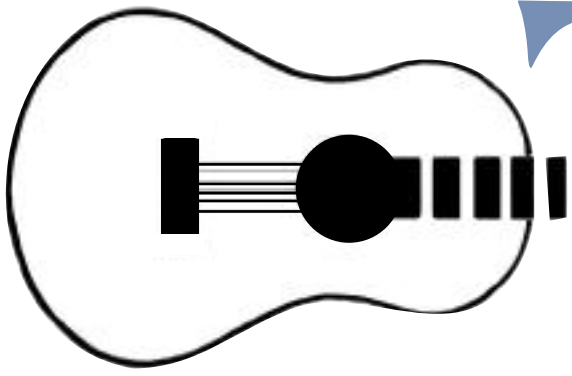


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# T SAN DIEGO ROUBADOOR

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



July 2010

[www.sandiegotroubadour.com](http://www.sandiegotroubadour.com)

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

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**Helping to Keep the "Glory" of Music in Public Schools**

by Raul Sandelin

On a Wednesday, May 26, the rock royalty of San Diego gathered at Anthology. Actually "rock royalty" always strikes me as an impossible oxymoron. So, let's call it San Diego's rock pantheon: The city's rock 'n' roll Apollos, Dionysuses, Athenas, and Icaruses were in attendance. Skid Roper, Bart Mendoza, Chris Davies of Penetrators fame, Mighty Joe Longa, and dozens more. MC-in-residence Jim McInnes called the play-by-play. The event was the reunion of the band Glory, San Diego's first generation of local rock stars.

Billed as "Legends of the San Diego Rock Scene," the reunion was a fundraiser for the California Music Project, a non-profit organization dedicated to protecting music programs in public schools. The evening started out with some slick McInnes one-liners and two-liners (to be honest, I swear I heard a three-and-a-half liner also) followed by a solid romping by Modern Rhythm.

Private Domain followed with a set that concluded with their international hit "Absolute Perfection."

Jerry Raney's Farmers hit the stage as evening turned to night, bringing a little of the East County to the downtown crowd. Much of the set included songs from their *Fulmination* CD, such as the hard rocking yet tongue-in-cheek "East County Woman." Thank god there're still 6-foot-tall women out in the Cajon Zone, barhopping in cowboy chaps, no underwear, and pirate patches over one eye. (If anyone knows where I can find one, please tell me!) The Farmers bid adieu with the "Riverside"/"Pipeline"/"For Your Love"/back-to-"Riverside" medley that has become a signature part of their live show.

All of the opening bands had their own connections with Glory: Modern Rhythm's drummer for 30 years is none other than Glory skins man (and Iron Butterfly's original drummer) Jack Pinney. Glory's first bassist and later guitarist Jack Butler is Private Domain's string slinger. The Farmers are a royal gathering of their own with strands of Hitmakers, Crawdaddys, Penetrators, and, of course, the Beat Farmers thrown in. But, before all of that,



Glory band at Anthology

frontman Jerry Raney was shredding lead guitar for Glory.

The Glory Band, as they're also known, took the stage a little after nine. With Mike Milsap holding the mic and Raney, Butler, Pinney, bassist Greg Willis, Mike Berneathy, and Paul Nichols all lined up across the stage, it was 1970 all over again. To appreciate the memories this conjures up, one only needs to hear how one Glory fan remembers those glory days of yore. To protect the innocent (and the guilty), we'll refer to him as "Smoky":

"It was a summer concert at La Jolla Cove. A contingent of police cars rolled slowly down the hill to intimidate the throng of people. Glory was going into their third song when policemen quickly moved into the crowd looking to abduct a few flagrant longhairs. Suddenly, it appeared that a large fight was breaking out. All around the police, there were arms flailing, people yelling, the crowd creating a swirly bubble, ballooning randomly in every direction. In the middle of it all was Glory. They kept that little park rocking non-stop throughout the craziness, seemingly adding a whacky heavy rock 'n' roll sense of humor to everything. Finally, the police moved back to their cars, and the crowd drifted back too. Glory never missed a beat."

Oh, the nostalgia! However, the night of May 26 was not for fighting in the street. It was to raise money so that the hippie generation's great-grandkids can receive a modicum of a musical education. In these lean times, public schools are focusing only on the 3 "R"s. This means that orchestras, marching bands, choirs, and music appreciation classes are terminally anemic if not extinct. This is where the California Music

Project has stepped in.

"San Diego's Crawford High School, where brilliant musician/songwriters like Stephen Bishop, Nathan East, Hollis Gentry, and Jack Tempchin went to school, hasn't had a music program in over 17 years. It now has funding for a music program starting in the fall. That is something to celebrate," says Jim Gunderson, spokesman for the CMP. "At the California Music Project we believe the key to strong music programs is having inspiring music teachers in the public school faculty, and the key to that is academic training for aspiring teachers."

According to Gunderson, was an instrumental organizer of the event and whose brother John is Modern Rhythm's bass player, the California Music Project focuses on training fellows who then go out into the schools to help energize faculty and students at the local level. "Seven CMP fellows are working in the San Diego region this year. Each fellow spends eight to 10 hours in the classroom weekly and signs on for a one-year commitment."

This may seem like a drop in the bucket. But, with state school budgets slashed, programs like this are the only thing keeping music education alive. That's why this Glory reunion and future events are so important.

Says Gunderson: "We're already talking about doing events with legends of San Diego's blues scene, San Diego's jazz scene, and an event that would combine performances by San Diego stars and high school students. And, I'm sure we'll have more rock events. People had too much fun not to do it again."

To find out more about the California Music Project, go to: [www.californiamusicproject.com](http://www.californiamusicproject.com)

Photo: Lynda Lang



Glory frontman Jerry Raney

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Jeff Berkley

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Photo: Bernd Nyman

Hugh Gaskins

by Allen Singer

It seems that time has flown since I reviewed and raved about Hugh Gaskins and the G String Daddies' CDs for the *San Diego Troubadour*. Although I thoroughly enjoyed their CDs, I had the mistaken opinion that these musicians just played a "guys-only" misogynistic music. After many emails between Hugh and myself, it became clear that only a live listen would give this testosterone-riddled, bar-hardened band of performers the musical justice they deserve. Luckily, I recently got to hear the band live on stage to give them their well-deserved chance to set the musical record straight.

As I drove to our musical summit, I took in the scenery on my way to meet the band at Humphrey's Backstage Lounge on Shelter Island at a benefit gig called Rock for MS. I realized I hadn't attended a live rock 'n' roll concert and heard amped guitars, the pounding, penetrative sounds of a bass drum, and the back beat bass since I attended concerts at New York's Fillmore East in the 1960s. As I strolled up the front steps, Hugh greeted me, somehow picking me out of the folks ambling into the concert. What had given me away, I wondered? We'd never met before. The vulnerability of my

advanced years set in as I clutched my pen and writing pad. I had entered a musical time warp. I felt I was greeting a musical time traveler with many years of saloon singing that fed his rockabilly-blues heart and "been there" smile. Hugh was wearing a black cowboy shirt covered in roses and skulls. He just extended his hand, we shook, and Hugh said, "Let's talk!" Humphrey's Backstage Lounge could best be described as a fern bar/juke joint.

Hugh and the G Strings fit the juke joint vibe well. A Corona in hand and several empties still on the table, Hugh introduced me to the rest of the band members. They are Hugh Gaskins, who plays acoustic, electric, and slide guitar, does the vocals, and possesses his harmonica; Charles Gordon, who envelops his electric bass and whose tattoos reflect his rock 'n' roll image, having once played on the sound track for Kenneth Anger's *Lucifer Rising*; and Dan Renwick, an attorney who drives the band's heartbeat with his drum sticks like a lawyer prying open a defendant on the witness stand. Hugh held an old *Troubadour* in his hand, with one of the reviews I had written. I felt the air getting sucked out of the conversation as I was gearing up for a defensive remark to Hugh's negative critique of my

# HUGH GASKINS AND THE G STRING DADDIES

## San Diego's Best Unknown Rock/Blues, Neo Punk/Rockabilly Band

review, but what I got instead was a big thank you. Critics are really fickle, cautious people, and I laughed at myself, realizing how exposed I felt then for a seemingly long moment.

We got right into talking about music, the tools of our trade, strings, and the real reason the band was called the G String Daddies. Dan spilled the beans about their name. It wasn't about a Victoria's Secret fantasy; it was about Hugh's tendency to break the G string on his guitar! These guys wanted to talk, to get others to see their relevance to and reverence for the old stuff: blues, early rock, and rockabilly. The band's sound evolved from early 1950s country with rock roots to a quasi-neo punk sound, light years distant from just a grown up garage band. The original Hugh Gaskins Band was renamed the G String Daddies four years ago.

Hugh has been playing in San Diego since the early 1970s when he did solo acoustic gigs. He's a good old North Carolina boy, raised within the sounds of old southern churches where he got the musical spirit around the age of seven. He still gets excited when he tells of his joy at discovering the sounds of gospel as he recalls the Sunday church services and the music that created his childhood curiosity and wonderment.

Our conversation took us to the usual band tales of lost gigs, biker shows, bars, saloons, wood-shedding times, and the one constant – the band's ongoing need to keep music alive throughout their performances. These boys have a sense of history, a sense of the music they play, and a love of performing no matter the audience size or concert setting. As we discussed the local music scene, the band's stories sounded like *déjà vu* to me, especially when it came to their stories about inept bar owners, closed clubs, smoke-choked rooms, and patrons more into their beer than the music. Dan talked about finally getting a gig at a certain club only to discover that the club's ownership had changed overnight. We also talked

about the San Diego music scene over the last 30 years that saw some really talented musicians get stuck sometimes and fight hard musically to survive. We talked right into their sound check.

The band is still hungry to play and stays active for the sake of the music and their audience. The G String Daddies' music is the glue that holds this band together. Hugh writes the band's material, using his life, his friends, their relationships, and slice of life themes as the basis for their songs. Naturally, much of the original material was about girlfriends and a musician's worldly views. Humor, fantasy, sex, women – and always remaining current and sticking to your traditional Americana roots – are what Hugh Gaskins and the G String Daddies have conveyed throughout their musical journey.

Before the benefit started, I recalled why in the earlier CD reviews I'd written that Gaskins' music should be experienced with a warning to hang on to your bar stool, hold on to your church key, and fasten your seat belt as you drive home alone, having lost out on some midnight love. The G String Daddies' music was born in late-night noisy saloons, juke joints, and blues jams, and fathered by long gone Border Radio's mega-kilowatt antennas, along with the sounds of Wolfman Jack, 1950s Chicago blues, rockabilly, country western, T-Bone Walker, Arthur Crudup, Eddie Cochran, Johnny Cash, Ronnie Hawkins, John Lee Hooker, Howlin' Wolf, and countless girl-driven musical fantasies.

The sound check took 30 seconds and suddenly Hugh was singing full out, picking in his manic style on his Gibson J-200 guitar open-tuned to E with heavy-gauge

strings. Suddenly, as if fed by some invisible energy source, the band was in full gear. Charles, feet planted firmly with bass in hand, playing like a fine-tuned metronome; Dan, drum sticks pounding the drum kit as if he were driving home a legal challenge; and Hugh singing in tongues that seemed to soar over the band's solid foundation of rhythm, as if in a musical moment of stuttering possession. The performance was a solid, up front, tongue-in-cheek revisiting of what rock 'n' roll was invented for: namely, good times, macho boasting, chasing girls, driving your parents bonkers, and being a star in your own fantasy garage band. The songs ran the full time line of rock 'n' roll plus 1950s Johnny Cash, Marty Robbins with hints of Howlin' Wolf, Muddy Waters, Hugh's Little Walter harmonica style blowing, feasting on gutbucket blues, double entendres, teenage seductions, and a healthy, non-misogynistic fixation on women. In the middle of the performance, the band traveled through time, reviving the Sun Records studio sounds in 1950s Memphis to the 1970s heavy bass bottom sounds of Grand Funk Railroad, to the free form, on the edge, screech of punk, and then shifted gears back home to the country blues sound of Johnny Cash doing "Folsom Prison Blues." The G Strings are a one of a kind, no nonsense, one foot still in the garage band, let's shake the rafters trio of guys who have played every dive in town and partied hard, all while burning the candle at both ends and rocking and rolling the blues with their full boogie beat, totally driven by a need to keep it real.

