

T SAN DIEGO ROUBADOOR

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



December 2009

www.sandiegotroubadour.com

Vol. 9, No. 3

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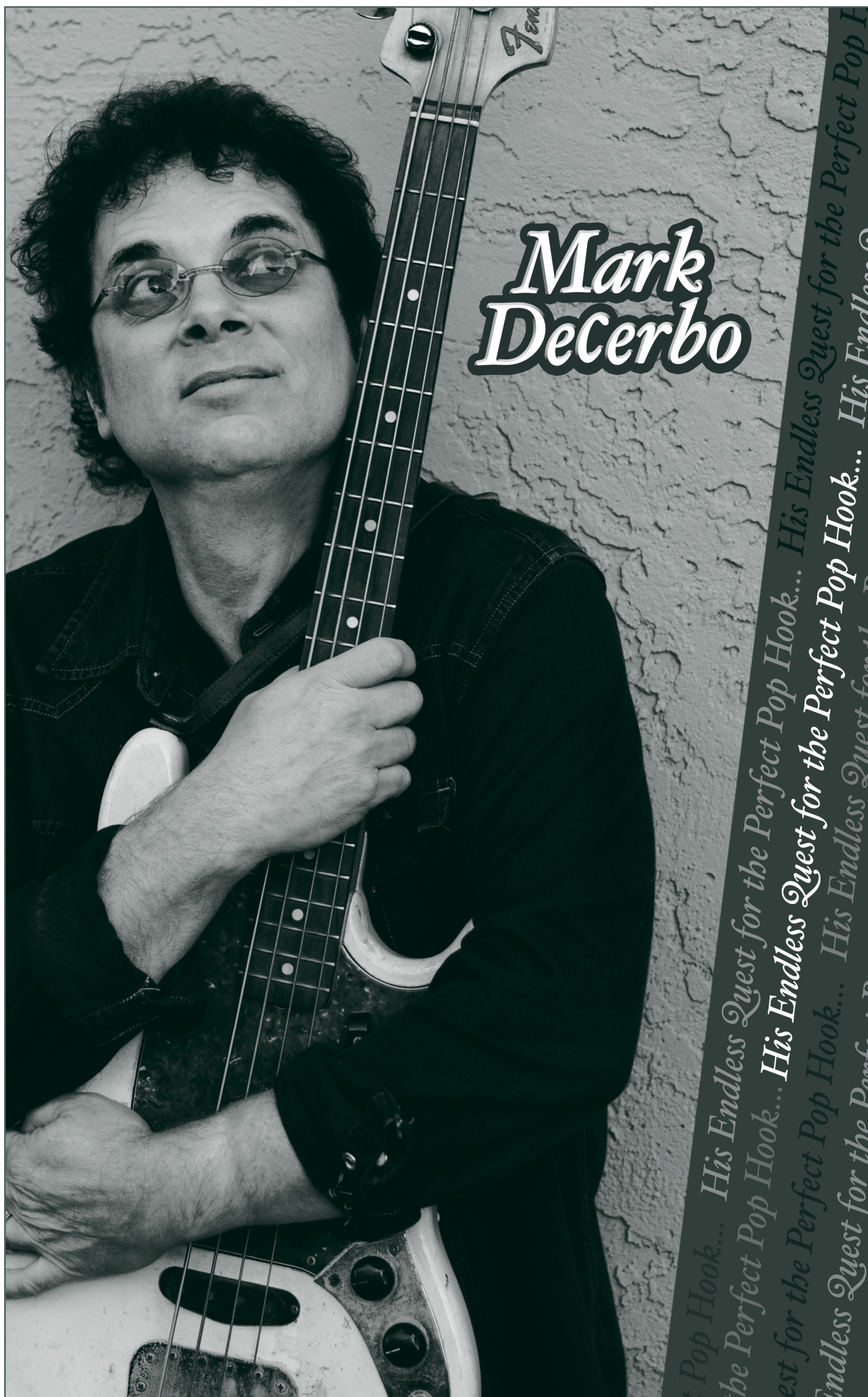
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MISSION

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.

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

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SUBMITTING A CALENDAR LISTING Email your gig date, including location, address, and time to info@sandiegotroubadour.com by the 22rd of the month prior to publication.

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

GEORGE DUKE BRINGS THE FUNK AND THEN SOME



Photo by Lisa Taylor

George Duke

by Mike Alvarez

Carlsbad's Museum of Making Music, in conjunction with the Bob Moog Foundation, is presenting an ongoing series of events and performances as part of its electronic music exhibition "Waves of Inspiration: The Legacy of Moog." Recently, keyboard legend George Duke brought his amazing quartet to the museum's auditorium for an evening of funky jazz. Or maybe it was jazzy funk. In Duke's capable hands, the lines between genres become somewhat blurred. Over the course of his decades-long and varied career, the Northern California native has enjoyed success as a soloist as well as through partnerships with a wide range of artists. Al Jarreau, Frank Zappa, Jean-Luc Ponty, Stanley Clarke, George Clinton, and Anita Baker are among the many noted musicians with whom he has collaborated.

Before the evening's funk commenced, museum executive director Carolyn Grant made a few introductory remarks, stressing the importance of bringing people together to experience live music. She noted that "the collection of individuals who are now gathered in this room for this performance will never be together again. This is a unique moment in time that should be

treasured." Also in attendance was Michelle Moog-Koussa, executive director of the Bob Moog Foundation, who wholeheartedly supported this assertion. Her father, Dr. Robert A. Moog, was concerned that the technology he was developing allowed some electronic musicians to create their art in isolation. She explained that "He felt it was important for people to come together in communities. If we lose this, we lose a valuable cultural resource."

As George Duke took to the stage with his band, he stated that the performance would be extemporaneous and casual, but this was never reflected in their playing. This is obviously a highly seasoned and well-rehearsed ensemble that displayed an almost telepathic rapport. Their easy and humorous banter between songs was a stark contrast to their tight and polished playing. They launched into "Five Hundred Miles to Go," which Duke described as "be bop with a backbeat." He took the lead, playing a grand piano, a Fender Rhodes electric piano and a MiniMoog, although this latter instrument wasn't quite set up in the way that he preferred. After putting it to good use on this song, it was rather sad to see him leave it alone for much of the evening, as it is a very important part of his sound. However, he was able to cover all of his parts quite

well with the remaining two keyboards. All musicians were given ample opportunity to strut their stuff. When freed from his supporting role, bassist Michael Manson took amazing flights of fancy, with hands effortlessly gliding up and down his fretboard. He occasionally indulged in some scat singing while playing. Duke would later give him a good-natured ribbing about this, to the great amusement of all. Dwight Sills' guitar playing was straight out of the jazz and R&B textbook, at times laying down crisp rhythm chords, while at others playing unison riffs with Duke's keyboards. When his turn to shine arrived, he took blazing solos that took the songs to a new level. Drummer Gordon Campbell kept the groove going all night long, staying in the pocket with Manson's basslines, but also creatively punctuating the moments that needed emphasis. Later, he was given a chance to display his considerable chops during an extended solo in the song "It's On," demonstrating the impressive ability to keep a steady beat while creating some dazzling musical fireworks.

Other classic songs from the George Duke catalog that they played were "Chillin'," "Cravo E Canela," "Anticipation," and "Brazilian Love Affair." A standing ovation convinced the band to play a couple of encores. The first was Duke's extended jazz solo on the grand piano, which was notable for its intricacy as well as its lyrical quality. During the band number that followed, he thankfully gave the MiniMoog one more try and was able to cajole a couple of impressively dexterous solos from it. Judging from the crowd's reaction, it appeared that many were hoping he would do just that and he did not disappoint. After the many interesting changes and rhythms that took place in this piece, Duke later confessed that he "threw them a fast one!" Such is the quartet's skill and experience that they seemed to follow him with no problems. Throughout the evening the iconic musician and his accomplished band treated the appreciative near-capacity audience to an energetic, emotional, and dynamic set that had bodies shaking and heads bobbing.



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by Frank Kocher
photos by Steve Covault

JERRY GONTANG TROPICAL ROCKER IN PARADISE

The small eastern Michigan town of Caseville welcomed a throng of Jimmy Buffett-style music fans this past August, in what has swelled from a weekend event to a 10-day festival. For the evening music show, a huge crowd of "Parrot Heads" gathered to hear San Diego's Stars on the Water, as founding member Jerry Gontang sang and played guitar on such standards as "Suite: Judy Blue Eyes," "Sail on Sailor," and Buffett's "Fins." The enthusiastic crowd of nearly 8,000 boogied happily in the night.

"The only reason you know it's that many people – you can't see because the lights are so bright and it's late at night – is when you finish playing the song, the applause and the screaming is so loud that it will physically knock you back, the energy from the crowd will make you take a step back. It's insane, absolutely insane," recalled Jerry in a recent interview.

"At night they have these glow sticks, and it's amazing. You can't see the people; you're left with this ocean of glow sticks moving back and forth. It's really fun to watch."

Gontang has been playing music locally since the early 1970s as a longtime member of several groups, including Stars on the Water and other Buffett cover bands, the music/comedy band Oh! Ridge, and as a solo artist. He has been a fixture in the local tropical rock scene and a regular performer at locations like Desi and Friends in Point Loma, the Ocean House in Carlsbad, the Galley at the Marina in Chula Vista, and numerous others. Born and raised in San Diego into a musical family, Gontang got his start early.

"For me, at least, the entertainment thing started when I was in the sixth grade and it was one of these deals where they had a talent show. My brothers played guitar and I learned how to play guitar from them, learned a couple of the songs, and took them to the talent show." Work in high school rock bands would follow and during a four-year stint in the Air Force Gontang found himself in a band covering Grand Funk, the Beatles, Black Sabbath, and other late '60s and early '70s music. While stationed in Southern Turkey, his band was flown to various large cities to promote American-Turkish good will for three years.

"We were in pretty big demand, so it was fun doing that," he said.

Back home, he joined up with his brother for a guitar and vocal duo, Ozzie and Jerry, in the mid '70s.

"We played down at the Ivy Barn and used to pack the place like crazy. Then, my brother went off to become a doctor, and I became a musician."

After a brief stint with another singer-songwriter, Gary Sparks, who Gontang claims as a major influence on his music writing, he joined a group called Oh! Ridge

in 1977. This drummer-less band combined stand-up comedy with various genres of cover songs, including bluegrass, country-western, and rock and once emceed the Julian banjo and fiddle contest.

