, sing it, it's really easy. I don't write complicated [songs]." Eventually, I agreed with him and am happy to sing along.





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