([www.myspace.com/gstringdaddies](http://www.myspace.com/gstringdaddies))



Gaskins and the G String Daddies

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It was 1965 when Ken Swerilas had been in the Jackson, Mississippi, area looking for Bo Carter and remnants of the old Mississippi Sheiks country blues band. Well, Bo had recently died but his younger brother Sam Chatmon was still alive, living in Hollendale, Mississippi, and working as a night watchman at a local warehouse. Sam had been the string bass player and sometimes rhythm guitar man with the Sheiks and also had made some records for the old Bluebird label with his brother Lonnie as The Chatmon Brothers (with an "a" spelling, not the correct "o"). Lonnie was the musically trained violinist with the Mississippi Sheiks as Sam was the lyric writer. Bo (who went by Bo Carter on solo recordings) also played violin and lead guitar. Their next door neighbor Walter Vincent (aka Walter Jacobs) played guitar as well, as did older brother Edgar but not very often. On some sessions they were

joined by first cousins Joe and Charlie McCoy.

But back to Ken meeting up with Sam. It turned out that Sam had been contacted a year or two earlier and recorded a few songs for the Arhoolie label and he felt he could have done a better job. Ken invited him out to San Diego and arranged for him to play at the Heritage Coffee House in Mission Beach, which is where I came into the picture. Sam had been invited out to live with Ken and his wife, Phyllis, for six months of each year so he could try to get something going with music. He contacted me and I arranged to get Sam some bookings in the LA area through John Fahey, who also came down to San Diego and recorded Sam in Ken's living room. That became the first Sam Chatmon LP, which came out on the Blue Goose label.

Sam also appeared that same year at the San Diego State Folk Festival. I think it was the third in 1969 (he would appear every year through 1983).

In 1970 a short black man walked into my shop (then on the corner of Washington and India) looking for guitar strings. I didn't have any, but I talked to him about blues and he told me he had learned to play guitar from Blind Lemon Jefferson. The man was Thomas E. Shaw, born in Brennam, Texas (across the river from Navasota). Tom knew just about everyone on the Texas blues scene in the 1920s and early '30s. He played in guitar contests against Williard Ramblin' Thomas and J.T. "Funny Papa" Smith (both who beat him) as well as Mance Lipscomb (who he beat). He travelled as accompanist with singer Texas Alexander for a time. In 1934 he moved to San Diego and opened an "after-hours joint" as he called it and a place to eat and play music called the Little Harlem Chicken Shack on Imperial Avenue. He brought people like Roy Milton, Little Willie Littlefield, Little Son Jackson, and Little Miss Cornshucks down to San Diego to play. Tom did some playing there himself with his piano playing buddy Robert Jeffery who

# Recordially, Lou Curtiss

moved out to San Diego in the 1940s. Tom went on to lead a double life after he met me. By that time, along with playing the blues, Tom was also playing church music at Noah's Temple, an Apostolic faith church. He had learned a number of old gospel tunes from Blind Willie Johnson who played on the streets of Dallas (sometimes with Tom's father) when Tom was a boy. He'd sneak off to play blues with Bob Jeffery at a series of clandestine blues jams down in Otay (south of Chula Vista). Tom also began to appear at the San Diego State Folk Festivals in 1970. In 1971 he brought Robert Jeffery with him.

Robert Jeffery was from Oklahoma and a first cousin of blues great T Bone Walker. He played the piano and sang, but he also worked as a mechanic at Camp Pendleton. He came to the festival to play behind Tom Shaw but also met up with Sam Chatmon; it was Bob who sort of brought Sam into the local blues scene.

Next up was Bonnie Jefferson from west Arkansas who played an older kind of country blues finger-pick style. She had been part of the blues jams in Otay too, but her husband was a little suspicious of her playing music at a college, so it took a couple of years to get her out to a festival. I think her first festival was 1973. Meanwhile, during all this period, we had been doing concerts at Folk Arts Rare Records (at the second location at 3743 5th Ave. in Hillcrest) and Bonnie had been playing those. A guy named Frank Scott owned a record label called Advent and he had recorded a solo LP with Thomas Shaw (who had also done an LP for Blue Goose).

Frank decided to do an all San Diego blues LP titled *San Diego Blues Jam*. It featured Sam Chatmon, Thomas Shaw, Robert Jeffery, Bonnie Jefferson, and yet another San Diego Texas bluesman, Tom "Tomcat" Courtney from Waco, Texas (who's still on the scene), and his then partner, Memphis-born Henry Ford Thompson. Also on the LP was Bahamas' calypso and blues singer-guitarist Louis Major.

Sam Chatmon went on to record LPs for Flying Fish, Rounder, England's Flyright label, and a label in Italy. Thomas Shaw would go on to tour Europe and cut an LP for a Dutch label. The rest of the folks here stayed mostly around San Diego (Tomcat is still touring and recording for the Earwig label); Bonnie Jefferson has quit playing music; Sam, Bob, Tom Shaw, and Ford have all passed; and Louis Major has dropped from the scene. For a time during the 1970s country blues was really happening in San Diego with first generation blues personalities. That all culminated with the first two San Diego Blues Festivals in 1979 and 1980. But that's another story for another column.

Recordially,  
Lou Curtiss



Photo: Steve Covatta  
Lou Curtiss

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## LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES AT SUMMERGRASS

by Paul Hormick

The eighth annual Summergrass Festival returns to Vista's Antique Gas & Steam Engine Museum next month for three days of nonstop bluegrass. Along with the scheduled stage performances, the festival will feature impromptu jam sessions and players' circles in the parking lots and shady spots around the festival. As anyone who has ever attended a bluegrass festival knows, these informal ensembles are just as important and a part of the bluegrass festival experience as the scheduled stage performances.

If you're attending Summergrass and wish to take part in a jam session or two, but it's been a while since you've dusted off that mandolin, or if you just bought that banjo and have only been taking lessons for the last six months, or even if you're a regular at a weekly bluegrass jam but feel like you want to improve your level of playing, the festival will feature three opportunities for players of all ages and experience to learn more about bluegrass, hone their musical skills, and improve their chops for fiddlin' and pickin'.

California State flatpicking guitar champion Sid Lewis returns for a second year to Summergrass to offer what he calls his "Jamming 101 Workshop." Lewis has taught his workshop or performed at the California's Strawberry Music Festival, California Worldfest, and numerous other bluegrass festivals. He has also performed and taught at a number of colleges and universities. His one-hour workshops are free to all festival attendees and are designed to teach novice musicians the art of playing music with others. These are the skills of listening, accompanying, and soloing that a

musician needs to know to take part in a bluegrass jam or join a bluegrass band. Lewis says that he tries to create a fun atmosphere in which all are encouraged to participate. The workshop is open to all ages; all you have to do is show up with your instrument.

For the musicians who have successfully taken part in a few jam sessions or performed in a bluegrass band, what would be considered intermediate to advanced adult musicians, Summergrass features "Bluegrass Boot Camp," an intensive four-hour seminar that will take the pickers' playing to the next level. The seminar is scheduled for Friday, August 20, before the start of the three-day festival. Seminar attendees will then have the next three days to use their new-found skills at the Summergrass jam sessions.

Some of the top bluegrass musicians in the country will share their knowledge and expertise at the Bluegrass Boot Camp. For bluegrass enthusiasts Dennis Caplinger, who will be teaching banjo, needs no introduction. He has performed with Vince Gill, Nickle Creek, and dozens of other top musical stars. He is a member of one of Southern California's most renowned bluegrass bands, Bluegrass Etc. Caplinger's bandmate John Moore, who has a musical resume equal to that of Caplinger, will share his knowledge of bluegrass lead guitar.

Members of the John Reischman and the Jaybirds bluegrass band - Jim Nunally, John Reischman, and Trish Gagnon - will be taking time from their busy touring schedule to become drill instructors at the boot camp. Nunally will teach rhythm guitar, and Reischman will instruct students on mandolin. Even if you play the doghouse bass, you can learn more bluegrass from bassist Gagnon. To ensure that all students receive a



Photo: Dennis Andersen  
Kid's Camp performance

great deal of personal instruction, class sizes are limited to 10 students per class.

Those who wish to participate in the boot camp need to register in advance. The deadline is July 31; tuition is \$75, which includes instruction materials and lunch. Once registered, participants will receive detailed information on the boot camp's schedule and items that participants will need to bring to the camp.

Ensuring that there is a next generation of fiddlers and pickers, Kids' Camp is being featured again this year at Summergrass. Kids' Camp is for young people, ages six through 16. As with previous years, youngsters will be able to join in groups appropriate to their level of experience and ability to play their instruments. Just as with the boot camp, Kids' Camp class sizes are limited, so parents are encouraged to register their children early. Registration closes on July 31. The registration fee is \$60, which includes instructional materials and admission for the entire festival. For those who may need help with the fee, scholarships are available and can be applied for when registering.

Serving as faculty for the camp are San Diego-based Chris Stuart and Backcountry, with classes in fiddle, mandolin, guitar, banjo, and bass. Besides instruction on the instruments, Kids' Camp will teach the youngsters about stage presentation and performance. Camp concludes on Sunday with a 30-minute main stage performance by the children who took part in Kids' Camp.

For further information, visit: [www.summergrass.net/](http://www.summergrass.net/)

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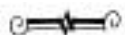
JULY 2010 SAN DIEGO TROUBADOUR  
front porch

# Splitting the Atom: Music at Lestat's West

by Tim Mudd  
photos by Dennis Andersen

SECOND IN A SERIES OF TWO

For over three decades, Louie Brazier has had a rich and extensive career in music from the front lines. From taking guitar lessons from a nun in second grade, to watching a local group rehearse; to fronting his own group Louie and the Cooties; to fixing guitars for Van Halen, touring the country with Heart, Richard Marx, Martika, and Nelson as a guitar tech; he's a foot soldier of sound, with the ears and experience that only a lifetime of on-the-job education could earn. These days he's better known for single-handedly operating Lestat's West. Located directly stage left of Lestat's coffeehouse (hence, the "West"), with the infinite support of John Husler, it's a venue he has built and fine-tuned and it continues to grow. Sound, booking, set design – Louie's the go-to guy for the venue... He's also notorious for being impossible to get in touch with, so I was stoked (apologies, California has rubbed off on me) that I had the opportunity to sit down with him for over an hour one Sunday afternoon to talk about his career and music at Lestat's.



Were you aware that Louie was a character in the 1985 Anne Rice novel *The Vampire Lestat*?

Yes, I've had some pretty weird emails. They made more sense once I knew the story.

Where did your love of sound come from?

I didn't grow up contemporarily like the kids who were educated on the Beatles. I was educated on artists like Elvis Presley and the Tijuana Brass. My mom also had an incredible 45 collection: Petula Clark, Michael Douglas from the Diamonds, Chuck Berry, Johnny Cash. I remember hearing "A Boy Named Sue" where Cash sings, "I'm the son of a bitch that named you Sue," and I'm thinking, "Oooo, he cussed!" [laughs]. From there, oddly, I jumped to the Osmonds; then came Aerosmith. I distinctly remember that – tenth grade, Hoover High, I'm in the graphic arts department and this guy brings over Aerosmith's *Rocks* album. It opened up and had all these live shots in it. It's just a great album. If you listen closely to the beginning of "Nobody's Fault," someone opened the studio door and you could hear it creak... Then the track starts. That's how intensely I was listening to the music. After that I totally jumped on the rock scene: Ted Nugent, Cheap Trick, the Kinks, Van Halen. I wasn't into the metal scene. It was all Top 40 – David Lee Roth, Beautiful Girls, Toes in the Sand – fun rock. So, I'm listening to my mom's old records, my new records... Subconsciously, I was starting to understand the reverbs, the snare sounds and all the different room sounds these different bands



The author performs at Lestat's Open Mic

had. Now that I'm educated on it, I realize that even back then I was fully exposing myself to music production by honing in on the engineering of those albums.

How did all of this go down at home?

My Dad and I were a lot different, but I have to thank him because he was the type of dad who, when I turned up my stereo, would just turn the TV up louder. He never told me to turn it down.

What came next?

Then came the Ramones. I remember listening and thinking, "These are three chords! I can play this!" It was 1979 when I put my own band together.

What's going on with your group Louie and the Cooties?

You never know, the original line-up may come together again some day but that group hasn't performed for a long time. I play as Louie and the Cooties every year for my birthday and fill out the line-up with newer local musicians, but it was always hard for me to perform because I was always worried about how it sounded out front.

So how did you get into live sound?