"We had lots of good harmonies; all three of us sang," Jerry said. "We'd start off with the usual dinner sets in restaurants, then we'd get into the blue humor side of it after 10 o'clock when the kids had to go home."

"Oh! Ridge is an actual location. North of Mammoth, there's a little berg called June Lake. When you come off of 395 and go into June Lake you go up over a hill, and when you hit the ridge and come over the top and look down, the scenery there is so beautiful that everybody goes 'Oh!' And that's where the name came from, Oh! Ridge. Before I got into the band, the guys that put it together were having an audition in Mammoth. So, they came out of June Lake and were driving to Mammoth and one of the guys said, 'What are we gonna call ourselves?' As they were saying that, they were driving by this sign and the bass player says, 'How about Oh! Ridge?'"

Gontang performed with the group for 20 years as he and band founder Jeff Lee carried on as a duo nearly half that time, playing James Taylor, Crosby, Stills and Nash; Poco; and Eagles music. Then, "political correctness" spelled the end for the comedy, and Gontang got an opportunity to go in another musical direction.

"Jimmy Buffett has been a real mainstay of my music ever since the '70s. The first time I ever heard him was in '72 at the Backdoor live and ever since I have followed him everywhere he goes to a point where, when he got popular, I really was the only person in Southern California who knew most of Jimmy Buffett's songs. From that, I was able to create myself a little niche."

He started getting the call from Parrot Head clubs in Los Angeles, Orange County, Phoenix, and other locales to play live music parties. The exposure at clubs and restaurants, at first for free, led to other job offers. After working with a Buffett cover band, Buffed Out, Gontang and the bass player formed Koko Loco in 1997.

Basically a trop-rock Buffett cover band, Koko Loco was successful and traveled a lot. In 1999 the group was invited to a Parrot Head convention in Key West, Florida.

"They hired us to come and play for this convention called Meeting of the Minds. It's an annual event where all of the Parrot Head clubs get together. It's very selective, only 3,000 people can be on the island at a time, if you're not one of those 3,000 you don't get in. We took the convention by

storm." Koko Loco would return to Key West four times before breaking up.

Gontang and two other members of Koko Loco stayed together and formed the first edition of Stars in the Water in 2003, named for a popular Buffett cover of a Rodney Crowell song. This version was a trio, lasting about four years.

"We went back to Key West as a trio. As the new kids on the block again, they loved what we did again and we were pretty well known for that." The departure of the band's guitarist to Nashville and drummer for other work left him with a year and a half of bookings and a need for a band, so Gontang eventually put together the current lineup of Stars in the Water.

"Guitarist Andy Tirpak was available and he pretty much is the go-to guy in town. He is like the sub, if anybody needs a guitar player who knows all the songs and can sing, he's pretty much the guy that all these bands will call. And the bass player, Guy Hufford, was a guy who played with the original guitar player, Mike Broward. I brought him down to Desi's one night with me to play and it worked really well for us. He had a real good chemistry and he is just a dynamic, dynamite singer and great bass player, too. Gary Nieves, our drummer, has subbed for the other drummer in Stars in the Water when he couldn't make it; he's with a group called ESP now, which is really a well-known jazz band. He's just a phenomenal drummer, like a clock."

The band plays a lot of reggae, old rock 'n' roll, covers of Buffett, and many other classic rock songs. Their promo kit has a partial set list, 80 tunes long. Being in a band primarily known for playing covers isn't an issue for Gontang.

"The cover band is good for us right now. They like the originals when we bring them in, so there's another good thing. I think that the covers are basically a doorway for us, or a vehicle for us to get people to listen to the originals," he said. "When you say we're going to do an original, they want to hear what it sounds like."

The band has released two CDs of covers, *Under the Covers* and *Still Under the Covers*. Stars on the Water mixed songs by local musicians, rearranged to the band's style, with some originals by the group members. The next CD, planned for spring release, will take the same approach, with a focus on originals.

The band travels a lot, most years with two West Coast tours to Seattle and back. They are also very popular with the Parrot Head crowd and play about 12 to 15 concerts all over the country each year, flown in for the occasion for three-day gigs. A Michigan concert a few years ago drew an estimated 16,000 fans, and Gontang is look-



Jerry Gontang

ing to set up tours in the Midwest, Southwest, and East Coast for the band.

"We have gotten a real good reputation as a very high energy, good sound, good feel band."

Gontang has been flourishing as a solo artist as well. Starting out as primarily a Buffett cover singer, he added other songs to his repertoire and found the audiences, and clubs, receptive. More recently, he has been receiving invites to play mixers and happy hours for big corporations; in November he will be flown to Orlando and back just to do one show.

"I've been really fortunate. I don't know how I got so lucky in a lot of cases. Once again, I built this niche for myself with the Buffett stuff. Being a Jimmy Buffett Parrot Head, being able to travel as a single solo act."

Among his biggest fans are a group of women called the Aries Angels. These volunteers work at concerts for Gontang and other local musicians, helping with merchandise tables, business cards, and other activities.

"They're all Aries, first of all, that's where they got the name Aries Angels. They're just do-gooders, for musicians that might have a problem getting business cards, or getting some money, or trying to get their foot in the door. They get their heads collectively together do a big think-tank thing and make it happen for people. And they just love to do this stuff, and they do it for free out of the kindness of their hearts."

Gontang is working on a solo CD, for which he has all of the songs written, by himself and friends. A target date for recording and release is around the time of his birthday in April 2010.

He has no regrets about being a Parrot Head; in fact he helped write a book about the whole Buffett fan phenomena, *JimmyDOTCom: The Evolution of a Phan*, in 2000 with friend and fellow Parrot Head Jackson Quigley. Since the term was coined by Buffett bassist Timothy B. Schmit in 1985, there have been over 230 Parrot Head clubs or chapters formed, including ones in Canada, Europe, and Australia with over 26,000 members.

"These people do what they call 'partying for a purpose.' What they'll do is have an event. They'll get a charitable concern, either local or nationwide, that needs some help. They'll bring all this merchandise in for silent auction, they'll charge a cover charge to come in, they'll have live music, and all of the proceeds go to whatever the charity is."

A Parrot Head website puts overall total 2008 donations at over \$3.1 million, and 175,000 volunteer hours. The San Diego Parrot Head Club had its fourteenth anniversary party September 26, with proceeds going to San Diego Juvenile Diabetes



Jeff Lee, Suzanne Reed, and Gontang at a Desi's get-together last spring.



Gontang with his band Stars in the Water

Research Foundation and the Community Coaching Center. Stars on the Water topped the music bill.

"This year they ended up getting \$26,000 for two charities, and there are Parrot Head clubs doing this all over the world."

Gontang has been settling down in his personal life. Clean and sober for 12 years, he also has found his soul mate.

"I truly am enjoying sobriety. There's nothing wrong with waking up feeling good, or not having to figure out where you are and what happened the night before." He gives a lot of credit for his success to his wife of 10 years, Shannon.

"This lady is the best thing that's ever happened to me and she really has saved my life."

Recently, Gontang has enjoyed getting opportunities to play with different local musicians, especially after an event at Desi and Friends, organized by local singer/songwriter Suzanne Reed. In addition to Reed, Mike Burns, and Jim Palmer were many other local musicians, including former Oh! Ridge partner Jeff Lee.

"After Suzanne got all the info from the musicians that showed up a good bunch of them stuck around, and we had a jam session. Since then I've had a whole bunch of musicians come and sit in with me. It just kind of got out into the grapevine, the Coconut Telegraph, I tell people that."

Jerry Gontang is grateful to be living in San Diego, happily married, and making a living as a working musician for all of this time.

"I'm always asked if music is my only job or do I have a real job during the day. I am very fortunate and blessed by being able to insert the word musician in the occupation box of my tax forms."

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GETTING MY FACE BOOKED

I've been getting involved with Facebook lately. I have a Facebook page my sister Leona set up for me (That's why it's under "Louis F. Curtiss." The "F" stands for Frog. I don't tell too many people that because I don't want them to think I'd croak). At any rate, I've been putting some jim dandy video clips up on that page (some 270 plus now) of performances by people, most of who have played at various concerts and festivals I've been privileged to put together over the past 40 plus years. I've also included also a few old clips of folks I feature songs by on my JAZZ ROOTS radio show (KSDS 88.3 FM & Jazz88.org Sunday nights 8-10pm "If you miss it you've got a hole in your soul" as Sam Chatmon said. "It's red hot, too tight, and out-site." At any rate, if you want to see some great music clips. Check this one out. There are also clips of some kinds of music that just interest me like Tibetan throat singing, using a spoon held in your mouth to play slide guitar, and some of that great swinging country music and old timey stuff that everyone ought to hear and some novelties you won't believe. Like I said, check this one out.

LOCAL MUSICIANS WHO NEVER GOT A SAN DIEGO MUSIC AWARD

Each year we see the brightest and the best local San Diego music people are awarded that little bronze (or is it pewter) music treble clef and music notes that is the San Diego Music Awards. However, the ones who made this town jump before those awards got started are largely forgotten and resigned to the ash heap of history that only folks like me talk about now and then.

So if the Oscars can have the Jean Hersholt Special Award, which they give out, why can't the San Diego Music Awards include the Lou Curtiss Award where they let me pick someone from the great musical history of San Diego who has gone on and give out one more little award to his or her memory. I could suggest the following: Smokey Rogers, Merrill Moore, Joe Liggins, Sam Hinton, Roy Hogsed, Jimmy Liggins, Ella Mae Morse, Slim Gaillard, Jelly Roll Morton, Thomas Shaw, Harold Laud, Teddy Picou, Fro Brigham, Russ Plummer, Johnny Downs, Charlie Barnet, and a host of others. If you don't want to name the award after me, name it after one of the others above like Joe Liggins, who graduated from Hoover High School in 1938 and just a cou-

ple years later had a million selling record called The Honeydrinker. He and his brother Jimmy owned a club here in San Diego, which regularly featured the best in Rhythm and Blues coming through town, plus local jazz and R&B. Call the award the Honeydrinker Award, but do something! The San Diego Music Awards has always been where the music is, but it also should be cognizant of where the music's been too.

ARTS FUNDING FOR SAN DIEGO

I just read that the National Endowment for the Arts allotment for San Diego is way down from what it has been in the past with much smaller California cities like Monterrey and San Clarita getting more stimulus dollars for the Arts than San Diego. San Francisco and Los Angeles got 14 and 18 times as much money as San Diego. Now I don't have all the answers as to why San Diego got short-sheeted, but I do know one thing: This city has never done much in the way of providing funding or even helping with funding for any kind of Folk Life presentations.