A friend of mine had a house on Marlborough and Adams in Kensington. The place had a huge round window that I could see his band rehearsing through. I just started hanging out and watching. Soon enough he started talking to me and invited me in. The band broke up, but he'd just bought a \$10,000 P.A. system, which he had to pay for somehow, so he started renting it out. That's where my career started. I was the kid he could feed a burrito to and I'd unload the P.A., haul it around, and plug it in. San Diego State [University] used to have frat parties with live bands every weekend back then. I was 15 or 16 at the time – too young for the college girls – so I was left at the soundboard. What else should I do? I started turning knobs and finding out what they did.

Uh-oh [laughs]

After a while, bands were asking for me. From running sound for the college bands, I was thrown into the bar scene. At that time it was a good living; bands could play Tuesday through Saturday, from 9pm-1am, and they'd pull \$400-\$500 a week, which was a lot more than it is today. The bar band music started to become Top 40 and suddenly I'm getting exposed to all the hits right off the bat. MTV launched, so then I was watching that during the day and listening to live bands in the evenings. I heard the music, the echoes, the room sounds... Suddenly I just started hearing. My ears were functioning. Today, if I'm in a room with music playing, while trying to have a conversation, my ears tend to wander. All of a sudden I'll say, "Wait, hang on a moment... what was that snare sound?!" [laughs].

So what happened to this golden era of the frat party/bar band scene?

DJs. Now just one person can come in with their bank of music; it's a lot less expensive, less hassle, and fewer people to worry about. They'd play anything people wanted to hear. From there, the DJs were getting bored just sitting around so "scratching" started coming in. It all develops together. In hindsight we've gone from live bands to DJs to mixing to rap and hip hop.

Interesting. Do you think this has affected the general listening of an average college-age kid?

Well, today it doesn't matter as much. Kids can be exposed to everything because of what's online. YouTube amazes me. I can go online, type in one of my favorite bands, and find live footage I've never seen before. I can't say this directs kids, but I think they're easily influenced by what they see and hear through the ever-expanding medi-

um. What concerns me is that they're hearing a heavily compressed format, which is far from high quality when compared to a stereophonic system. They may think they're hearing quality, but sometimes they'll play me their MP3s and I can hear the distortion on it. I can't say where people will be ten or 20 years from now because ears are being trained differently.

So you'd say that aural standards are decreasing?

To a point, yes.

Therefore, the standards of what we come to expect from a recording are also going down?

I know that engineers are working on improving the quality of compressed file formats, but I worry as to where we'll end up because the average kid who throws on some headphones and jumps on a skateboard will know nothing about what quality is until they learn to be exposed to it. It's possible they'll discover this but if their ears are trained badly, and they're not trained to hear quality, what will that eventually sound like? The Police were one of the first bands to go all digital in the beginning; when it first came out it sounded so sterile.

Everything sounded dry and right in your face; there was no room sound. My reaction was, "Ugh. Is this where we're going?!" [Sound] engineers heard it and now they're trying to find the realm to even it up with digital remastering. Hopefully, we'll get there but, until then, I'm still a true analog believer. That's why I run an analog board here.

It's not because an analog board is what you're comfortable with?

I've worked with digital boards. My concern with them is getting past certain limitations. If I've got one screen to work with and suddenly have a panic situation with a problem sound, I worry as to whether I can, I get to it quickly. With a big analog board, it's right in front of me. I feel those boards better, too. I can't explain it, but when I turn the knobs and feel the EQ changing... overall [analogs] where I hear the warmth of the instruments, the room, the sound. Digital is clean as hell, but it's sterile; there's no room ambiance. That's why studios are built in a certain way – to get the true acoustics of the instrument. The best way I can describe it is with a simple rim shot; if a drummer's playing the rim and there's no reverb from the room, you're left with a straight stick sound. That's where I go the extra effort in this room [Lestat's]. A musician who hasn't been exposed to these techniques will say, "Wow, the drums sound really warm!" when all it took was adding a touch of reverb. Horns are the same. Some of the old school guys will say, "No reverb!" but I've worked with Tower of Power and their major tool was reverb. When people are using horns in here, I'll always add a little.

Do you think there's a distinction between players and people, like yourself, who love sound?

There's definitely a distinction. A lot of kids come in to Lestat's saying they want to do sound, but a month later they want to be a star. Next thing you know, "Can you book my band?" "Can I get a time slot on open mic?" I haven't found anyone yet who just wants to do sound. I'm the guy behind the curtain, I'm not the star. My career's been much longer than a lot of the big artists I've worked for who've had their hits, made their money, come, and gone. My longevity is in doing something that is always needed.

I'd venture to say that the sound engineer is the most important member of a live band.

It's an art form, but there's a psychology to it, too. Everyday I'm working with artists who come from insanely different backgrounds; some like to have me behind the board, some hate that because they think I'm fiddling with the sound too much. My



Louie Brazier outside Lestat's



Lining up to see Gregory Page

job is to find out who these people are and make feel secure while delivering the best sound possible. There may be some aspects I don't like – an instrument that doesn't sound great or other physical limitations – but I'd rather they were comfortable on stage and end up with a live recording that's familiar to them. To me, I'll know it's not as great as it could be, but then I'm also a perfectionist. I've been in some of the best rooms in the world and know what instruments can ultimately sound like.

So you've got the techniques down and now you're working on the psychological aspects of live performance. Is it like you're becoming a musical therapist?

Right. I'll record some artists without telling them and when they find that I did record them, they're happy. Whereas others who know they're being recorded will be upset and frustrated by the end of the show because they made mistakes.

It sounds like a delicate balance.

I've never been here to hurt anyone's sound. I want to make it the best it can be; that's what I'm about here [at Lestat's]. I also want to help people; I want to teach. I come from a family of teachers. My mom and brother were teachers, my sister still is one. I want people to come in here, pick up on stuff, and become more creative because of it. One of the main reasons I bring in bigger national and international acts is to teach the aspiring local artists. I'll always tell them, "Come in and watch this person!" I want people to learn. In return, the bigger artists can also learn from our local talent. That's happened here on more than one occasion.

So there's a give and take from all sides?

I'm not Mr. Know-It-All, I'm still learning, too. I hear artists do things in here that make me go home and break out GarageBand [Apple's proprietary recording software] but, essentially, with everything else – like developing the club – that becomes a matter of time for me. I admire people like Gregory Page who just live for music because he can complete an idea. He gets an idea and follows it all the way through to the end. I wish I could do that. But that brings me back to understanding my part: he's the star and I'm the guy behind the curtain.

With regard to your "Mr. Know-It-All" comment, the tee shirt you're wearing says, "I'm wrong 96% of the time – who cares about the other 4%?"

[laughs] That's actually my humor for the artists who perform here. Hopefully they'll

get it and realize I don't take myself so seriously.

As well as providing a professional set-up, you record shows here.

I do my best to get good live recordings here and I want artists to be able to leave and do something with them. The Viper Room [in Los Angeles] sells theirs for \$50. Hotel Cafe [also in Los Angeles] sell theirs for \$100. One of those venues also sells ProTracks [wherein each channel is separated to enable further mixing after the show] for \$500. I offer artists recordings from this room for \$20! I'm also planning to offer ProTracks in the future, which I'll keep to \$50. Otherwise, how can these musicians afford it?!

Really, it's a pretty great deal.

If you get something good out of here, you're going to want to come back.

How would you like local artists to approach playing a show here?

There's a blessing and a curse when it comes to the reputation we've built at Lestat's West: people want to play here but they don't research it. They don't realize that we're about good sound. All they hear is, "Oh, you gotta play Lestat's!" So I'll come in here and start mic'ing instruments and they'll say, "Oh, you don't need to mic the drums or guitars; they'll be plenty loud enough." I have a problem with that. At first, they'll fight me, but at the end of the night they'll hear the CD and they'll get it. That's why I try to record the sound checks. It allows me to play back how they sound, and their attitudes will turn around. Occasionally, I'll get my favorite comment, which is, "Well, this is our sound," and at that point all I can say is, "Well, I tried."

If you've never performed at Lestat's before, where's a good place to start?

Open mic is a good start. Some acts jump out; if you see me approach a performer with my card when they get off stage, they got me, they're ready. Then there are those who are developing and are not quite ready; that's not meant to be insulting, it's just that I've been doing this a long time and have a pretty good gut feeling. I can never say an act won't make it. I've seen an artist one year and I'm thinking, "What is this all about?!" Then a year later, they've completely turned it around. That's why you never say never in the music industry. The way I'm approached by the artist is also very

continued on next page



Lestat's, continued from page 6

important; being nice is always appreciated. I've also noticed that some of the better people don't hound me as much. There's a mutual understanding there, I know they're busy; they know I'm busy; we'll work it out.

**For the more mercenary, how does a typical gig pay at Lestat's?**

All the artists here make 80% of the door. Usually that's evenly split between them unless one of the performers had a major draw. Everyone's doing well at that point, even lesser artists are making more than usual. I like to say, "We're pioneering the phrase 'artist-friendly venue,'" to which people usually laugh and say, "Well, you're the only one." This saddens me because if other venues are only worried about putting a buck in their pockets and not in the artists', how will the artists survive? The scene will die and live music will disappear completely. You've got to put money in artists' pockets. The industry isn't developing bands anymore like they did before.

**They're having to do it themselves.**

And that's why YouTube is so useful now. We have a chance to make a name for this venue that could go down in history. Java Joe's discovered Jewel; I want to go past that and be a place where big artists want to play and come back to. Then, of course, my usual goal is to have these major acts perform alongside our local artists.

**What's your reaction from the bigger artists who perform here?**

The key to our audience at Lestat's is that they listen. More often than not, this simple courtesy shocks the bigger artists.

**I can't think of any similarly sized venues of this ilk in town at the moment.**

I don't want to be the only place; I like competition with other venues. I'd rather we all do well. I'm just working on the quality of this venue for the artist. I get frustrated when artists play other shows, close in both date and location at venues that don't put anywhere near as much energy into the quality of the listening experience, and then come to me saying they built a bigger show there. Ultimately these artists are going to dilute their audience. But that's also their right and choosing.

**What would you suggest to artists who'd like to perform more effectively in San Diego?**

Geographically, San Diego County is a big market. I know the smart local artists, because they'll do four shows a month: the city area, North County, East County, and South Bay. That's effective. If they choose to play Lestat's as their city-area show, that's a big compliment.

**How about a few words about the venue for our readers who aren't performers?**

"We have incredible acts in here - Sarah Lee Guthrie was a good example, but there were fewer than 20 people in the audience... Woody Guthrie's granddaughter? The guy who goes back to the beginnings of folk music? Here?! We've got a recording of her little daughter singing 'Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star!' C'mon! We're getting a great reputation out there now, not just in the states, but worldwide. Artists are hearing that they've got to play here; they do and then they want to come back regularly. We can't take what we have here for granted. If this venue were in the Midwest, it'd be packed every night. So, pay attention, now! Come to Lestat's! The thing I can say most about the folks at the Troubadour is that they always get their paper out to music lovers. If you're a music lover, this is the place to come.

**So we should just check the Lestat's schedule in the back pages of the Troubadour?**

Okay, I know I don't always get the schedule in on time and part of that is my fault. There you go, I said it, but the other part of that is because things do change on account of this being a fluctuating business. I promise you, I'm doing my best to keep you all informed.

**Are there any myths or gossip about you or the venue that you'd like to take this public opportunity to debunk?**

We're not just an acoustic venue, please. We do it all. You can underline that.

**Are there any harbored desires outside of your current gig that the future may hold for you?**

My only goal is to make a name for this venue. I'm not trying to say we could be CBGBs, but I'd be happy knowing that Lestat's West was the foundation of something.

photo and story by John Philip Wyllie

**A**t an early age Adrienne Nims began absorbing and imbedding the sounds she heard around her like a giant sponge. Her gift for music was recognized, cultivated, and expanded upon from the first piano lesson she received while still in kindergarten through her mastery of the 30-odd woodwind instruments that capture most of her attention today. Born in Colorado, but raised in the Northeast, Sims experienced and performed a wide variety of music as a developing musician, taking a little bit from each musical foray and adding it to her ever-expanding bag of tricks.

"I dove into the world of jazz and was playing in big bands in Massachusetts by the time I was in the eighth grade. Some of these were local groups with elderly guys that were in their '60s and '70s. I was the only youngster in these groups. It was a really exciting way to experience jazz. That is where I learned to improvise."

Nims learned even more during her stint with the New England Conservatory Ensemble.

"They had composers and conductors from the Middle East, Africa, and all over the world, so at a very young age I got to play a lot of very exciting music. That's where my interest and exploration of world music took off. From there, I began collecting many unique instruments from all over the world."