I've been involved with programming Folk and Roots music in San Diego since 1967 and in all that time have never received a cent for any of the work I've done. It had to be totally out of the love of the music because no one in any kind of local arts and cultural organization ever thought enough of the work I've done to offer any kind of stipend to do it. Any National Endowment money the city or any arts group in the city got went to the symphony, opera, theater, and art museums. The people's music - traditional roots music, blues, jazz, country, and folksong (the kinds of music I presented in 55 music festivals, 300 plus concerts, banjo and fiddle contests, etc.) never had anyone at the city level talk about any funding either to bring artists to San Diego or to pay anyone to do the research connected with putting on a festival. Money coming in always went to the tuxedo crowd. The folks who liked to be seen playing dress up and nearly never to

folk life (people music in any form).

So now people are wondering why San Diego has less money coming in. Could part of the reason be that for so long we have tried to ignore our cultural heritage or taken for granted the folks who did care, expecting them to volunteer year after year. I've got to admit that I've lived just a bit above the poverty level over the years to be in a position to be able to put these music festivals on. Many times I've talked about the need for a Folk and Cultural Music Center here in San Diego. I've written letters to the San Diego Commission for Arts & Culture and they've acted like I just told a particularly offensive joke. The best I ever got was a vocal pat on the head from a City Councilman, and people who look at me with blank stares like I don't know what I'm talking about!

Well, I do know what I'm talking about. This city needs a place where we can promote the folk culture we have and bring in folks from other cultures to let the folks in San Diego have an opportunity to be exposed to them. That's what I've tried to do with festivals, concerts, my radio shows, and my collector's record shop, every tool I can make work for the community. On my Facebook page I've put up over 400 video clips of musicians I've brought to San Diego, and would have brought, had the money been forthcoming to do so as well as videos of artists I play on my "Jazz Roots" radio show (KSDS 88.3 FM & Jazz88.org on Sunday nights at 8pm), who I think you just ought to be aware of. I have a sort of running where and when, with an accompanying commentary with them. That's at Facebook: Louis F. Curtiss. I also have a website at Folk Arts Rare Records.com with live tracks from the early folk festivals and concerts here in San Diego. Also included are links to a wide variety of old time and traditional archives. I do get around with things I think you should hear.

I've been telling folks for years to go listen to certain kinds of music they haven't listened to before. You might find that you like it. I'll say that to San Diego's powers



Lou Curtiss

that be as well, and don't ignore something or proscribe it as cornball because you don't particularly think it's your cup of tea. For sure, other folks may disagree with you. If you happen to be affiliated with the San Diego Commission for Arts & Culture, you are ignoring most of the people's music for some of the reasons stated above. Then maybe San Diego needs to have another look at the whys and wherefores of who gets grant money and who doesn't.

Recordially,
Lou Curtiss

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PETER SPRAGUE A LIFE SET TO MUSIC



The Peter Sprague String Consort

by Erick Petterson

After a five-day tour to New York City with jazz vocalist Diane Reeves, Peter Sprague returned home, opened his guitar case, and discovered that the neck of his guitar had broken somewhere between New York and San Diego. If that didn't give Sprague reason to give up playing guitar, his diagnosis with arthritis 15 years earlier, along with many other challenges, might have. However, throughout the years, rather than quitting his passion, Sprague has continued to play in concerts, and produce his own as well as other people's music.

Sprague enjoys setting his world to music in a way that everyone can enjoy. When he sets out to produce a CD, Sprague says, "I just look at things that interest me [and ask] how can I bring them in and make them real within my own world?"

In June 1977, with the group Dance of the Universe, he first set his world to music with the release of *You Make Me Want to Sing*. Following that, Sprague, Kevyn Lettau, and the rest of the members of the band produced *The Space Between Two Thoughts* in 1982. This album was conceived after Sprague met a hippie who gave him a poem, which Sprague set to music. The poem, written before the band's inception, was titled "Dance of the Universe."

Over the next 20 years, Sprague recorded six more CDs. Then, in 2001, he met a woman named Chris, who led him to set more poetry to music. Many who are familiar with Sprague and the history of his music know the story of

Chris Pengram's daughter Nikki, who died in a tragic traffic accident. Sprague set one of Nikki's poems, about a rose, to music, and that song turned out so well that her mother wanted more of Nikki's poetry to be given the same treatment. Sprague then adapted Nikki's poetry on an entire CD. Following the release of *Nikki's Rose*, Chris celebrated her daughter's life by arriving at the premier concert with a rose for everyone who attended.

Of his CDs, he says, "They're all sort of like children, in a sense," though he admits that of all his projects, one of his favorites is *Na Pali Coast*. "I think a lot of great elements came together." Sprague enjoys working with the same people he has worked with for years, always trying to draw upon artists with whom he has worked or is familiar.

Now, technology allows him to manipulate his music, offering him the opportunity to make his in-studio sessions sound like concerts; he enjoys mixing his own tracks. In a recent interview he spoke of making CDs in much the same way a movie producer might make movies.

"I really like making records where you're documenting what you'd do with a live show," he said. "I love projects where you make it bigger than life."

Sprague has been active as a producer as well as a solo artist, despite a lull from 2005 to 2008. He theorizes that he may have spent that time working on *The Wild Blue* (his latest album, reviewed this month on page 13). On the CD, along with the familiar sounds of Sprague on guitar, his listeners will hear the

voices of Leonard Patton, Allison Adams Tucker, Kate Hightower, and Lisa Fuller.

With his current CD, Sprague had been pondering the idea for some time; two years ago he and his string consort (featured on the disc) began performing more concerts. Of the performers who make up the string quartet (violinists Bridget Dolkas and Jeanne Skrocki, Pam Jacobson on viola, and Carter Dewberry on cello), all four ladies are younger than Sprague, Duncan Moore (drums), and Bob Magnusson (bass), the other band members.

"They brought a really cool new energy to the group," which inspired him to put the thoughts of his project into motion. "It's really rewarding as a band leader to have that kind of energy to work with."

Amidst all the new ideas, Sprague produced the new disc while keeping an old idea in mind. That idea began for him in 1974 – in the basement of the Interlochen Center for the Arts, a boarding school he attended, which allows young artists to study their creative pursuits. During that year, Sprague spent many evenings in the basement studying the piano stylings of Chick Corea.

After that, Sprague studied anything he could find about Corea. After years of studying and playing with Corea, Sprague set his world to music again with *The Wild Blue* by using a

string quartet to complement the guitar, in much the same way Chick Corea and Gary Burton had done with the piano in the 1980s. For Sprague, "The string quartet is a manageable kind of unit."

Over the course of the last 30 years, Sprague has gotten to know many musicians throughout San Diego. He played at this year's San Diego Music Award-winner Danny Green's CD release party at Anthology. The mere mention of the name Peter Sprague to other longtime San Diego musicians will draw stories about how Sprague taught that person to play guitar, or the first time that person heard Sprague in concert. Of his years in San Diego Sprague says, "I feel good. I feel connected." He later adds, "I like the whole connection that the musicians have here."

Throughout the years, Sprague has accomplished many things, including opening a successful recording studio (SpragueLand), appearing on over 190 recordings, and producing 16 albums of his own, including *What's Enough?* with vocalist Kevyn Lettau and scores of others by many other jazz artists. However, if he could, Sprague would go on to accomplish a few more things. He would like to attend Brazil Camp – two one-week camp sessions with Brazilian musicians who gather with their students in Northern California in

late August. And he would love the chance to play with jazz guitar legend Pat Metheny and Sting. He wishes he had played better during his years with Dance of the Universe, but if practice did not make perfect, Sprague might have been born a jazz guitarist extraordinaire.

In a town that is sometimes called the "Harlem of the West," because jazz greats like Dizzy Gillespie and Duke Ellington have passed through, a name like Peter Sprague make San Diegans proud that another jazz legend calls San Diego home. After all the highlights and trials during Sprague's career, he says, "It's a great time for young jazz musicians." He goes from one project to the next, not allowing himself to regret anything about a previous project.

"I just sort of work as best I can on a certain project," he said. "I kind of release it and let it go."

While everything around Sprague changes, he remains the same. Guitar strings may break, loved ones may write poetry and pass them on only to pass away, and doctors may diagnose hands with arthritis. None of that matters to Peter Sprague, because in his heart he is still that young boy at Interlochen, hiding in the basement, furiously studying the sounds of Chick Corea.

(I-8 East) of Eden: Lester Bangs' El Cajon Years

by Raul Sandoval

"VDKHEOOSNCHSHNELXIEN
(+& H- SXN+(E@JN?)

– Lester Bangs

The morning's newspaper headline at the El Cajon Trolley Station read - WATER FOUND ON MOON.

In typical El Cajon fashion, non-sequiturs were traded off amongst the huddled brood until three conclusions were drawn. One, this was impossible since the original moon landings took place on a movie set in the Mojave Desert. Two, Jesus evolved from spores that drifted to Earth from outer space. Three, it is Lester Bangs' birthday this month.

Leave the first two conclusions to further debate. But, yes, the third is true: El Cajon's native son and the world's legendary rock critic would turn 61 on December 13.

If California is the land of fruit and nuts, El Cajon is the land of just the nuts. (As an El Cajon native, I say this as a good thing.) El Cajon is a city that should have suited Lester Bangs well. Founded in the rugged traditions that saw the rise of the Wild West, El Cajon is both blue collar and hard working, on one hand, eccentric and rebellious on the other. After WWII, it became a working class, bedroom community where trades people, navy men, and aerospace workers hung their hats after working in and on San Diego's factories and ships. To this end, El Cajon grew along typical middle-American lines.

Yet, El Cajon has always been a place to hide, playing lady liberty to the hordes who found San Diego's civility too stifling and coastal California's real estate too expensive. Since the 19th century, the city has courted agrarian communes, religious sects, cowboys, outlaws, and runaway artists and opera singers. Add to that later the silent movie moguls and starlets, motorcycle gangs, SSI recipients, and parks filled with kids with nothing to do but banter about the harder fringes of teenage pop culture. And, you have a counter-cultural Cuisinart with an "on" button pressed by sweltering summers, an abundance of liquor stores, and rock 'n' roll.

The El Cajon I grew up in, which is Lester Bangs' El Cajon fast-forwarded 15 years, helped invent Extreme Sports and Shred Metal guitar. It's an El Cajon that Lester Bangs should have felt at home in. However, Lester Bangs hated El Cajon and fled at his first chance, vowing to never return.