She made her way to the West Coast in 1995 and toured for a time with the Larry Mitchell Band, playing saxophones and flutes. She currently performs as a solo artist, with her dynamic contemporary jazz ensemble Spirit Wind and with the Celtic/jazz group Raggle Taggle. She can be heard in one form or another all over San Diego County and beyond. In fact, if you have visited the zoo or your local library in the last few years, you may have already heard her. She has been performing there regularly for years.

My first introduction to this incredibly versatile and talented artist occurred in April while she was sharing the stage with percussionist Warren Bryant and pianist Jim Lair. They, along with guitarist Jimmy Patton (who was absent on this day), are known collectively as Spirit Wind. It was a Sunday afternoon concert at the Point Loma Public Library and for the small crowd that was wise enough to take advantage of what was a delightful, free afternoon concert, it was a very memorable experience. Playing a combination of originals and covers the individual members of Spirit Wind combined their talents to lift my spirits and set my toes to tapping.

Knowing very little about Nims beforehand, I was initially surprised by the large number of saxophones and flutes that she had resting on the music stands before her. There must have been at least a dozen. I became impressed when she went down the line and played each one as if it were her

## ADRIENNE NIMS A Musical Chameleon

primary instrument. She bobbed and weaved while filling the air with her sweet sounds as Bryant pounded out the rhythms on his conga drums and Lair tickled the ivories and traded licks with Nims. Drawing from a wide range of material, the trio imprinted their own unique sound on pieces as different as Beethoven's "Für Elise" and Dylan's "The Times They Are a-Changin'."

From a versatility standpoint, what multi-instrument virtuoso Dennis Caplinger is to bluegrass, Nims is to jazz.

When connected last month in a phone interview, she said, "When somebody attends one of my jazz performances they may think that it is the only thing that I do, but it's not. I give classical concerts and world music concerts as well. Jazz is a high priority for me, so that is why there is a lot of focus there, but I am classically trained and I play quite a few classical venues. In fact, I have one coming up on August 8 at Greene Music on Miramar Road. I don't really have a strong sense of boundaries. I am an all-around musician. I've been playing classical music my whole life and I have been playing jazz for most of it too. I have always wanted to explore it all. I started out on piano and learned to read music at a very early age."

With the fundamentals she learned on the piano Nims set out to become a one-woman orchestra or, at the very least, her own woodwind section. She has actually gone beyond that. She spices up the mix with a number of rarely heard exotic flutes from faraway places like Africa, Asia, and South America, playing them all with passion and skill.

That skill is especially demonstrated with her "Flutation" Concerts.

"I bring my collection of 16 or more flutes from all over the world, present them, and play compositions that I have done. It's a really different thing from the jazz or the classical music shows, but I integrate aspects of jazz and classical into them. A lot of times people find flutes they have never seen exciting."

Concerts involving Nims can be as different from each other as they would be from one artist to the next.

"When people come to see me in a performance they know they are coming to see and experience a passionate multi-instrumentalist who plays with all of her being," Nims said.

That can be as a soloist or as part of a jazz, classical, or world music ensemble. With Spirit Wind, they can expect an interesting and exciting repertoire ranging from elegant melodies to intense, edgy jazz with intricate and surprising arrangements featuring sax, flutes, keyboards, guitar, percus-



Adrienne Nims

sion, and occasional vocals.

Nims has been thrilled to open for such artists as Al DiMeola, Fourplay, and Spyro Gyra, all of whom influenced her; she was honored to be asked by Tony Gwynn to play at his Hall of Fame Induction Gala. While Nims can do it all, she also loves to collaborate. The regular collaboration she does with her Spirit Wind bandmates is something she treasures.

"This is where my passion lives! Music is a universal language and it is very important for me to share music that will have a positive influence on people. I attempt to offer a musical banquet for body and soul. Although I am equally at home playing other music genres such as classical and world music, I currently place my greatest focus and emphasis on performing and recording as a jazz artist with Spirit Wind. It's inspiring and rewarding to play the music I love with these great people who are also great musicians."

Just as most mothers would be hard pressed to name their favorite child, Nims does not play favorites with her ever-expanding family of instruments.

"I would hate for anybody to make me choose. The reason I play them all is because I love all the instruments that I play. I don't want to choose. [On any given day] when you see a performance, it is pretty obvious as to which ones I am gravitating toward."

The important thing for local music lovers is that Nims continues to play. We will leave the instrument up to her.

In addition to the aforementioned Green Music concert on August 8, Nims will appear August 1 at the Vista Library and in an ongoing series with the Del Mar Foundation's First Thursday Program. For more detailed information visit [www.AdrienneNims.com](http://www.AdrienneNims.com)

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JULY 2010 SAN DIEGO TROUBADOUR

## parlor showcase

sandiegotroubadour.com

by Mike Alvarez  
photos by Steve Covault

*"Yes there are two paths you can go by,  
but in the long run,  
There's still time to change the road  
you're on"*

## THESE FAMILIAR LYRICS

to a rock 'n' roll classic have been heard so many times that most people probably don't even contemplate their meaning when they're singing along with the melody. Yet it wouldn't be surprising if these words were somewhere in the back of Jeff Berkley's mind when he got the notion to form a new band. This well-regarded artist started playing in alternative rock bands before finding his niche in the acoustic music scene. Keying off such influences as Woody Guthrie and Bob Dylan, he soon found himself alongside such notables as Jackson Browne, David Crosby, the Indigo Girls, and Bruce Cockburn. A skilled djembe player as well as an accomplished guitarist and singer, he fit very easily into the rootsy sound of these performers. His attentive ears eagerly soaked up these sounds, and before long he was devoting his energies to writing his own original songs. Turns out he was very good at this because validation came in 1999 when he won the Kerrville New Folk Songwriter award for his song "High School Town." Shortly thereafter he began performing with Berkley Hart, an acoustic duo he formed with partner Calman Hart. It wasn't long before they gained wide recognition and acclaim among folk and Americana audiences. Together, these two gentlemen continue to create a body of work that includes numerous recordings and countless live performances across the country.

Yet the other path still beckoned. Berkley relates that "Berkley Hart music is all about acoustic guitars. I had songs that needed an electric sound." He half-jokingly confesses that "the good thing about the folk world is that it doesn't take all year to do all the gigs." This being the case, it gave him the freedom to explore this fork in the musical road. Sending out the call for musicians, he was gratified to receive answers from several notable locals. Marcia Claire, already known for her rocking bass lines and melodic vocals with the Coyote Problem, Cindy Lee Berryhill, and Barbara Nesbitt, stepped up and immediately fit right in. In fact, it was she who named the band. She laughs, "I came up with the name Citizen Band while I was coaching softball." A highly in-demand bassist, she has performed with many major players in the local scene. Mike Spurgat, lead guitarist from the blues rock jam band Deadline Friday as well as Nesbitt's band, also answered the call. While still active with his other groups, he notes that Citizen Band is "the busiest band I'm in." Thus far, for Spurgat, it's an ideal situation. "I don't feel as much pressure to write. I get great joy out of playing Jeff's music. It's nice to not have to be the focal songwriter. I like being able to add something to someone else's music." Also from the Deadline Friday/Barbara Nesbitt lineup comes drummer Bill Coomes, although he recalls it being more of a gradual process. He pointedly looks at Berkley, playfully declaring, "I turned you down the first time!" Berkley confirms this, recollecting that Coomes spent a

bit of time hanging out at Citizen Band shows before eventually coming aboard. However, once this lineup was in place they all agree that "everything clicked." Claire earnestly states that "if I weren't in a band with these guys I'd hang out with them anyway. I don't think I ever laugh as much as when I'm around them." The band once included pedal steel guitar player John McBride, but he has since moved out of the area. Although he is welcome to sit in whenever he's in town, the group is now moving forward as a quartet.

Each band member brings something to the table that makes Citizen Band unique in its genre. While Berkley's acoustic folk roots are at the core of their sound, Claire points to rock bassists like Jack Bruce and John McVie as having been hugely influential. She also lists jazz artists Victor Wooten and Marcus Miller as inspirations. And, indeed, her solid grooves are tastefully punctuated with flashes of virtuosity. Spurgat's melodic lead guitar style evolved after years of listening to players like Government Mule's Warren Haynes, Dire Straits' Mark Knopfler, and John Scofield. Most important, he knows exactly when a song calls for him to cut loose as well as when to lay back. When asked which drummers inspire him, Coomes' answer is direct and simple: Led Zeppelin's John Bonham. It's not hard to hear the late rock legend's trademark heavy beat in his approach, although he does make it known that he listened to a lot of country music growing up. Berkley says all of these elements make Citizen Band's sound an interesting one. "Rock 'n' roll people will change a song that you were just playing on an acoustic guitar." While he is modest about his own guitar playing ability, he is a versatile rhythm player who can play a mean lead when called for. He will occasionally trade guitar leads with Spurgat on stage, displaying his own dexterity and musical sensibility. His singing voice is engaging and warm, which at times can be evocative of great singers like Glen Frey, Tom Petty, and even Michael Stipe.

Speaking of singing, every member of the band is a great vocalist in their own right. Berkley calls it "a happenstance. Everybody can sing really well." Although he is clearly the frontman, each person in the band gets opportunities to step up to the microphone. Recently, Spurgat turned in an impressive vocal performance when he sang Ryan Adams' "Goodnight Rose," bringing something akin to Neil Young's simple and plaintive quality to the mix. Coomes closed out the show by unleashing a very credible Robert Plant-like wail from behind the drum kit when the band launched into the Led Zeppelin classic "Rock and Roll." The others will often take such opportunities to either concentrate on their instrumental performance or create an extra sonic layer with their backing vocals. Claire cites groups like the Eagles and the Little River Band as being important teachers of vocal harmony. As in all aspects of their music, the vocal arrangements are meticulous throughout. Berkley confirms this by saying, "There are two or three different textures that we can get with the various combinations of our voices." One of the most appealing examples of this occurs on their song "For Lillian," which brings to mind Buckingham-



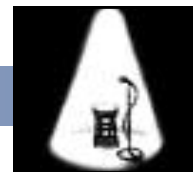
Citizen Band at the San Diego IndieFest

Nicks-era Fleetwood Mac.

Although they have played dates throughout the state and occasionally outside of it, they haven't yet mounted a full tour. Nevertheless, Citizen Band has done a good number of live shows in the area's best venues. Their calendar is filled with the names of just about every local establishment that hosts live music: The Belly Up, Winston's, Dublin Square, Brick by Brick, Anthology, and Humphrey's Backstage Lounge, to name just a few. They have done events like Earth Day, IndieFest, the Adams Avenue Street Fair, and the Kick Gas Festival. Not ones to miss an

opportunity to play, they have also taken the stage at great party joints like Pacific Beach's 710 Beach Club and Cheers in Ramona where their brand of country rock is just what the doctor ordered. Even in a raucous nightclub setting, a significant number of revelers will pause to take note of what a great band they are being treated to. Recently, Citizen Band was given the chance to open for the Black Crowes at Humphrey's outdoor stage. Berkley has nothing but good things to say about the venue's management and staff. "Whenever they have a band that's touring without a warm-up act they'll call us and offer us an





Jeff Berkley



Marcia Claire



Mike Spurgat



Bill Coomes

opportunity to play. Their staff was very sweet to us as was the Black Crowes' road crew. Things got kind of touchy backstage because they brought a lot of vintage gear with them. You had to be careful not to knock over a valuable old guitar or amplifier. But they gave us a good spot for us to set up our stuff." While they didn't get to mingle much with the Black Crowes themselves – the headliners showed up for a quick sound check and then left the stage – every member of Citizen Band agrees that this was a milestone gig. The crowd was very receptive, the amenities were outstanding, and the venue is one of the best in town. What more could a band ask for?

Berkley confesses that "the local market for our kind of music is vibrant but small. What we'd like to do is build a circle of fans around Texas and the Southwest." They made a very significant step toward this goal in March of this year when they performed at the South by Southwest Festival in Austin, Texas. Not only did they enjoy performing, they also took the time to soak up the annual event's vibe. Perhaps most memorable was an after-gig party that was attended by members of the bands Cracker, Stonehoney, and the Mother Truckers. "When we got there, there were guitars and a toy drum kit in the living room. This drum kit was like something you'd get at Toys R Us, and it turned out to be a real 'party in a box.' When our turn came up it was about 4 a.m. It was so surreal, with all the alcohol and our eyes at half mast playing the AC/DC song 'Whole Lotta Rosie' for a bunch of country rockers." Claire smiles knowingly, nodding as she adds, "Our clocks were completely on rock 'n' roll time! None of us was going to be up before two the next afternoon." Berkley wistfully recalls, "It was tough to come home after that. We felt so accepted by people who make our kind of music on a national level." Their next foray out of the area will be in July when they are booked to play the Las Vegas Hard Rock Café on the Strip.