In his meticulously written bio on Lester, titled *Let It Blurt* Jim DeRogatis retraces Lester's own explanations of the cultural void he grew up in. DeRogatis provides a descriptive overview of El Cajon in the 1960s. Mentioned are endless apartments that line streets like Lexington, the empty lots alongside new SoCal subdivisions; the crumbling, Route 66-type motels and bungalows where people with no future go to hide their past; the many, competing churches that unite the city under the word of a fractious God. Even the Mother Goose Parade gets some props. Lester graduated from El Cajon High in 1966.

While turmoil gripped San Francisco, Watts, and Chicago, Lester's El Cajon, was a throwback to the milktoast balminess of the 1950s. Racial exclusion enforced by the real estate industry ensured a suburbia that stayed xenophobically white.

In this climate, Lester Bangs was an oddball. Where male identity was sculpted through sports, crewcuts, and patriotism, Lester, the uncoordinated loner, would not have fit in. Couple this with the fact that Lester was raised a Jehovah Witness, in a landscape where Baptists, Methodists, and Lutherans held sway.

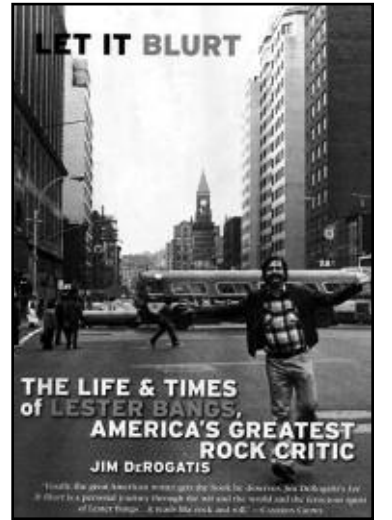
This is basically the story as Lester told it. (It should also be mentioned that DeRogatis, a senior in high school in 1982, was the last person to interview Lester before his death. So, the DeRogatis interview could certainly be considered the "last word" on the issue.) Unable to bear the cultural wasteland that was El Cajon, Lester fled to that Shangri-la also known as Detroit then steppingstoned his way to that cultural mecca of all cultural meccas: New York City. End of story.

However, things are not as cut and dried. In 2000, Lester's childhood friend Robert Houghton published a feature article titled "My High School Days with Lester Bangs" in the *San Diego Reader*. Though not discounting the "wasteland" perception of El Cajon, Houghton offered alternate images of Lester's hometown that were just as real as the earlier mythography.



Lester (far right) with mom and siblings around his senior year at El Cajon High

Houghton recounts an El Cajon High that was a modern high school. Breaking from its agricultural past, El Cajon was a mid-sized city that offered Lester access



to a greater world beyond suburbia. Lester performed in ECHS's musical and stage productions. He read great authors such as Dylan Thomas and T.S. Eliot. (He would later find William S. Burroughs and the Beats via the El Cajon Public Library.) Lester was on the El Cajon High speech and debate team, traveling to numerous tournaments, winning one at Grossmont College. He later attended Grossmont College where he was exposed to a library stocked with both classics and modern tomes and a Liberal Arts faculty that was far from red neck.

Racially, El Cajon was white in the 1960s, like large swaths of Queens and Brooklyn, New York. But, it also had strong Mexican-American and Native-American influences. Certainly, the *vaqueiros mejicanos* had disappeared. But, we had a well-mixed Latino population along with many Indians from the three large reservations that skirted the city. (Let two of this writer's grade school friends – Kenny Ruiz and Duane Whitespear – from 1968 Johnson Elementary stand as testament.)

Musically, El Cajon was cooking in the late-'60s. Again, it couldn't compare to the TV images of the Haight. But, bands were forming, gigging, and many finally heading to L.A. to make it big. Long a stop-over for country-western musicians such as Johnny Cash, Hank Snow, and Patsy Cline, El Cajon's Bostonia Ballroom might only reinforce the city's reputation as a place to go corn-poking. However, El Cajon provided a young Frank Zappa with his first record player and a young Lester Bangs with his first Miles Davis and John Coltrane albums. The city produced Iron Butterfly's first guitarist Danny Weiss who bashed out proto-Metal riffs nearly five years before those bad boys from Birmingham – Black Sabbath – exorcized their blues jams and Beatles covers for the dark side. Many clubs dotted the area, including the Candy Company,

Continued on next page

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One Bad Bloke Deserves Another



The Blokes (l. to r.) David Lindquist, Steve Musick, Paul Castellanos, Gary Piro, Joey Piro

by Erick Pettersen

At a recent battle of the bands competition at Viejas, where bands won or lost depending on the noise level of the crowd's cheers, the Blokes – an Irish folk band – lost. According to band member Clay Colton, they lost because of their fans' drinking habits. After each band performed, their fans would run to the stage and show appreciation for their favorite band by screaming and applauding. The story goes that when it came time to applaud the Blokes, their fans sat at a nearby outdoor bar too drunk to run to the stage, scream, or applaud. At that time, they had only played three gigs together and went

up against bands that had played together for years. Following the Blokes defeat at the battle of the bands, Colton, Paul "Strings" Castellanos, and father-son duo Gary and Joey Piro gathered their losses and moved on. Although they lost, Viejas invited them to play there again.

Before that loss – before the four musicians formed the Blokes – Colton grew up in Kentucky. He transferred to San Diego with the military and served as a Navy aircraft engineer long enough to blow out his knee and receive a medical discharge.

After his release from the Navy, Colton and Matt Bongiovanni formed Bender, though the

partnership faded. Striving to keep his aspirations in tact, Colton continued to book gigs, playing with various guest artists. After playing gigs with whoever would join him, Colton former the Clay Colton Band, which consisted of Grant Gebler, B.J. Morgan, David Winter, Paul "Strings" Castellanos, and Sergio.

Another member of the Blokes, Joey Spiro, went through his own musical transition during the '80s when the punk/hard rock band Pitchfork he helped form broke up. After the other members of Pitchfork went on to pursue their individual musical interests, Spiro continued to call San Diego home.

Along with their disappointments and tragedies, the Blokes also share triumphs and laughter. Joey Spiro, who adds vocal to the Blokes with his dad, Gary Spiro, brings a new sound to the Blokes with his multi-talented percussions. After Pitchfork broke up, Joey began studying such percussion instruments as the cajons and timpani, which are non-traditional to Irish music. Apart from the music, Gary Spiro owns a successful engineering company, and he continues to battle to improve San Diego's environmental future. Paul Castellanos plays the violin, guitar, mandolin, and banjo at pubs, festivals, and concerts with various bands. Of the various instruments Castellanos plays, Gary Piro said, "Paul switches from the violin to the guitar to the banjo in the middle of the song." When asked if he finds transitioning in the middle of the song difficult, Castellanos replied, "Not so much anymore. When I'm asleep, yeah." And Colton, who continues to enjoy success with the Clay Colton Band, met his wife in San Diego and now has two children.

Among the four member of the Blokes, they share stories of tragedy and triumph. Some stories contain humorous anecdotes, while others are of the losses of friendships and death's of loved ones. Despite their losses, the Blokes continue to play at festivals, competitions, and pubs throughout San Diego. Each member of the Blokes shares a different story; though, they focus on the good memories.

After sharing a fifth of Jameson, Clay Colton and Gary Spiro conceived of the idea of forming a spinoff of the Blokes called the Bad Blokes, an Irish rock band that pays tribute to such Irish bands as Flogging Molly, Young Dubliners, and other Irish rock bands. The Bad Blokes consist of Gary Joey Piro from the Blokes, Grant Gebler, and B.J. Morgan from the Clay Colton Band, and Clay Colton and Paul Castellanos from both bands.

After a resounding applause from 6,000 fans at the San Diego Irish Fest, playing with members of Flogging Molly and Young Dubliners,

and less than ten gigs together, the Bad Blokes have received a warm welcome in San Diego.

Between the Blokes and the Bad Blokes, which both sometimes look like one of Forrest Gump's boxes of chocolates, outside performers like first lady of Irish Music Patric Petrie, as well as Steve Musick, David Lindquist, and other local performers sometimes join the music.

For those who want to enjoy a little beer, along with some Irish step dancing, the Blokes and the Bad Blokes offer both. At each of the Blokes and the Bad Blokes performances, six to 12 dancers from the Rose Academy perform. On Sunday afternoons, a four-year-old may dance and entertain the crowd at O'Sullivan's in Carlsbad, while on week nights

adult Irish step dancers perform with them at such places as The Field in the Gaslamp Quarter.

Many times the Blokes play to a restaurant or pub's afternoon crowd, while the Bad Blokes play to their evening crowd. At one, the audience will hear more traditional Irish music and at the other, Colton may sing an Irish rock version of "Hotel California" or "500 miles." And whether or not they're performing, the Blokes and the Bad Blokes share a web site.

At the end of the interview, Colton summed up the attitude of the Blokes and the Bad Blokes, as well as Irish music, when he said, "You can do it until you die" – play, dance, or enjoy.

Lester Bangs, continued

Cinnamon Cinder, and the Hi-Ho Club where Lester played harmonica on stage with his buddies Jack Butler and Jerry Raney of Thee Dark Ages.

El Cajon was a city of 40,000 in the 1960s, not a huge city but neither a small town. The truth is that El Cajon had many sides and faces and could be a different city to different people. Lester was by nature a loner. It was probably his own inherent isolationism that made El Cajon feel more remote than it actually was. Also, Lester Bangs was a critic, both professionally and by nature, and made his living and his art by nitpicking and finding flaws. The "El Cajon as hell hole that I heroically escaped" story rings similar to many rock autobiographies. From Bob Dylan to Tom Waits to, yes, Lester Bangs, many in the rock community have painted bleaker landscapes of their childhoods than reality might divulge. Lester himself stated that there are no facts in rock 'n' roll. Ironically, the Rock Star-as-mythmaker works retroactively.

Later, Lester seemed to be escaping every place he lived. After he escaped El Cajon, he escaped Detroit. At the end, he vowed to escape New York City for, of all places, a small village in Mexico where he thought he could finally write in peace.

The truth is that El Cajon is the home town of Lester Bangs. And, the Lester Bangs wit, intellect, and persona are distinctly El Cajonian. From his East County drawl to his absurdist and comedic mixture of high- and low-cultures, Lester

couldn't have been raised in many other places.

Hopefully, future studies of this great writer will delve further into his distinctly El Cajon character. One project is the new Lester Bangs Archive at Grossmont College.

At the turn of the century, Bangs' legacy enjoyed a revival with Cameron Crowe's *Almost Famous* in which Phillip Seymour Hoffman played a mustachioed, take-no-prisoners Lester to Bangsian perfection. Jim DeRogatis' bio *Let It Blurt* was published to universal acclaim. And, John Morthland's anthology *Mairlines, Blood Feasts, and Bad Taste* was also published. Since then, however, things have remained quiet. Let's hope that new projects such as Grossmont College's Archive will ignite a new generation of readers and fans.

So, Happy Birthday, Lester, just in case you're reading! Let's blow out the candles again next year.



Lester and girlfriend Andrea "Andy" di Guglielmo the year after graduation from El Cajon High

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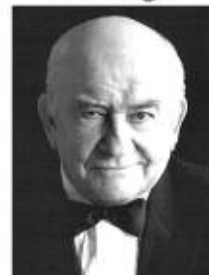
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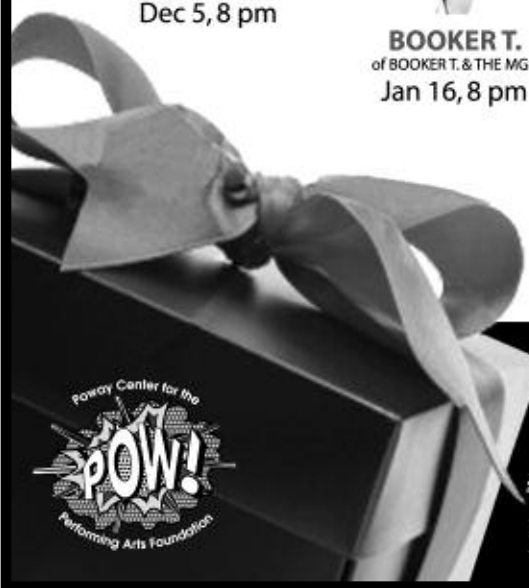
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by Steve Thorn

First and foremost, it's the hook.

It's the opening moments of a song that arouses in the listener an undivided attention. It causes homework to not be completed, conversations coming to abrupt halt, and cars pulled over to the side of the road. In "She Loves You," John Lennon's musical message – hardly subliminal – is that the lads have found their ticket out of Liverpool. Al Kooper wasn't sure where his improvisational swirling organ solo was going on Bob Dylan's "Like a Rolling Stone," but we musical hitchhikers enjoyed the ride. And what is it about the opening Tex-Mex centrifugal force of the Bobby Fuller Four's "I Fought the Law" that makes it sound so damn heroic after 44 years?

It all comes back to the hook, where joy and excitement intertwine. An uncredited source once dubbed it "ear candy," but it is sweetened by several ingredients: terrific chord changes, inspired singing, and a rhythm section more than up to the task.

San Diegan Mark DeCerberio understands the aura of the hook and, over the course of more than 30 years, has created a catalog of melodically rich rockers and ballads. He is singer, songwriter, and music education advocate. It wasn't the case of DeCerberio finding music early; it was actually the other way around.

DeCerberio's earliest music exposure began in upstate New York during the Eisenhower years. "Well, I was born in Schenectady on August 21, 1953. I lived there for about my first five years of life," said

DeCerberio. "It was during this time that I discovered rock 'n' roll, though, even at that early age. As a toddler, I was crazy about Elvis Presley. My mom tells the story of me sitting with my little turntable and my 45s, most of them Elvis discs. Even though I couldn't read the labels, I could tell which one was which by sight and I could sing them as well: 'Hound Dog,' 'Heartbreak Hotel,' 'Blue Suede Shoes,' etc. My parents and aunts and uncles would encourage me and nurture me in my singing."

By 1959 the DeCerberios moved to Binghamton, New York. It turned out that radio was also in flux. "I still loved Elvis the most," said DeCerberio, "but radio was starting to change and become this mish-mash of styles with artists like Connie Francis, Chubby Checker, Dion, the Four Seasons, and such. Then, when the Beatles were on Ed Sullivan in early 1964, it was like, 'Wow, what's that? I really like that!' That's when I instantly became interested in playing guitar. My dad tells the story of me being at baseball practice that spring. He was our team coach and it started raining, so he called off practice. On the way home from the field I asked him if we could stop at a music store and look at guitars. He said yes and we did and he bought me my first guitar. That was pretty much the end of baseball for me. Now, I, along with tens of thousands of others, wanted to be a Beatle."

DeCerberio began taking lessons at the local music store. "When I could finally play some chords and some songs, I looked on the bulletin board at the store and found the names of some other guys looking to form a band. By age 14, I had my first band, which my dad managed, and he, also, let us rehearse in the cellar of our house. We were called the Mayonnaise Machine. My dad got us gigs at local teen centers, school dances, and even

across the border into Pennsylvania in towns like Great Bend and Susquehanna."

The decade of the '60s "was a magical time for music," according to DeCerberio. "Every time you turned on the radio there was just great song after great song. That magic fed the vibrant music scene in the area with lots of bands and places for them to play. When we got good enough, we played in a few battle of the bands competitions and, in 1968, actually won one. Our first prize was a recording session in New York City at Capitol Records. My dad drove us there and we got to record in a real recording studio. We recorded 'Questions' by Buffalo Springfield and an original called 'Cos Cob Crown,' written by our lead guitarist, Bob Marcil. I don't know what ever happened to the recording, but I remember it was a lot of fun."

While he was still in his teens, Mark's parents separated. His mother relocated to San Diego, and her decision to move to the West Coast would eventually present DeCerberio with the chance to one day do the

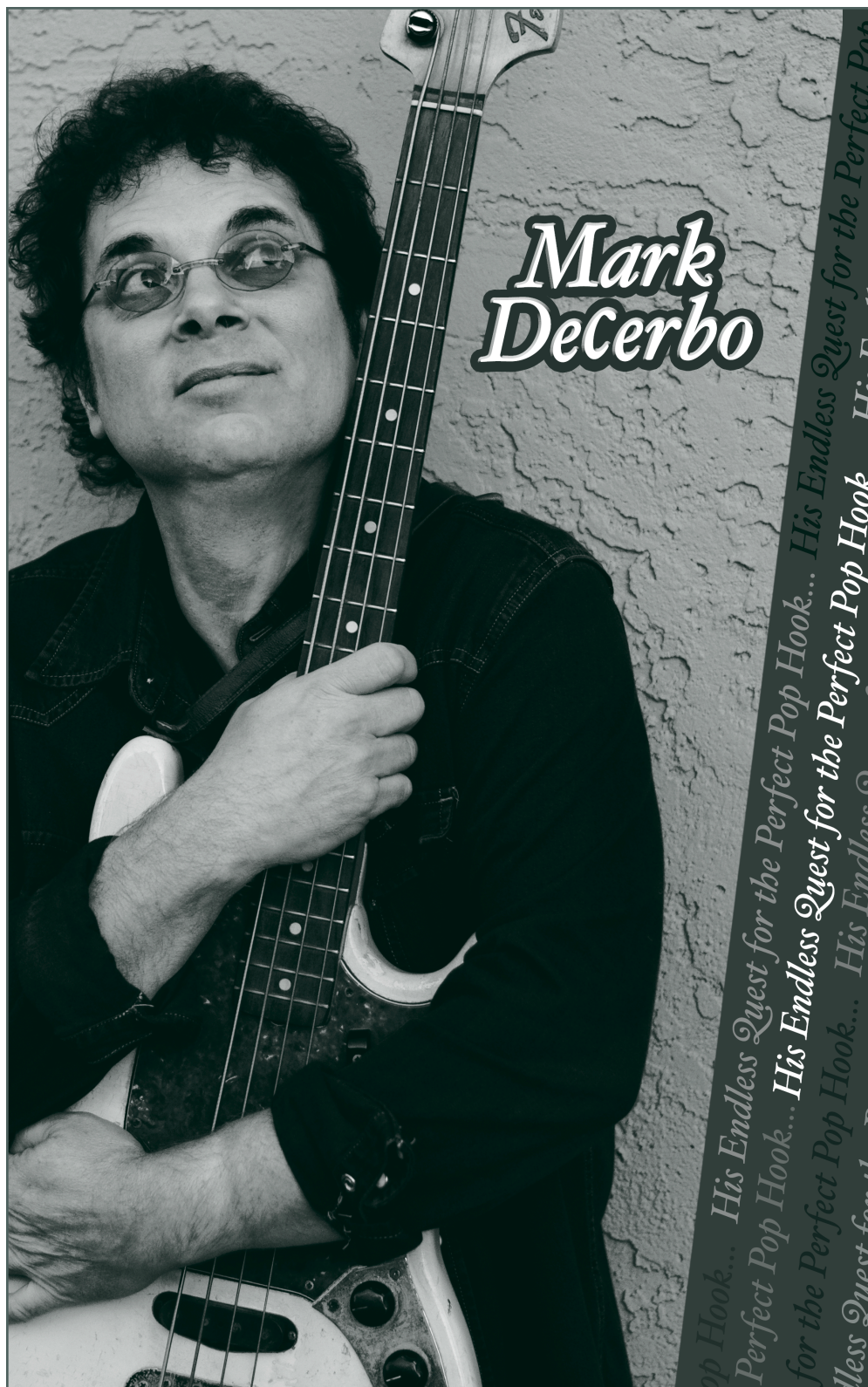
same. But for the next few years, Mark continued to take advantage of the musical opportunities the Empire State had to offer. "I had taken guitar lessons from a guitarist that lived up the street from me and he taught me chords. I soon realized, with his help, that I could play by ear. He didn't teach me how to read music, but he taught me how to hear music and then figure out how to play what I heard on the guitar. That's how most of the guys I played with did it. The Mayonnaise

Machine turned into Tattoo, then Cathedral, and on and on. I graduated from Maine-Endwell High [in suburban Binghamton] in 1971, having spent my entire high school career playing in a band for pocket change. And a nice chunk of change it was for a teenager!"

Mark's father came up with a good game plan. "After I graduated, my dad told me that if I went to college, he would pay for school and let me live at home. And that meant I could still play music on the side, which I did. By this time I was playing with the guy who would eventually be my musical partner in Four Eyes: Jeff Becker. We had a band through junior college and we played at our own Broome Community College as well as other colleges in upstate New York and some clubs in the area. After graduating we were down to a duo, Mutt & Jeff. We lived in a house out in the country and worked at IBM while playing sporadically."