A Citizen Band show is the real deal. It's quite evident that the good-natured humor and musical craftsmanship that Berkley perfected in Berkley Hart has crossed over to this group intact. They are all very much at ease onstage, playfully bantering with the crowd as well as with each other. They want you to have a good time, so they start having one themselves and invite you to join in. Berkley dutifully exhorts the crowd to buy drinks at regular intervals.

Yet when it's time to play, they are all strictly business. The entire band is well-rehearsed but their performance retains enough looseness to let the music bubble over with genuine fun and emotion. They make this look effortless because they put in a lot of hard work and discipline into their regular Thursday evening practice sessions. The chemistry they have while performing actually does exist offstage. Berkley says they are "a real band, not just a bunch of people playing together." At rehearsals their conversations are peppered with movie quotes. They count *Ghostbusters*, *The Big Lebowski*, *Caddyshack*, *Conan the Barbarian*, *Braveheart*, and *This Is Spinal Tap* among their favorites. They also proudly admit to knowing "at least the first 20 seconds of

*"We work it until we get it right. Nobody ever says 'that's good enough.'"*

— Marcia Claire

every rock song." While there is a lot of laughter and joking, they are all quite serious about their craft. Claire says, "The musicianship in this band is so good. We take our time on arrangements. We work it until we get it right. Nobody ever says 'that's good enough.' Some people might think that country rock doesn't have to be dialed in, but that's just not true." Berkley agrees by saying, "Even when you're jamming, you have to practice in order to know when to come in." The payoff for their work ethic happens onstage. Whether playing an original song or a cover tune, Citizen Band injects its own personality, style, and energy into the music, effectively making every song their own. Concert goers will have many great opportunities to catch their live show in the coming months. They are scheduled to play every last Wednesday of the month from July through October at The Stage in downtown's Gaslamp District.

Their first CD, the amusingly titled *Breaker, Breaker My Heart*, is an energetic and eclectic collection of songs that demonstrates the band's ability to synthesize a multitude of influences into their own singular

statement. Every now and then one can hear melodies, licks, or arrangements that bring to mind greats like Crosby Stills & Nash, the Byrds, the Traveling Wilburys, and R.E.M. The influence of artists like the Eagles, Lynyrd Skynyrd, and the Beatles also surfaces from time to time. It's a well-crafted album of highly listenable songs that goes light on the studio polish. Much of the energy and grit of their live shows is captured in the recording. Yet Berkley hopes to top it and has definite thoughts on how to go about doing it. "When Bill and Mike joined the band we went right into the studio. The band never had a chance to find its character. In the months that followed, our characters started to leak into the songs. Hopefully we'll start writing songs together instead of just showing up with the ones we've already got." The unflappable Spurgat is in complete agreement, stating, "That's the direction we want to go." Citing Aerosmith's "Dream On" as an example, Berkley continues, "We may just go in and see what happens in the studio. The greatest records ever made happened when bands just showed up in the morning, wrote songs, then recorded them after dinner. You know the excitement you feel when you just wrote a song? You want to play it over and over again.

If you capture that on record, other people will feel it too." In addition to their original music they enjoy playing cover songs live and in the studio. Not surprisingly, their criteria in

selecting them is very eclectic. Berkley says that such songs are chosen in order to "please ourselves. I like doing B-side covers. 'Stop Draggin' My Heart Around' instead of 'Free Fallin.' 'Whole Lotta Rosie' instead of 'You Shook Me All Night Long.' Sometimes I'll find an old folk or bluegrass song that could be set to electric guitar. It's a great way to introduce people to the poetry of a beautiful tune." And that's really the ultimate goal of any good band whose number one priority is its artistic vision. By staying true to their art and working their tails off, Citizen Band have mapped out their route and hit the road with the hammer down. They've got a long journey ahead that will surely include some very interesting detours, but their destination is clear and they know how to get there. It's not often that a band's drummer gets the last word in, but Coomes very succinctly summed up the good feelings and optimism felt by everyone: "I like this band because of where we're gonna be a year from now. We're getting to the point where we're about to raise the bar!"

For info: [www.citizenbandmusic.com](http://www.citizenbandmusic.com)

*The Citizen Band plays live on July 12 at Humphrey's Backstage Lounge, 7pm, and on July 18 at noon, San Dieguito Park in Del Mar.*



Citizen Band on a recent gig at Cheers



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# BLUEGRASS CORNER

by Dwight Worden

## SUMMER BLUEGRASS FESTIVALS

The summer festival season is upon us. I hope some of you were able to attend the Huck Finn Jubilee in Victorville held over the weekend of June 18 to 20, which featured some of the greatest currently performing bands in bluegrass music: Huck Finn featured perennial crowd favorite Rhonda Vincent and the Rage along with blazing hot fiddle player Michael Cleveland and Flamekeeper (who you can also see at the upcoming Summergrass Festival in Vista), top-notch singing band Illrd Tyme Out, featuring Russell Moore, Wade Mitchell, and hot new mandolin talent Sierra Hull, among others.

Perhaps you went to the California Bluegrass Association's annual **Father's Day Festival** held at Grass Valley, California, instead of Huck Finn? These two great festivals are held over the same weekend, but each has a very different ambience. Huck Finn is in the Victorville high desert area at a large regional park with flat grassy areas, fishing in adjoining water areas and scattered cottonwoods for shade trees to combat the typically hot desert weather. Grass Valley, in contrast, is held on the western slope of the Sierra Nevada Mountains amidst towering pines and adjacent to the quaint old mining town of Grass Valley. Both festivals featured great performing bands and excellent opportunities for jamming.

This year the CBA Grass Valley Festival featured the James King Band, Rhonda Vincent and the Rage, the Infamous Stringdusters, the Bluegrass Patriots, Michael Cleveland and Flamekeeper, the Dirk Powell Band, and more. As you can see there is overlap in the bands at these two festivals as many of these bands perform one day at Huck Finn and the next day at Grass Valley, or vice versa. We are indeed lucky to have these two premier festivals in our state and if you missed them this year, give some thought to planning a visit next year.



Michael Cleveland & Flamekeeper

In our own backyard the Summergrass Festival is fast approaching. Held over the weekend of August 20-22 at the Antique Gas and Steam Engine Museum in Vista, Summergrass, now entering its eighth year, has developed into one great bluegrass experience. This year Summergrass features John Reischman and the Jay Birds, Michael Cleveland and Flamekeeper, Bluegrass Etc., and Chris Stuart and Backcountry. Also being presented are local bands the Virtual Strangers, Lonesome Otis, the Taildragers, the Bluegrass Brethren, Faultline, and the Anderson Family. For more information visit the Summergrass website at [www.summergrass.net](http://www.summergrass.net).

We also have two new one-day festivals planned for later this summer, as well as the annual Julian Festival. New this year is the Santee Bluegrass Festival to be held September 25, 5-9pm, at Santee's beautiful new Town Center Community Park. This is a fundraiser for Santee Parks, featuring a number of wine and gourmet food booths; it will also present local bluegrass bands Gone Tomorrow and the Shirthouse Band. For tickets and info visit [www.ci.santee.ca.us/index.aspx?page=74](http://www.ci.santee.ca.us/index.aspx?page=74). Word is that Bonita is also planning a one-



day festival on September 25 in conjunction with a parade. Stay tuned for more on that later.

September 18 and 19 brings us the 40th annual Julian Banjo and Fiddle Contest and Bluegrass Festival. Held at Frank Lane Park in Julian, this festival has a long and storied history. This year the festival features the Bayside and Dixie Stompers, Heloise Love, Sara Petite and the Sugar Daddies, Judy Taylor and the Wild Oats Band, This Just In, Chandler Station, Scott Gates and Nathan Mcuen, and Blue Creek. In addition, the festival will once again feature the traditional banjo and fiddle contest. For more information visit [www.julianbluegrass-festival.com](http://www.julianbluegrass-festival.com).

So, you should find plenty of festival action through the rest of the summer to feed your bluegrass habit. We hope you will get out and enjoy some of this great bluegrass music.

## BLUEGRASS DAY AT THE FAIR

Saturday, June 12, saw a great Bluegrass Day at the Del Mar Fair sponsored by the San Diego Bluegrass Society and the San Diego County Fair. The action included performances by several top local bands: the Shirthouse Band, Driftwood, the Chris Clarke Band, Blue Creek, Prairie Sky, Gone Tomorrow, the Full Deck, and featured Chris Stuart and Backcountry as the closing headliner. The action took place on the beautiful Paddock stage, the sound system was great, and the music was extraordinary. And, hey, you can't beat listening to great bluegrass while munching on fried Twinkies or bacon deep fried in chocolate (yes, the fair has both, and more).

In addition to these performances an Old Time Fiddling demonstration was presented as well as an ever-popular band scramble. Taking first place in the band scramble was Rabbit in the Grass, comprised of Eileen Apfel on accordion, Kim Donaldson on fiddle, Orion Johanning on banjo, Jeff Johanning on guitar, Aaron Rosenfeld on bass, John Deckard on specialty instruments, and Mike McCalm on mandolin. Taking second place were the Paddock Pickers with Blank Sticker taking third out of five bands.

Awards were also given to the top performers in the band scramble in each instrument category, with John Deckard taking the honors for best male vocalist and Eileen Apfel taking the blue ribbon for best female vocalist. Jeff Johanning took the prize for best guitar, and Corky Shelton took the gold for best banjo. Kathleen Green took the win on fiddle, with Gary Pay winning for best mandolin, while "Tad" took the honors for best bass. John Deckard also took the win for best specialty instrument for his jaw harp and harmonica performance.

If you have never tried a band scramble, they are great fun. Check the SDBS website to learn where and when you can get involved in band scrambles and other bluegrass activities. [www.socalbluegrass.org](http://www.socalbluegrass.org). I hope to see you there!

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by Sven-Erik Seaholm

## IN TUNE WITH THE UNIVERSE

It was one of the coolest, oddest things I've ever witnessed at a music show:

It's Java Joe's at Café Libertalia in Hillcrest on a recent Friday night. The first artist to perform this evening is Podunk Nowhere, the acoustic duo featuring vocalist Heather Janiga and guitarist/vocalist/husband Johnny Janiga. As diners, drinkers, shoppers, and revelers bustle along 5th Avenue on their way to whatever activities their evening holds, anticipation begins to waft through the room, mingling with the sweet aroma of coffee and pastries.

"Hang on folks, we're just about to start and I'm almost finished tuning..." says Johnny, punctuating his announcement with a gratifying rock god strum of his open-C tuned acoustic: "Brrrrrrraaaaaaang!"

That last strum added a little something more to the already thick atmosphere: Magic. I really don't know how else to more accurately describe it. The tuning of his guitar was SO perfect that it was actually stunning. Just the simple, single strum of his guitar instantly hushed the world around us.

"Weird," I thought. In fact, I wasn't quite sure if anyone else noticed the same thing I did, or whether they were just settling down for the show. I chalked it up to a pre-show cocktail and took my seat.

As Heather sang and swayed, eyes closed and hands gracefully gesturing like soaring sparrows, Johnny laid down a backbone of muscular riffs and rhythms that kept their musical fire stoked. The crowd responded with enthusiastic but rapt attention. Hoots and cheers peppered the spaces with love and encouragement...

But at the end of each and every song: Perfect Silence.

The only thing heard was the beatific ringing of the last chord for what seemed like eternity. A flawless sustain like no other I had ever witnessed and, apparently, neither had the audience. This continued to happen during their entire set.

Now, I'm a seasoned professional. Tuning is VERY high on my list of things that must be continually checked during the recording process and without too much exaggeration. One could say that onstage and off, I've probably checked the tuning of guitars hundreds of thousands of times by now (which is not to say I haven't played out of tune a few thousand times, either!). Looking around at the crowd each time (and we're talking a full 20 seconds of just listening to that

last chord fading away), I wondered if they actually recognized what it was about the sound that was so striking.

Regardless, at the conclusion of their performance I bounded onto the stage and excitedly pelted Johnny with a flurry of questions. Chief among them:

"Dude, your guitar sounded so amazingly in-tuned. What did you use to tune?"

"Aw, brother, I got an app for that," he says with a Cheshire-sized grin.

He holds out his iPhone and shows me the interface for his tuner application. "This is the best damn tuner I've ever used, man. Check it out."

I did just that.