During this time – the early '70s – San Diego beckoned. "My mom offered me a chance to come to San Diego, but I was reluctant to go. I didn't care, and still don't, for a lot of change in my life. My girlfriend at the time put it this way, 'Your mom has invited us both to move to California. You can do what you want, but I'm going.' Well, since she put it that way, what could I say? We moved to San Diego in the late summer of 1973. I took a 'refresher' course in music theory and applied to the SDSU music department. Though I had no formal training, I was able to pass the test and got in. I had some wonderful experiences there and met a lot of great people, but I had completely stopped playing rock 'n' roll out in front of people. All my time was spent studying and practicing for school. I finally had to find an outlet for doing what I had always done in the past, playing music for people."

Photo: Grant Gilmore



San Diego musician Gary Lehmann provided DeCerberio with a musical outlet, and the duo became known as Roots. "We both loved to sing and harmonize and play guitar and we liked a lot of the same music. It was much fun and I learned a lot from Gary about other artists that I was not familiar with, such as Jimmy Webb and Leonard Cohen. One night in 1976, when Roots was performing at Le Chalet in Ocean Beach, a few of my friends from upstate New York [Jeff Becker, "Mighty" Joe Longa, Butch Botino, and Dave Haney] showed up. I hadn't seen them in a few years. They had just driven out to California and they found me. I was totally surprised. That night, pretty much, marked the end of Roots."

With Becker, Longa, and Botino, DeCerberio formed a band called Temporary Wedge. They submitted a song, "Santee Nights," to one of the KGB-FM *Homegrown* albums. "I can't remember if it ever even made it on the album," said DeCerberio.

A work-related injury during this time nearly brought DeCerberio's guitar-playing to an end. "I had an unfortunate accident at a day job using a table saw where I cut my thumb pretty badly," DeCerberio recalled. "I had to have a skin graft and was out of commission for a while as far as playing guitar was concerned. I swore, after that, that I would never ever take another non-musical job, especially one that involved sharp objects and saws."

Temporary Wedge sounded more like Nashville cats than laid back Californians. After finding a place to live – a reasonably priced off-season suite at the Catamaran Hotel in Pacific Beach – the group began the

search for jobs. "One day we decided to try and find ourselves a gig where we could play in front of people and maybe even get paid. We started hitting up every club within walking distance of our 'home.' We finally came to the Elbow Room, a country/western bar on Garnet Ave. It was the type of bar where people would line up at 6 a.m. every day to get in and start drinking their day away. And they did, I'm not lying, at 6 a.m. The manager told us we could audition, so we set up and played on their small stage. I played acoustic, Jeff played electric guitar, Butch was on bass, and Joe played harmonica and the upright piano that was already there. We were playing a variety of music from blues and boogie-woogie to Stevie Wonder and Beatles stuff. The manager thought we were good but didn't think we had enough of the type of music that his customers liked – country and western. So he took us over to the juke box and showed us what songs he thought they would like. We asked him if we could take some of the records out of the juke box home and learn them and then bring them back. He said okay. We took home quite a few 45s and as many as we could, including of songs from Hank Williams' 'Your Cheating Heart' to Skeets McDonald's 'The Tattooed Lady.' We got the gig, it was 1976, and Temporary Wedge was in business. We also played a variety of other gigs that year, including the San Diego Folk Festival."

Temporary Wedge eventually found a drummer [U.S. Navy Sailor Steve Bidrowski] and a future mentor, a Greek whose first name saluted a later empire: Roman. DeCerberio remembered him as "an interesting Greek guy. He convinced us to let him be our



Copenhagen Flyer, 1978

in Ocean Beach. “We landed a job as the house band at Webbs in OB on Friday and Saturday nights and the Over Easy Production Company, also in OB, on Monday nights. We also played a concert at the Adams Ave. Theater and did some shows at The Spirit as well as concerts at local colleges and military bases. At gigs we would try different things like dressing up in turbans and weird clothes or hold dance contests with the prize, a bottle of hot peppers, going to the most insane dancer, not the best one. Our repertoire included a good amount of our original tunes because we could get away with it at Webbs and Over Easy. We made a demo and took it up to Mushroom Records in L.A., but we were treated like yokels up there because we were from San Diego. Also, our friend from Endicott, New York, Gary Wilson, came out for a few weeks and did some gigs backing him at an SDSU frat house and Webbs.”

By 1979, New Wave was in full bloom and the DIY (Do it Yourself) ethos resulted in many artists taking an independent stance. “I was a new dad with my first child, a son named Ian, and a band named Four Eyes. My first wife and I had a house with a detached garage. And, yes, the garage became the band rehearsal studio. I got us an old school bus and we started to travel a bit to do gigs. We went to places such as Yuma and Albuquerque. That bus seemed to break down every place we went. It finally broke down for the last time in Yuma and we left it there. Steve left the band and we got Fred Dunsmore to play drums.

“I had been writing a lot and we put together a full set of songs, including ‘Baby’s Not in the Mood,’ ‘Contagious,’ and ‘Disengaged.’ We had been rehearsing and recording a lot and had done some demos, but the gigs were few and far between. Geof [Macaraeg] left the band and we were without a bass player. We tried advertising in the *Reader* but could not find a single bassist who could sing, or play, for that matter. We were stuck and we needed to keep playing to survive. One day I had the idea that I would be the bass player; heck, at least I could sing. We got me a Fender Mustang bass and an amp and, with barely a hitch, we were a real live performing power pop trio. As far as I can remember, we were three guys, Mark, Jeff, and Fred, who never had so much fun in our lives. The freedom of doing original music and playing as a trio was very exciting. We were on our way.”

Four Eyes were in demand during the ‘80s music scene in San Diego. They played every venue imaginable and shared bills with singer-songwriters Nick Lowe, Marshall Crenshaw, and John Hiatt. The most valuable keepsake of this period in DeCerber’s career was the single “Disengaged”/“Penny Pong” on the local Big Fish label. A rev-up song in an energetic Paul McCartney style [think “Junior’s Farm”], the tune remains, nearly three decades later, a fine example of Southern California power pop.

But by the late ‘80s, DeCerber felt himself pulled in different directions. “It was 1988 and Four Eyes was made up of myself on vocals and guitar, Jeff Becker on guitar and vocals, Lee Knight on bass and vocals, and Bobby Sale on drums. The band was working with producer Bart Bishop recording demos up in L.A. Bart passed the demo on to Robert Duffey who was working at Bizarre/Straight Records for Frank Zappa’s old manager, Herb Cohen. Duffey booked some studio time to finish up a few of the demos [“Baby’s Not in the Mood,” “Blue In Clover,” “Contagious”]. Herb liked what he heard and flew down to San Diego to see the band live at Jose Murphy’s in PB. Negotiations seemed to go on forever with no end in sight. As time went on Four Eyes started slowly to go through changes with Bob Sale leaving the band and a previous drummer, Mark Spriggs, rejoining the band. But work was hard to come by and the recording contract seemed far away. Herb Cohen was leaning toward signing me as a solo artist because of my catalogue of songs.

Lee Knight decide to leave the group as well. The band just finally came to an end.”

It was at this point that DeCerber began his long and rewarding career with Rockola, an internationally lauded group, which is not an artist “tribute” band per se but a group of musicians whose knowledge and expertise of rock’s first 50 years is impressive. “I had no band and needed a paying gig, so I took the job,” DeCerber explained. “Finally, the offer from Bizarre/Straight came through and I was signed to a ‘production agreement’ as a solo artist. We had a meeting with Howard Kaylan and Mark Volman [Flo and Eddie of the Turtles] to talk about them producing the album but even though Kaylan is Herb’s cousin, they proved to be too expensive. It was going to be co-produced with me and Robert Duffey. I contacted Mike Keneally to help me arrange the songs and play guitar and keyboards. He asked me one day, who I had to play drums on the album. I said I didn’t know. He told me he knew Pat Mastelotto who played with XTC, the Rembrandts, and Mr. Mister. I said that sounded great if Herb was willing to pay him. He was, so Pat joined Mike and me in the studio to record rhythm tracks for ‘Mama, Through the Years,’ ‘Baby’s Not in the Mood,’ ‘Blue in Clover,’ and ‘Curtains.’ We finished up those four tracks and Herb shopped them to several labels such as CBS and MCA. We did some showcases and had some bites, but Herb ultimately decided to put the record out on his own label, Bizarre/Straight. We got more musicians together, including Burleigh Drummond [Ambrosia], Paul Kimbarow [Mighty Penguins] Sha Na Na, and finished the album. It was released internationally and promoted through Rhino Records.

“Unfortunately,” said DeCerber, “there was not enough money spent to promote it. In a sense, it died on the vine. Although the ups and downs of that whole experience got me depressed for some time, I am very proud of that album and appreciate all those who helped make it happen.”

In the ‘90s, Mark and the other Rockola members [Bob Tedde, Doug Booth, and Marty Eldridge] would periodically play as the Mark DeCerber Band. “We opened for such artists as the Everly Brothers and NRBQ. Marty left the group and Larry Grano came aboard as the drummer. At this point I decided to go into the studio with the guys in Rockola and record some of the songs I had been writing. We got several songs recorded, but they sat there for a while.”

Those songs found a new outlet when Four Eyes reunited in 2000 with Knight on bass and vocals, John Chatfield on guitar and vocals, and Grano on drums. “Lee had a studio in his home and we decided to finish the album with Lee as producer/engineer. We redid most of the earlier tracks and wrote some new ones. We got signed by Zip Records and in 2005 ‘Sweet on the Vine’ was released. We have continued to do shows



Four Eyes, 2007 (Larry Grano, DeCerber, Lee Knight, John Chatfield)

into 2009 and hopefully beyond.”

An anthology covering 13 years of Four Eyes recordings was released earlier this year to positive reviews (see *San Diego Troubadour*, May ‘09). “During the 1980s Four Eyes recorded a lot in the studio and live, so there is a lot of recorded stuff that has never been released or heard. I took the time over the last few years, under the prompting of my good friend Bart Mendoza, to transfer all those vintage recordings into a digital format. I cleaned them up and released *Four Eyes Anthology 1977-1990 (featuring Mark DeCerber) Part I*. There is a lot more recorded Four Eyes material and there will be a Part II and beyond.”