Sven-Erik Seaholm

The PolyTune interface lights up with an arc of LEDs; the green ones mean the corresponding string is in tune. If the red LEDs below it light up, it's flat and the ones above indicate sharp.

Tune each string until all LEDs are green.

You are now in tune. Rock out! How simple is that?

PolyTune is fully chromatic, so alternate tunings like Johnny's are a natural fit. The previously described tuning method utilizes PolyTune's "Stream" mode, wherein all of the strings are identified within the polyphonic audio signal.

For those who would prefer to tune each string separately (or monophonically), simply strike a single string at a time. The tuner enters "Needle" mode. This is the more conventional approach many of us are used to, where the needle points to where the note lies, relative to the center pitch.

In practice, I have found the best results from tuning each string separately, then strumming all of them to "finish" the overall tuning in "Stream" mode.

Incredible, intuitive, easy, and consistent are the most descriptive four words I can muster to describe PolyTune for iPhone. The only problem I encountered was when I went to tune my guitar during a recent performance and remembered that I had left my iPhone backstage!

For those of you who would love to bring this level of tuning satisfaction into their lives, but don't want an iPhone... DO NOT DESPAIR!

There is a hardware version of the PolyTune available (\$149 list, \$99 street). It comes in an attractive and compact white steel housing, with true bypass and even a DC out for powering other pedals in your setup.

In the words of my friend and colleague Jeff Berkley, "We tune because we care." Apparently, T.C. Electronic cares one hell of a lot.

*Sven-Erik Seaholm is an award-winning independent record producer ([kaspro.com](http://kaspro.com)), performer, and recording artist ([svensongs.com](http://svensongs.com)). Contact him for recording, mixing, mastering, or audio consultation: 619-287-1955*



PolyTune from T.C. Electronic (tcelectronic.com) (\$9.99 at the App Store) is by far the best tuner application on the market, and it may just be the best tuner for acoustic instruments, period.

Certainly the best 10 dollars I've ever spent on an app, and with results that eclipse those of 80-100+ dollar models, I just can't say enough about it.

But I'll try...

Having shown this to any guitarist that will listen within the last couple of weeks, I can tell you that it has a very intuitive interface that takes little or no time to understand and derive excellent results from upon the very first use:

Place the iPhone in front of your guitar or amp.

Without touching the strings with your fretting hand, perform a single strum of the guitar's strings, letting them all ring "open."

Life is short.  
Choose strings.

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# Hosing Down

by José Sinatra



The piercingly incisive José Sinatra

## THE CULTURE OF COOL

Eight years ago in this column I expressed my dismay at the growing power of a single word that (as I saw it) threatened human evolution. I gallantly offered "scroat" and even "hose" as potential substitutes but they were rejected by the public, forcing a humiliating retreat by my Troops of Truth.

No, it was much more than a retreat. They were turncoats, each and every one of them. It was nothing less than an enforced betrayal, an awe-inspiring display of the power that three different letters of our alphabet can attain when they are properly manipulated, seasoned and scented, and presented on the public's polished plate. I've covered during these eight years as the word itself seems to have become most of America's reason to live, and I've come to accept that I'm a bit like the refugees inside the house in *Night of the Living Dead*, fighting a futile battle for survival.

Although I seem to be alone, I do still cling to the very pure hope that someone, sometime in the future might read these words and realize that in 2010 there was a person who recognized the horror and did all he could to fight against it. To that someone — that doomed, valiant crusader still in possession of thoughts of his own — heed well these three truest words ever written by man or mutant:

I love you.

During the past month, the headline for the review of a major film in the *L.A. Times* exclaimed that the movie was saved by "cool stars." Another major story in the same paper lauded the latest hand-held internet device for its prodigious acceptance of "cool apps."

On the recent Father's Day, a lovely local co-anchor on the news announced to her compatriot that "... it's actually the 100th official Father's Day!" To which her middle-aged top-billed news reader looked slyly at the camera (with the requisite raised eyebrow) and assured the home viewer of the importance of that fact with one of the finest readings of the word "cool!" I have ever heard.

Today's science page in *The San Diego Union-Tribune* continues its information-for-the-trivia-addicted segment with its venerable "Cool Numbers" section. Four pages later, "Dear Abby" relates the important information "... that it is 'cool' to wear a helmet... friends thought it looked great, and that made it 'cool' to wear it."

We have, my former friends, become a nation whose primary goal is to Be Cool. It has become accepted that anyone who regularly speaks the word is automatically cool himself.

One of the most popular local singer-songwriters used the word an average of seven times during the introduction to each of his songs at a recent concert at Java Joe's. The most frequently heard assessment of his show during the afterward meet-and-greet among the ecstatic audience was "cool."

"That new song was really cool," coos the sweat/glow-moistened babe as her eyes beg him for a feel.

"Cool. Thanks," he replies.

If there had been any doubt before, it is now settled. Both artist and fan are now certifiably cool.

During these past eight years, I have sat removed yet sadly intent at the funerals of many fine friends who lived long and meaningful lives — all of them victims of the might and greed of one word. Who but myself, indeed, continues to mourn the fallen Good, Delightful, Great, Boss, Tuff, Groovy, Splendid, Paramount, and Fab? Who but so endangered an example of humanity still sheds an honest tear for Gorgeous, Fine, Endearing, Nice, Great, Terrific?

Who chokes even now upon his own Hose and Scroat?

In this increasingly frightening, cyber-datatinarobotic mind warp of a life, an activity is not pursued unless it's cool. Music will be ignored unless it's cool. Babies will be adopted only if they are cool, and those doing the adopting become even more cool for doing something most cool people aren't yet cool enough to do, but that's cool, too. All the cool people are constantly connected, revising and solidifying the current requisites of Cool through their cellphones and Facebook pages and mirrors and they're getting mighty annoyed at the so-not-cool rascals who (rumor has it) consider them herded, brainwashed zombies.

Today "cool" remains the most effective single word in advertising besides "free." When it is uttered, it provokes in me more instant emotional responses than any other word I've ever encountered. It makes me laugh, it makes me sad, angry, near-suicidal, fully nauseous. Sort of like the relationship I never had with Lindsay Lohan.

You've won, you hearty zombies of that Power you were powerless to resist. Oh, yes, you seem so darned cool as you continue to smash against the boarded doors and windows behind which I cower in fear of the final pain that you are ever nearer to inflicting on my frenzied body and soul. Forgive me for never having sown a cellphone. Forgive me for never having access to your cool internet. Forgive me for never having allowed myself the opportunity to be c--.

- X22 to base. Report subject terminated at 16:20 hours
- Cool. Demeanor report?
- Was informed subject resisted, reportedly fought, screamed, cried like a girl.
- Cool.



# RADIO DAZE



by Jim McInnes

## GETTING MY CURMUDGE ON, PART TWO

When we rolled up to the Costco checkout counter this afternoon, the clerk commented on the items in our basket, "Hmmm, one box of saltines, one bottle of Erath Pinot Noir, one box of fudge bars, two loaves of bread, a *dual flush toilet*, and a Blu-Ray DVD player. Very interesting!" "We know how to have a good time," I replied.

When we got home, we parked the "porcelain god" in our office and went into our entertainment room to install the DVD player. I figured that would be a cakewalk compared to installing a toilet.

Wrong!

It wasn't that many years ago when all you had to do to set up a component system was plug the cassette player into the cassette in/out on the amplifier, and do the same for the turntable. There were no remotes! If you wanted to make it louder, you walked over and turned up the volume control. If you wanted to play a cassette, you walked over and selected "cassette" on the amplifier. Simple. (Of course, the entire system sat on 4x6 boards held up by cinder blocks!)

These days, though, you need an engineering degree to figure this sh\*t out.

When we connected the Blu-Ray player to the TV, it made a chiming sound and a menu popped up, written entirely in Korean. The accompanying manual told us to press the arrow keys on the remote to select our language of choice. I pressed the arrows and nothing happened. All I could do was turn it off and on.

I pulled the DVD player out of our console and checked the connectors on the back: HDMI, Optical Audio, LAN, Digital/Analog, etc. WTF?? I connected the analog audio out of the DVD into the controller of our Bose home theatre sound system. When I turned the speakers on, I heard a hip-hop concert being broadcast on the Palladia channel. Oops! Now I have to remember to turn off the cable box if I want to watch a DVD? Jeez, it's always something.

Maybe I should connect the optical audio cable to the DVD instead of to the cable box! Nothing. How about plugging it into the LAN port? Doesn't fit. Wrong cable.

Out of frustration, I unplugged every damned cable and started from scratch.

Now, when I use my cell phone, the DVD player turns on and displays a message in *Russian*, and when I put a disc into the machine, the toilet in the master bathroom overflows.

Good thing we bought that new toilet!

## Glory Reunion Update

The Glory reunion at Anthology on May 26 was a resounding success. All four bands were in top form, powered by a terrific sound and video system. For me, the Farmers stole the show when they brought out Nathan Raney to play guitar alongside his father, Jerry, on a scorching cover of the Yardbirds classic "For Your Love."

A grand time was had by all, and the California Music Project raised much-needed funds to help keep music education in our public schools.



by Peter Bolland

## ENDLESS BECOMING

The San Diego County Fair comes around every June and wraps up right after the 4th of July. An annual summer ritual, the fair brings over a million people together on a prime piece of real estate in a coastal estuary just north of Del Mar, California. Warm sun and cool ocean breezes play tag while fairgoers part ways with their hard-earned cash in exchange for wildly inappropriate and oddly compelling food items like chocolate covered bacon and deep-fried butter.

The fair, like the top car on a Ferris wheel, comes around every year without fail and we file in knowing that everything will be exactly as it was the year before — the same sheep in a row, the same magic mop demonstrations, the same greybeards in Hawaiian shirts playing geezer rock — and yet we keep coming back year after year. There's something comforting, even beautiful about the symmetry of it all. Going to the fair is like stepping into a time machine, a very particular time machine — not one that delivers you to the past or the future but one that delivers you to a realm completely outside of linear time. The fair is an eternal, changeless moment that we fall into summer after summer. We don't go to the fair to return to our childhood. We go to the fair to stop the wheel of time entirely and experience, for a while, the wide open freedom of timelessness. "Time," Plato wrote, "is a moving image of eternity." And I think I saw him on the midway in a Harley-Davidson bandana handing out cotton candy to kids, beaming with joy, the kids and Plato.

I have a friend who never goes to the fair. "It's just the same old crap year after year," he says.

"That's why I like it," I say.

Not going to the fair because it's the same old crap year after year is like saying *why go to the beach, I've seen waves breaking before, or why go to the forest, you've seen one tree, you've seen 'em all.*

"Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in," wrote Thoreau. "I drink at it; but while I drink, I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it is. Its thin current slides away, but eternity remains."

Beneath time's shimmering surface there lies a depth that goes down and down and down. We long to swim in those waters, but the only way to them is through the surface. Only by letting go of the rope swing and plunging through to the depths will we know the full measure of the beauty of our own ephemeral lives.

The fair, like any hash mark on the wheel of time, is a sticky-sweet reminder of the simple pleasures, the bounty of the land and the chance to come together as a community to celebrate each other. And besides, it's fun. "The secret of life," sang James Taylor, "is enjoying the passage of time."

There is an innate human tendency to celebrate and honor the recurring moments in the annual cycle of time. Lent, Yom Kippur, Ramadan, and Groundhog Day are just a few examples. As with the fair, we don't celebrate these events year after year in order to return to the past. We celebrate them in order to move into a deeper consciousness of the fundamental unreality of linear time. We celebrate them in order to liberate ourselves from the tyranny of time. "The distinction between past, present, and future," said Einstein, "is only a stubbornly persistent illusion." The apparent relentless march of time, which we normally allow to tyrannize and torment us, is temporarily lifted when we enter into the joyful celebration of these annually recurring events.

PHILOSOPHY, ART, CULTURE, & MUSIC

# STAGES

Birthdays, anniversaries, and the like restore us to our original purity as beings of infinite awareness and infinite value. That sort of thing gets washed away by the torrent of time.

The same pattern, the same apparent, but ultimately illusory dichotomy between motion and stillness occurs in music. A good song has to accomplish two contradictory aims — it must be fresh and familiar. It must be rooted in the known while breaking new ground. If new music does not somehow fall within the parameters of familiar tonal and rhythmic spectrums while also delighting and surprising us with something novel and unique, we turn away. From Bach, Handel, and Haydn, Mozart learned where the boundaries were, and then he pushed them. Carl Perkins, Little Richard, and Bob Dylan showed the Beatles the road to their own genius, and they never looked back. Everyone who's ever written a song or played in a cover band knows that if you really want to move an audience you must take them on a journey, but you must also always bring them home, home to the heart of their own lives. People want to be moved. But when it's over they want to sleep in their own beds.