Partly a sense of giving back to the community – and another part keeping him young at heart – is DeCerber’s support of youth music programs. It’s a mission shared by his fellow musicians. “Playing with Rockola has been and continues to be a wonderful rockin’ experience. There is a lot of passion and fun in our performances and it feels great to be part of that. We’ve done many shows featuring our Magical Symphony Youth Orchestra. Sometimes we’ll do entire Beatles albums live with orchestra including *Sgt. Peppers Lonely Hearts Club Band*, *The White Album*, *Abbey Road*, and *Revolver*, along with *Rubber Soul* and *A Hard Day’s Night*, which don’t have much orchestral playing on them. We try and include young people, ages 12-24, whether they are playing orchestral parts or incidental percussion, guitar, or piano in our shows. It is quite amazing for us as well as our Youth Orchestra to see just what they are capable of in a rock ‘n’ roll setting. And the audience really loves it. It’s a lot of work but the kids really love it...almost as much as we do.

“We are totally in favor of keeping music and the arts in school and after school programs, in fact, we want to be part of those programs. Our plan is to keep working with young musicians and including them in our shows to create the magic that happens when we join forces with the Musicians of Tomorrow. It’s a beautiful thing.”

www.decerbo.com



Four Eyes, 1980 (DeCerber, Jeff Becker, Fred Dunsmore)



Four Eyes, 1987 (clockwise from upper left: Jeff Becker, Lee Knight, Mark Spriggs, DeCerber)



Rockola (bottom row: Bob Tedde, unknown, DeCerber; top row: Doug Booth, Bob Sale)

manager. He also lent us money to buy a proper PA system and talked us into changing our name to Copenhagen, where he had lived before coming to San Diego.”

In 1977, Copenhagen found steady work

Photo: Steve Covault





Bluegrass CORNER

by Dwight Worden



BLUEGRASS IS EVERYWHERE!

Surprisingly, San Diego is a veritable hot bed of bluegrass music. Maybe that's because we are the "South," Southern California that is. Whatever the reason, here are some of the regularly occurring opportunities to enjoy great bluegrass music in San Diego, and to get involved in jam sessions and open mics.

FIRST TUESDAY OF EVERY MONTH The first Tuesday of every month is bluegrass night in Escondido, hosted by the non-profit San Diego North County Bluegrass and Folk Club. They meet at Roundtable Pizza at 1161 East Washington Ave. The action starts at 6:30pm with pick-up bands and open mic; a featured band is presented from 8 to 9pm. Admission is free; donations are solicited. Bring your instrument for jamming outside. For more information visit the North San Diego County Bluegrass and Folk Club website at: <http://www.northcountybluegrass.org> The NCBFC also sponsors Bluegrass in the Flower Fields event in the spring. Check their website for details.

SECOND TUESDAY OF EVERY MONTH The second Tuesday of every month finds bluegrass at the Fuddrucker's Restaurant in La Mesa's Grossmont shopping Center, located at 5500 Grossmont Center Drive. Second Tuesdays are sponsored by the non-profit San Diego Bluegrass Society. These events feature open mic and pick-up bands from 6:30-9pm. There is also plenty of jamming on the outdoor patio. Admission is free; donations are solicited. If you want to jam, simply show up. If you want some stage time, send an email in advance to reserve a slot to sdbinfo@socialbluegrass.org, or, space permitting, sign up on site. For more information visit the SDBS website at: www.socialbluegrass.org.

THIRD TUESDAY OF EVERY MONTH The third Tuesday of every month Bluegrass Jam, which started last month and continues monthly, is now located at the Old Time Music Store on the corner of University and Utah in North Park. This monthly event is sponsored by the SDBS and by Old Time Music. The action, which starts at 6:30pm and runs until 9pm, features open mic and pick-up bands, jamming, and a "slow jam" led by Old Time Music teacher Janet Beazley. The slow jam helps beginners and intermediates learn how to jam, learn jam etiquette, and, in the process, have fun playing some classic bluegrass tunes at non-breakneck speed. If this appeals to you, be sure to stop by. Janet is a wonderful teacher and very welcoming to all. The slow jam is free. There is parking behind the store, nice seating for listeners as well as players, and a nice stage for pick-up bands. For more info visit the SDBS website at: www.socialbluegrass.org or the Old Time Music website at: www.sdolddtime.com. Admission is free; donations for SDBS are solicited.

FOURTH TUESDAY OF EVERY MONTH The fourth Tuesday of every month is Featured Band Night for SDBS at the Boll Weevil Restaurant, 9330 Clairemont Mesa Blvd., at the corner of Ruffin Road. Pick-up bands and open mic begin at 6:30pm and continue until 8pm. From 8 to 9pm a featured band is presented in concert. Admission is free; donations are solicited. The food is great at this Boll Weevil, featuring not only their normal fare, but also great BBQ prepared by Rick and his staff. The Boll Weevil also reserves the main listening room for the bluegrass folks so we have a great listening environment.

EVERY THURSDAY EVENING IN NORTH COUNTY Every Thursday evening from 6:30 to 9pm there is a jam session led by banjo player Jason Weiss (of the Bluegrass Ramblers and the Taildraggers), located at Today's Pizza in Encinitas, 481 Santa Fe Drive, across from Scripps Hospital. These sessions were started by Banjo Bob Cox more than 30 years ago and have been continued under the guidance of Jason Weiss for the last several years. Jason leads the session, calling out tunes that the group plays, with Jason giving

opportunities, to those who want them, to take solos. Bring your instrument and enjoy the fun. Participants all chip in \$5 and the group feeds on pizza and salad. By the way, the food is great!

ACOUSTIC MUSIC SAN DIEGO Acoustic Music San Diego runs a concert series located at 4650 Mansfield just off Adams Avenue in Normal Heights. Concerts start at 7:30, and there are typically several different concerts every month. Many of the concerts are not bluegrass, although the emphasis is clearly on quality acoustic music. Periodically, a great bluegrass band is presented. Join the Acoustic Music email list by signing up on their web page www.acousticmusic-sandiego.com or join SDBS on its website at www.socialbluegrass.org and you will get email and flyer alerts of upcoming bluegrass events.

DIZZY'S While Dizzy's is primarily a jazz venue, it does on occasion present great traveling bluegrass bands. Dizzy's is located in downtown San Diego at the San Diego Wine and Culinary Center, ground floor of Harbor Towers at 2nd and J Streets. You can visit Dizzy's at: www.dizzyssandiego.com.

ANTHOLOGY Anthology is a high end dinner club and bar with a great stage presenting outstanding music. Most of the music is not bluegrass, but as with Dizzy's, on occasion Anthology will present a great bluegrass group. Visit Anthology at: www.anthologysd.com

SUMMERGRASS Every August the SDBS and North San Diego County Bluegrass and Folk Club co-sponsor the three-day Summergrass bluegrass festival at the Antique Gas and Steam Engine Museum in Vista. The festival features 10 or more great bands, camping, vendors, workshops, a kids music camp, and lots more. Learn about this premier West Coast event at: www.summergrass.net.

SPECIAL CONCERTS The SDBS presents anywhere from two to five special concerts a year featuring top quality national touring bands. Check the SDBS website for more information, or, better yet, join SDBS for only \$20 per year for the whole family and you will be regularly updated. By way of example, SDBS presented Eddie and Martha Adcock last October and will be presenting the great band Special Consensus in January. SDBS also just presented its annual live bluegrass show at St. Mark's United Methodist Church on November 22, featuring three bands performing the music of Bill Monroe, Flatt and Scruggs, and the Stanley Brothers.

BLUEGRASS SPECIAL RADIO SHOW. Be sure to tune in to KSON, which features Wayne Rice's "Bluegrass Special" radio show every Sunday night from 10 pm to midnight. Wayne plays great bluegrass and, once a month, presents a featured local band live as part of a joint program between KSON and the SDBS. You can listen in at 97.3 and 92.1 in North County, or you can stream the show from the web at www.kson.com. Feel free to call in or email your requests to Wayne.

STAYING INFORMED As you can see from the above, there is lots going on involving bluegrass in San Diego. The best way to stay informed and to know what is happening, and to support local bluegrass while you are at it, is to join the SDBS for \$20 for the family for the year and you will receive regularly mailed flyers and email alerts so that you will know everything that is happening. You can also check KSON's Bluegrass Bulletin Board, which has a comprehensive listing of all bluegrass related events. Visit <http://www.waynerice.com/kson/bgevents.htm>. And, of course you can read the Troubadour and this column and we will do our best to keep you informed.

So, tune up that instrument, and get on out and enjoy some of the great bluegrass music and jam sessions available in San Diego. I'll be looking for you!

The Zen of Recording

by Sven-Erik Seaholm

LET'S HEAR IT

There are seemingly hundreds of questions that a producer must field and answer during the course of a recording project.

At the outset, there are the usual suspects. "How do you like to record?" "Do you use ProTools?" "Should my strings be new?" "How much is this going to cost?"

On the first session, they become more musically directed. "How was that?" "Should I tune again?" "Do you think we should double the last chorus?"

By the middle of the project, we've gotten to things like "Can we fix that flat note there?" and "Do you think we need a harmony vocal?"

By the mixing and mastering stage, there's much more focus: "Is the vocal up high enough?" "Is that too bassy?"

Note that the later questions are almost rhetorical. They're almost saying "I think the vocal needs to be louder" and "The mix sounds muddy." This is because the person asking the question is reacting to what they are actually hearing. There's no conjecture or supposition. For me, one of the most puzzling issues to wrestle with in the recording studio is talking about something you haven't actually heard yet.

I recently recorded a band that had so many ideas inside of them that they seemed to be on the verge of actually bursting. This was accompanied by a steady stream of "How abouts" and "What ifs." All of which is totally fine. I really enjoy and prefer the collaborative approach best anyway. After all, as I like to say "we're making your record, not my record." The difficulty arises from the disparity between how it looks "on paper" and how it actually sounds in the context of the music. For example, the keyboard player arrives for an overdub session. We set him up and I go to the computer to ready a track for recording.

"Sven, do you think that on the bridge, he should move his left hand up to the F# instead of staying on the D the whole time?"

"I'm not sure. Let's try it and see what you think."

"Yeah, but I'm just wondering if it's better that way."

"Well, it's not like it would be out-

side the key, so theoretically it wouldn't be wrong, but..."

"I'm just worried it will be too static otherwise."

"I understand. Let's hear it and see."

"I just want to figure that out before we get all involved in recording."

"Well, 'tape don't lie,' man. You'll have your answer as soon as I play it back for you."

Now, I've made lots of records in a lot of different ways and while I certainly have my preferences for how to approach various styles and genres, I have no strict formula, either. I have, however, developed some loose guidelines from the experience I've gained. Chief among them is to let folks do their thing with as little interference as possible, then react to what I'm hearing. All of my best contributions to projects over the years were born (or stumbled upon) in just this fashion. I liken it to jazz musicians: someone plays a phrase and another reacts to it. In this way, the performance continues to develop spontaneously, and the results are often surprising and, in many cases, the results are far superior to anything that could have been mapped out in advance.