Life itself turns on these same illimitable laws. All forms arise and fade but the totality remains unchanged. Each year we grow older. Our faces continue to change right before our eyes. But the I within, the silent witness, knows nothing of the passage of time. Past, present, and future are all continually occurring in this eternal moment. The mind cannot understand this. The mind is just a squirrel strapped to a rocket, convinced that it's steering. Poor squirrel.

I turned 52 last month and am, on my better days, deeply grateful to be alive. I've been to too many funerals of friends my age and younger whose lives were cut short by hard living, heart defects, or the vagaries of cancer. I'm also grateful to my parents for many things, foremost among them good genes. Bollands tend to stick around awhile. When I talk to my 88-year-old father I feel the full width and breadth of his life — the maddening struggles, the heroic choices, the simple beauties — and I know that none of us has forever. And yet we do. These transient forms around us — that song on the radio, these vibrant bodies, the warmth of the hand we hold as we walk through the midway of our lives — these will all slip from our grasp. But behind the shimmering veil there is a consistency far more real than any passing image. Developing the ears to hear it, the eyes to see it, and the heart to feel it is the lifework of any lover of wisdom. Only then, in the timelessness of this eternal moment, are we freed from the wrenching sorrow of the world with its endless cycles of birth and death. The fair, like a good song, can only last so long. Like a long, slow ride on the Ferris wheel, life winds down. Below you the midway lights shine on clusters of teenagers careening through the barkers and the colored balloons. The sun is sinking into the sea. It's time to go home. It's time. But if you let it, time opens a door through which the flood waters of eternity pour, holding us and nourishing us like amniotic fluid in the wombs of our endless becoming.

Peter Bolland is a professor at Southwestern College where he teaches eastern and western philosophy, ethics, world religions, and mythology. After work he is a poet, singer-songwriter, and author. He has a band called the Coyote Problem. He also leads an occasional satsang at the Un ity Center and knows his way around a kitchen. You can write to him at peterbolland@cox.net



**JULY 2010 SAN DIEGO TROUBADOUR**  
**highway's song**



# Mary Gauthier Brings a Soulful Intimacy to Country Songwriting

by Terry Roland

Bob Dylan once said, "There's a lot of ways a record gets under your skin." In the case of Louisiana singer-songwriter Mary Gauthier, it comes when it first gets under her skin. Her latest, *The Foundling*, is a unique country album for even the most of daring singer-songwriters; a cycle of songs that are told from the perspective of an orphan. The orphan is Mary Gauthier. The emotional center of the album is the songwriter's search for her birth mother, documented lyrically in the song "March 11, 1962." If songwriting is three chords and the truth, Mary's new album has the truth running deeper than most; it's an act of intimacy between the songwriter and her audience. Had this been a debut record, it may have been a hard pill to swallow. For those who know her work know the intimacy of her past work and the passionate dynamics of her song craft as a natural chapter in her work. Songs like "Long Way to Fall" and "I Drink" allow the listener to peer into the musical window of one artist's core being.

At 29, Mary's life changed. She found sobriety. Within a few years, she found songwriting or, based on our conversation, songwriting found her. With an easy feeling in her voice that invites comfort while her lyrics confront many of life's most difficult times, Mary's songs are crafted to be personal and universal. Today, at 48, she has created a body of work that has discovered the same gold once mined by the Nashville singer-songwriter movement of the '60s when Kristofferson and Mickey Newbury first arrived in town.

*The Foundling* is an album of stunning honesty from one of America's great living singer-songwriters. Songs like "Mama Here, Mama Gone" and "Blood Is Blood" echo the stripped-down emotion displayed on John Lennon's *Plastic Ono* album. But, this one takes us a step further – to the revelation of finding the paradox in knowing that once we discover we're all orphans, we no longer need to feel lonely. She has found a kind of peace that has allowed her writing to grow to a place where these songs were able to be written. Without her earlier work that explored alcoholism, broken relationships, and redemption, this record could never have been made. But, here she stares wide-eyed into her brokenness and comes out the other side able to sing, "I still believe in love," on the song "Orphan King."

In the following interview, Mary comes across, like her songs, with a sense of grace,

kindness, and an ever-curious spirit about her life's journey. The most touching thing I experienced with her is her sense of gratitude at being a sober songwriter. In the song, "March 11, 1962," which documents her phone conversation with her birth mother, she says, "Don't ask me why I'm calling/I don't know why." Isn't that the way it is when our intuition takes us off the beaten path to places we may not want to go but somehow need to? But, the conversation ends with these lines, "I just had to thank you once before this life went by/that's why I called/Goodbye." If the old cliché is true, it's not the destination but the journey; Mary Gauthier's journey is strewn with a treasury of songs and stories, which can help us all if we dare follow her path. As she says, it's her way of being of service through song.

**San Diego Troubadour:** Let's talk about your new record.

**Mary Gauthier:** *The Foundling?* Oh, that was a hard one! It took a lot of energy, but it was a relief to be given the time to write it, to try to make sense of my story through song. It really helped me understand myself.

**SDT:** It also touches a universal nerve inside of all of us.

**MG:** That's the magic of it. You go deep enough inside yourself, to the most personal places, and you find something universal.

**SDT:** This album represents something I've rarely heard in country music: a personal and intimate album. I don't think anyone's ever recorded anything like this in country music. It reminds me of Hank Williams', "Luke the Drifter," only more personal. It's cathartic like John Lennon's *Plastic Ono* album.

**MG:** Thank you. You know it's the theme of being an adopted child. One of my favorite songwriters, Harlan Howard, who wrote "Fall to Pieces" for Patsy Cline, lived in 21 foster homes. He said that he picked out those parents before, so he could have the songs that wanted to be written. He really wanted to be the "dean of songwriters," and he was. He was a very wise man. He showed me it's about believing in your self. He walked through life with an orphan feeling. But, he came up with these great songs that wouldn't have been written otherwise. If you write about it, why not tell a beautiful story to believe in?

**SDT:** There's a wonderful poem at the beginning of the CD booklet that basically states we're all orphans.

**MG:** That's from a beautiful, well-written book called *Wanderer's All*, by a writer

named Gregory Armstrong. I think it's available online. That's basically what he says. He believes it to be a part of the human condition. All you end up with is the journey. That's really all there is. You put yourself in the position of being vulnerable and it changes you. I went into this story asking hard questions and I risked the hard answers. But, I came out feeling lighter. You know, both lite and light. I was spiritually not as heavy. And I could see more clearly. I had to be willing to go into the story.

**SDT:** Did you feel a kind of release from something?

**MG:** Yes. It was like I went and stood in a dark room and didn't run from it. I faced it. You how they say you peel the onion back layers down to the core inside. At the core is darkness. To stand in it is very powerful. I'm going into my 20th year of sobriety; it's so hard to face it and not run like hell. It's terrifying. You know, nobody's gonna catch you.

**SDT:** You've been quite open about your sobriety and alcoholism. The song "I Drink" speaks to this.

**MG:** I drink because it's my nature, it's not a choice. If I ever had a choice to not drink, I lost it a long time ago. Without my writing, I'd be lost. My writing comes from my sobriety. If I was still drinking, I wouldn't be able to do my music and I want to remain a songwriter. You know, you hit that "dark night of the soul" and in the process of writing I illuminate it and I'm staying sober. The challenge of it is all consuming – to be able to get to what I want to say, get past that free fall and stay sober.

**SDT:** Do you believe in a higher power and how does that influence your writing?

**MG:** Yes! Creativity is a form of spirituality that comes through me and not from me. My journey is trying to find it. I'm like a lightning rod walking around looking for the lightning. I find it when I find where I can be of service. I'm just answering the call. I don't always know the purpose. But, being of service through songs is what keeps me sober and sane. It gives me a higher purpose. You know I really believe this. When there's too much ego driving me, I don't go there. I have to listen. I don't always know what the fall-out will be. Like *The Foundling*. I know this album will affect people in ways I may never know. After the shows, I sell my own CDs and it's a chance to connect with the audience. I can see it in their eyes when it's there. Something is illuminated in them. It's huge. For me, it's sobriety.

**SDT:** So, you really see your art as a form of service to others.



Mary Gauthier

**MG:** Yes. That's the gold. You can't find it in the music industry, which is so ego driven. Every artist has a choice between the ego or to be the channel. For either choice there's a huge price to pay. I choose to be the channel.

**SDT:** It's interesting that you became a songwriter after your sobriety kicked in.

**MG:** Yes. It's a paradox. I stopped drinking at 29. That's the same age Hank Williams was when he died. I'm kind of inverted Hank. You know, Kerouac backwards in the body of a woman. I'm so grateful I get to do this. It's really a gift, a blessing. There's such joy in being an artist and a teacher. When I listen to my students, I hear their inspiration, I feel like I'm a young midwife. I'm just helping the process along.

**SDT:** Is your own writing like this? Being a midwife?

**MG:** Yes. It took three years to write *The Foundling*. I had a lot of false starts. I didn't know where the record needed to go. I'd get inspired and then take the inspiration in my writing room and write my ass off. It's hard work. But when something good happens, it's like an ecstatic release. I may spend hundreds of hours and I don't feel like a writer. I stay with it and then comes. George Eliot said, "Genius is nothing more than great patience."

**SDT:** How do you teach this?

**MG:** I teach workshops. I try to help with the craft of songwriting. On songwriting weekends, I try to give them a tool kit. You know, like perspective, whose voice is telling the story, how to move the story along, and emphasizing certain words and how to use instinct with intentionality. It took me about ten years to become more of

songwriter/journeyman. Before that, things seemed to happen accidentally. I'm learning how to make things happen, how to work with commitment; when to work and when to wait. It comes to a point where you don't have a choice. It just transcends you. You have to outwait it. Then, it surrenders to you. I know it sounds nuts. It's like the seeds are germinating and the plant is pushing up out of the ground.

**SDT:** Interesting. Tell me more about intentionality.

**MG:** Intentionality comes out because of high standards. I heard someone say the song isn't done until I get the chills. You give yourself the chills. I just keep working until I get there. My writing has been what's allowed me to continue, not my singing voice. I'm not a real singer. When I played at the Grand Ole Opry, they said I was a "vocal stylist." It's like being a character actor.

**SDT:** So you'll continue on the road?

**MG:** Yes. It's the never-ending-tour. That will keep going. We've been in Australia, Europe twice, then to California, and up the Pacific Coast.

**SDT:** Well, I look forward to seeing you in San Diego.

See Mary Gauthier in concert on Friday, July 9, 7:30pm, at AMSD Concerts in Normal Heights. Tickets: (619) 303-8176.



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## Zapf Dingbats

by Lou Curtiss

There are a lot of groups picking up on string jazz these days and there are a lot of groups with really weird names. This group combines the best of both worlds. With a bunch of hot acoustic pickers combined with a little computer experience with fonts (them's words, folks), it all adds up to the Zapf Dingbats.

With David Bandrowski's guitar and vocals, Chris Clarke's mandolin and vocals, Dane Terry's harmonica and vocals, and Doug Walker on the string bass, the group is complete.

Now to the songs. The album kicks off with Bob Willis' "My Window Faces the South" and goes right into all-day preachin' and dinner on the ground with "Blood of the Lamb," staying "South" with the great Benny Moten signature tune, and down to New Orleans with Jelly Roll Morton's "I Thought I Heard Buddy Bolden Say." Next up is another old gospel tune "I Want to Die Easy," followed by Charlie McCoy and Sam Chatmon's version of the "Cow Cow Blues," which they called "Jackson Stomp" (some good hot mandolin here). I remember "Soldier Soldier" by the New Lost City Ramblers but it was originally recorded by Bradley Kincaid. I know "Utah Moon" goes back a ways (it was recorded by someone in the 1920s but it was revived in the '60s sometime and I don't know where these guys got it, but it's worth a revival). Now, "Who Threw the Whiskey in the Well" was originally done by Doc Wheeler's Sunset Orchestra in 1942 and Lucky Millinder's Orchestra revived it in 1945. "Bogalusa Strut" is a New Orleans jazz piece first recorded by Sam Morgan's Jazz Band in 1927 and the CD winds up with "At the Jazz Band Ball," originally recorded by the Original Dixie Land Jazz Band although it's older than that and lots of folks did it later too.

And that winds up the program. Lots of good picking here. Some unusual arrangements of some not-often-heard songs. I wish there were more info about the songs and where they came from (you'll just have to tear out this review or at least the part about the songs and tape it to your jewel box). I recommend that you buy this CD. In the first place there is lots of good music; in the second place, these are hard working local musicians trying real hard to keep neat old songs alive and they do need the money, I'm sure.

For further info, visit the Zapf Dingbats' website: [www.zapfdingbat.com](http://www.zapfdingbat.com) or c/o any of Chris Clarke's websites. Or go see them at one of their local gigs and buy this CD. You won't be sorry.

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## Justin James Perfect Sometimes

by Frank Kocher

San Diegan Justin James has a fascinating story. As a 20-year-old surfer on a quest for the perfect wave in Venezuela several years ago, the singer-songwriter was bitten by a shark and nearly bled to death in a scary encounter that left him with over 200 stitches, a year of recuperation, and some new life priorities. He started playing guitar and writing music; he still surfs, but his main thing is now writing and singing songs. He has released an EP and three CDs since 2002, and his latest offering is *Perfect Sometimes*.

The new disc benefits from smart arrangements and production by Andrew Williams, who works the boards for Old 97 and other country artists. The writing credits vary, but a team of James, Ben Greet, and Al Howard are behind most of the tracks.

Things get started with the title tune, which has a trop feel, helped by several Hawaiian guest musicians and steel drums. The immediate feeling of the sound is light and comfortable, and James has the right voice for this kind of thing. He may sound like John Mayer, but the material here is different, and the vocal similarity doesn't detract from the music. After stumbling on a string-soaked ballad, "Beautiful Crime," "Stay Close to Me" moves closer to straight pop, with a bouncy rhythm and clever melody. "Sometimes" tells a story of a couple in turmoil: "It's so hard to love/Sometimes." On this one, soft verses build up to churning choruses, with restrained but effective use of strings and background vocals. James again mines the ballad lode with "Deeper Waters," and the result is a highlight. The tune rides a memorable chorus hook, framed nicely by an ace Williams arrangement that uses country cues until the listener can't forget it. "You Don't Know Me" falls apart when a bridge that tries for funkiness feels is tacked on, showing that the songwriters have their limits; the disc works best when they don't try to stretch them. Things are much better on "Moonlight," a sleeper surprise with a stripped-down acoustic sound and a Latin feel. Classical guitar accents set a perfect mood for the message of romance in the night.

The music on *Perfect Sometimes* seems like the kind that is heard in snippets during TV shows about young people, and it is. James has had good luck placing music on a number of television shows.

"Running with the Wind" and the closer "On My Way" have more of a groove than some of the earlier ballads, and both show the smooth sound that seems to be James' strong suit – upbeat lyrics that aren't deep or emotional, set to a tune that is just catchy enough and doesn't quite rock-but doesn't plod either.

*Perfect Sometimes* is refreshing pop. Justin James' sound goes beyond the beach music vibe to a broad pallet of pop and succeeds for the most part. It's a fun listen.



## Larry Zeiger Meetchu in Machu Picchu

by Frank Kocher

For 33 years, Larry Zeiger worked as an educator at Point Loma High School and made his mark before his 2007 retirement as its volunteer musical theatre producer/director. During that time he wrote and oversaw the production of 31 original musicals, gaining national recognition for the school's Gotta Sing, Gotta Dance company. Zeiger's high school productions have covered many pop culture topics, with recent plays being at least loosely based on an infamous Barstow beauty pageant, exotic coffee, and Wynona Ryder's shoplifting bust.

Zeiger retired from teaching, but not from music. *Meetchu in Machu Picchu* is a two-disc collection of tunes that Zeiger assembled from 2007 to 2009, with help from enough singers and musicians to start a theatre company. In fact, though this project isn't itself a musical with the customary connecting plotline, characters, and theme, it is musical theatre music all the way. Zeiger wrote the 21 songs with some help from Joy Woodward and a few others. Prominent instrumentalists are keyboardist/singer Anthony Smith (who also did the arrangements), trumpet/flugelhorn player Gilbert Castellanos, and local jazz guitar star Peter Sprague.

The first disc kicks off with the title tune, with Broadway veteran Jason Michael Snow handling the vocals as the listener gets a taste of Zeiger's style. Sure, it's all a bit over the top, with a Latin beat and horn riffs blending with Snow's high stage tenor and glitzy affectations to soar above the drums, but why not? "Tango Heat," which follows, is a smooth and jazzy tune that uses Castellanos' flugelhorn to great effect and brings things back to earth. "Dream of SAKS" teams Smith with Mara Cooper for a clear highlight, a disco-flavored spoof of consumer culture – many people have seen the name of the department store; Zeiger is the guy who wrote the funny song about it. Cooper's moans on the funk closeout of the tune are hysterical. Snow is back on "Pinga Panga Ponga," which works as disc two's opener, the bluesy sax/keyboard tune is the kind of song that is designed for a full-stage treatment with dancers and lighting; props to Zeiger for a clever rap segment with an impersonated George W Bush. "Missile Man" swings as Smith salaciously sings "Baby, you're missile man is missing you bad" then scat sings over hot keyboards.

Other highlights include "Lost in the Dark," "The River We Knew So Well," "Windsong," and "Conozco Mi Cafe." The latter is one of three tracks on disc two from an earlier Zeiger musical. Like with any musical, or album, there are songs that don't work as well as others. Of the 12 singers, Smith, Julie Sullivan, and Phil Johnson make an impression – Old Globe vet Johnson in particular, on such songs as "Lost in the Dark" and "Conozco Mi Cafe."

*Meetchu in Machu Picchu* offers a generous glimpse of Larry Zeiger's talent, which has enabled him to write a prolific amount of original music over his career. At its heart, it's all about putting on a show.



## Soup The Great Awakening

by Frank Kocher

Soup hails from Oceanside, a trio of roots-rockers whose sound is a sort of throwback to earlier decades when the San Francisco psychedelic sound and jam bands ruled. On their debut disc, *The Great Awakening*, singer Jonathan Fleig writes most of the music. Eli Slover and Colin Wicker also sing on the songs, which blend acoustic and electric guitars, harmonies, and nice touches that create a '60s feel. There is a definite debt to earlier bands in the genre like the Grateful Dead and Phish, and the disc has a vibe that makes the listener want to burn incense while playing it.

"5th of May" follows an instrumental opener; the goofy lyrics, country-rock melody, and Jerry Garcia-inspired guitar fills make for a fitting introduction to the feel-good hippie vibe that permeates the music here. The lead vocalist (uncredited throughout, as are the guitars) has a bluesy howl that goes well with the protest song "Enemy," which has a counterculture message, "You've got me down on my knees/But I'm not your enemy." The title cut has an acid-rock chord progression, acid-rock lyrics, and morphs into a long, frenzied coda that throws in snippets of Chambers Brothers, the riff from "Going Down," lots of fuzz guitar, and choruses like "Love/love/love/God is Love." Feedback ushers in "Cope," and the mood is sustained as more screeching, overdriven lead guitar wails; this one evokes a flashing amoeba light show, like the old Country Joe and the Fish albums. Nobody take the brown acid, man.

Not all of the tunes here hit the mark, as some of the mid-tempo shuffles ("Postcard," "You Will Bear") fade quickly. There is a Doors feel to "Disguise," which wraps two guitar licks around snare drum shots for a hook that resolve as lyrics professing love take over, until an echo-freakout ending.

The disc was produced by Fleig and the band in Wichita, Kansas, with Wayne Van Zee handling the drums. The mix is muddy in spots, burying the vocals here, blasting them too loud there. The overall feel works, since it sounds a lot like late '60s vinyl.

The disc saves its best for the end. Slover's "Dandyion Feathers" is a highlight, a soft country folk tune with the kind of smooth harmonies and compelling melody to lift it above the other material here. "The End (Celebration)" relates how love is going to ultimately triumph over hate and war, to an instrumental rave-up. The end (of this disc) comes with an extended jam featuring duel lead guitars.

Soup has established its sound with *The Great Awakening*, and it is familiar – love, peace, happiness, and guitars. The disc is enjoyable, and there is a long tradition of bands to suggest that they may succeed with an approach like this.



## Steam Powered Giraffe Album One

by Frank Kocher

Visitors to San Diego's Balboa Park may see a musical group playing there that is distinctly different – mime artists made up and dressed like retro robots, playing and singing disarming music that brings to mind sounds of the past as varied as the Mills Brothers, 10cc, and Queen. Steam Powered Giraffe performs as a quartet, the steampunk outfits part of a performance concept that brings vaudeville, sci fi, guitars, and three-part harmony vocals together. The quirky result is captured on *Album One*, an always interesting disc that features all four regular members: Jon Sprague, Christopher Bennett, David Bennett, and Erin Burke, along with Michael Reed. All five write songs on the 11-track disc, as do others. This is a concept album that stays with themes consistent with a subtitle *The Original Singing Musical Robots*, but for the most part the concept doesn't get in the way of the music.

The disc has a homemade feel, but is well recorded; the Giraffe members do all of the singing and playing, and it is first rate.

After the robot story concept is laid out on "Clockwork Vaudeville," sort of a band mission statement, then comes "Sound of Tomorrow." The lead singing and general feel of this tune recall more than a bit of Freddie Mercury's theatrical presence, as the tune rocks with conviction. "On Top of the Universe" continues the same trend, adding a Mills vibe – some of the background vocals sound like a barbershop quartet. It's a very catchy combo, and the song is a highlight. One minor quibble: both tunes, and others on the disc, are sprinkled with background chatter and effects that seem to be a carryover from the live act; these are distracting to stretches of this tune in particular.

Burke is lead vocalist on "I Am Not Alone," which has a very different texture than anything else here, a soft, simple folk ballad. The harmonies lift this one a notch; it is different and it works. The big production number "Brass Goggles" has a brass band march chorus and a small army of vocals weaving in and out; the lyrics are back to the concept, like metal men and a Colonel Walter's adventures with elephants. "Out in the Rain" piles on Beatlesque echo and harmonies, as *Abbey Road* immediately comes to mind, especially "Sun King" With "Electricity Is in my Soul," some of the influences heard earlier come together, as well as Giraffe's own sound, a kind of pop hybrid of deep harmonies, keyboards, tradeoff lead vocals, and hooks. This tune stands out, the best mix of concept and a stand-alone song here, it could be robots singing.

*Album One* is unusual, a disc that works as music and, to an extent, as performance art. Steam Powered Giraffe stays in character throughout, and the music is surprising and memorable.





# SAM HINTON FOLK FESTIVAL IN POWAY



Photo: Steve Covault

Allen Singer introduces Tanya Rose Stage



Photo: Steve Covault

Walt Richards & Paul Strong



Photo: Steve Covault

Jason Weiss



Photo: Steve Covault

Greg Gross



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Charles Johnson



Photo: Steve Covault

Chuck Fitzgerald



Photo: Steve Covault

Patty Hall & Greg Campbell



Photo: Steve Covault

Ken Graydon



Photo: Steve Covault

Roger Taylor



Photo: Steve Covault

Sweet Joyce Ann



Photo: Steve Covault

Mark Jackson

# AROUND TOWN



Graham Nash @ MOPA show w/ Robbie Taylor



Photo: Dennis Andersen

Carlos Olmeda @ Oasis



Photo: Dennis Andersen

Sara Watkins @ Moonlight Theatre



Photo: Liz Abbott

Joe Rathburn & Dan Conner



Photo: Dennis Andersen

Brown Sugar & Lisa Sanders @ Oasis



Photo: Dennis Andersen

Patty Page w/ Blue Creek Band



Photo: Dennis Andersen

Blue Creek Band @ Moonlight Theatre, Vista



Photo: Dennis Andersen

Chris Klich



Photo: Dennis Andersen

Dave Howard @ BobFest, Dizzy's



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Sara Petite & John Mailander @ Adobe Falls

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Photo: Dennis Andersen

Cici Porter @ BobFest, Dizzy's



Photo: Dennis Andersen

Chris Vitas @ BobFest, Dizzy's



Photo: Dennis Andersen

Cindy Lee Berryhill @ BobFest, Dizzy's



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Carl Durant @ Letstat's Open Mic



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Happy Ron @ Letstat's Open Mic



Paul Hormick earns a masters degree in environmental science. Congratulations!

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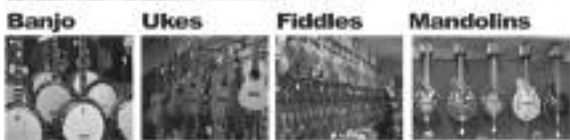
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