Equipment is the same way. Lots of microphones, preamps, instruments, and effects are available to the modern musician, but until they have actually had some "hands-on" experience with them, it's all really just conjecture.

In the past, I reviewed an amp made by local custom amp designer **Randy Bemis**. It was a modified version of a 1959 Fender tweed deluxe. Its 6V6 power tubes and custom-wound transformer yielded a robust, ballsy tone that matched my Les Paul electric guitar perfectly. I used it quite a bit for gigging and recording with The Wild Truth and was very pleased with its performance. Subsequently, I've begun to focus more on a soul-oriented vibe, which has greatly diminished my need for such a powerful guitar sound. I was also still looking for something that would give me a wider variety of tones at a lower volume for recording purposes (I still have neighbors, after all).

Meanwhile, Randy had begun to develop some designs using EL84 output tubes, due to their lower drive



Sven-Erik Seaholm

requirements. Basically, you need less gain to drive the tubes into the "sweet spot" and get good tone at lower volumes.

In other words, exactly what I was looking for.

I currently have a 15-18 watt 2 x EL84 amp that borrows its genetics from VOX, Matchless, and 18 watt Marshall designs. This is what Mr. Bemis calls the **Simplex18 Combo** (also available as a head with a tube buffered loop). It provides an incredible array of tones ranging from clean, bell-like chime to warm, burnished and buttery all the way to full on flamethrower crunch!

The Simplex18 gets its name from the incredibly uncomplicated manner with which one comes to dial in these great sounds: three "chicken beak"-style knobs at the top of the amp labeled "Gain," "Tone," and "Volume." Additionally, the Simplex18 has a high and low volume switch. This toggles the amp between 18 watts and approximately 7 watts, greatly reducing the overall volume of the amp for those looking to record with it. The only slight difference in tone was a barely perceptible compression, which helped keep the sound a little more aggressive and "in-your-face."

Finding the right tone couldn't be, well...simpler. The "Gain" knob lets you dial in the right amount of overdrive distortion, while the "Tone" and "Volume" allow you to fine-tune things even further. For example, I found a very pure, crystalline pedal steel sound by setting the Gain at 8:00, the Tone at 12:00, and the volume at about 2:00. A great, twangy Telecaster tone was at 10:00, 1:00, and 3:00 and a heavy power chord crunch was arrived at by setting the knobs to 3:00, 10:00, and 4:00. All of these tones were recorded using the 7 watt setting.

I played a couple of gigs using the 18 watt setting and was really inspired by the amp's ability to give me the tones and stage volume I wanted and, really, nothing spells success like a very happy soundman after the show!

Bemis has clearly come up with yet another winner in the boutique amp wars with the Simplex18 Combo. However, you won't be able to make that same observation until you can actually hear it for yourself. Call him directly at 619-248-2362 and see what he can do for you!

Sven-Erik Seaholm is an award-winning independent record producer, performer, and recording artist. His company Kitsch & Sync Production (kaspro.com) provides recording, mastering, graphic Design, consultations, and CD manufacturing services. Call him at 619-287-1955 to inquire about Special Winter Rates.

Radio Daze, continued

tarist and singer who plays his right-handed guitar upside-down (like Jimi, maaan,) is a master of both blues and swing.

A couple of musicians challenged me on the Hendrix reference, claiming Jimi strung his guitars the same way a righty would. Whatever. He's still Jimi, maaan. Finally, here's another quote from my January article:

In a business like broadcasting, still having a job at the end of the year is considered a major success. That's my goal again this year.

So far, so good. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year, friends.

ROBIN HENKEL

Fri, Dec 5, Coyote Bar & Grill, 6-10pm
Robin Henkel Band with Horns!
300 Carlsbad Village Drive, Carlsbad, (760) 729-4695

Mon, Dec 7, Humphrey's Backstage Lounge, 7-11pm
Robin Henkel Band with Horns!
2303 Shelter Island Drive, San Diego (619) 224-3411

Wed, Dec 9, The Cellar (Wine Bar), 7-10pm
Billy Watson & Robin Henkel
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Fri, Dec 11, Chateau Orleans, 6:30-9:30pm, solo blues
926 Tourquoise St, Pacific Beach (858) 488-6744

Sat, Dec 12, Benefit at Humphrey's Backstage Lounge, 2-6pm
a fundraiser for two local homeless shelters \$8
Regina Leonard, Charlie Imes, Cathryn Beeks, Sara Pettie
Dave Humphries Band, Chuck Schiele & Robin Henkel!
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Sun, Dec 13, Paper Moon Music, 6pm, \$10
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Sun, Dec 20, Lestat's, 8pm
Robin Henkel Band with Horns and some pretty xmas music.
3343 Adams Avenue, San Diego (619) 282-0437

Fri, Dec 26, Iva Lee's, 7-10:30pm, Robin Henkel Blues Trio
555 N. El Camino Real, San Clemente (949) 361-2855

Booking info / lessons (619) 244-9409



Hosing Down

by José Sinatra



The piercingly incisive José Sinatra

JOYSTICKS TO THE WORLD

I've always said I'd be the first to admit to mistakes, if for some supernatural reason I ever made any. Having comfortably adapted to the modern habit of reassigning blame to anyone or anything other than oneself, as a lark I've decided to switch things up during the closing of this dwindling year.

There were two factual mistakes in this column last month, which should be corrected for historical purposes and for the future prosperity of the planet. The word "April" in the first paragraph should have been "March." And, later on, the singer "Angeline Butter" should have read "Angeline Butler," in spite of the fact that words cannot read (though they can indeed be literate).

The fault here was definitely not attributable to the editor. Rather, it sprang from my own inattention due to a mind rendered temporarily numb from my listening just a bit too much to some no-longer-even-entertaining talk radio pundits who still worship at the altar of Reagan. Plus, my reading glasses hadn't had the decency to bathe before I used them to proofread my work. So, yes, I'll cop to it - I'll cop to being an easy target for insidious influences and ineffective implements I cannot control. Stuff happens, dude, why should I always have to take the blame?

It is during these final weeks of December that the contemplative artist tends to reflect on his accomplishments and failures, the joys and sorrows that will forever define the year within his own interior, unpublished almanac.

Right about now, too, the truly gifted contemplative artist will augment these ruminations with the formation of a battle plan for the year ahead.

Most people wait until January first or perhaps the day before that to address these activities. They're called procrastinators. Procrastinators are neither gifted nor artistic. Still, their contemplation is in itself a kind of achievement, since the very act, in its purest sense, keeps them momentarily away from their iPods and cell phones.

Tragically, headset users are well past redemption.

Then, there is the rare, gifted contemplative artist who will relinquish some of his "me" time to focus on the needs of others. He does this for three reasons: 1. To exercise his humanitarianism. 2. As a way to delude himself that things aren't really always about him, anyway. 3. To bestow the 2009 Hose Awards upon the people and events of the year that were most successful at diverting my mind's gaze away from my own exquisite navel.

The Hose Award for the television commercial whose creators most deserve waterboarding this year is a tie. One Hose goes to the cretins behind the mock-

solemn-patriotic Chia Obama statuette, and the other to the BlackBerry ad using the Beatles' "All You Need Is Love" with that "cool" singer desecrating the pronunciation of the word "easy." The only thing "ee-zeh" about this travesty is my ability to locate my inner Mark David Chapman every time I hear it.

The 2009 Hose for the weirdest TV moment goes to Channel 6's morning news on October 20, which unfortunately featured the innocent Mark Bailey, my fave local anchor (who happens to share a birthday with me this month). Beginning shortly after 5am (and frequently updated thereafter), the top, breaking local story concerned a massively growing traffic jam near downtown on Highway 5 north, the result of some nebulous "police action." Shortly after 8am came that morning's usual brief, live video conference/cross-plug with AM600 KOGO's Chip Franklin, who was unaware that producers at Channel 6 had decided to keep secret the fact that the "police activity" involved a lady on an overpass. So when Franklin casually mentioned this potential suicide, there was a moment of truly transcendent silence before Bailey awkwardly mentioned that Channel 6 had been withholding the cause of the traffic jam and "police activity" in order to prevent any copycats. If this isn't a textbook definition of Channel 6's motto, "balanced news," I'll jump off the bridge of their choice right now.

As for motion pictures: one film gets the Hose not for being the best, but certainly the most astonishing. I'll admit that I stumbled into the wrong theatre by mistake and missed the first 10 minutes. The mistake was quite a fortunate one. The film was *Amelia*, a biopic about Amelia Earhart, and it contained a stunning achievement - the superb, brave, entirely revolutionary performance by Willem Dafoe in the title role. He played Jesus a while back, now he has believably portrayed a female. He *became* Amelia Earhart to my mind; best impersonation since David Brenner in *Yentl*.

As far as musical performers go, the choice was a no-brainer, and I've decided to give Britney Spears the Hose.

Well, that about wraps it up for this humiliating yet ennobling edition of "Hosing Down." My best wishes to you all, even the ugly ones. If 2010 is only half as good to you as this past year has been, then 2009 was twice as good as next year will ever be.



RADIO DAZE



by Jim McInnes

LOOKING BACK

Here we are again, at the end of another year. I've excerpted parts from some of this year's columns to create this month's masterpiece:

January *I'm somebody now! I've been rewarded for almost three years of freelancing at Jazz 88.3 with my own regular time slot. I'm spinning straight-ahead jazz every other Saturday, from 9am to 2pm. It's even better now because I am on EVERY Saturday, from 9am to noon!*

February *If 1966 ever returns, the Shambles will be as big as the Beatles! Mark my words.*

The Shambles may not yet be as big as the Beatles, but there is a tribute album to them out now. It's called *Forty-One Sixty*, and it has 24 covers of Shambles tunes done by 24 different artists. (Reviewed in last month's Troubadour.) How many bands can lay claim to an honor like that?

April *Most important, though, April means the start of baseball season!*

The Padres turned into a real TEAM over the final third of the season, giving fans something to actually look forward to again.

May *The crowd roared its approval when the set ended. The Jack FM crew measured audience response at 110 dB on the decibel meter! That's as loud as a jet taking off, or some such analogy.*

The Ultimate Music Challenge was a hit in its third year at Viejas. I thought all the cover/tribute bands were excellent. Can't wait til next year's competition. Congrats to the winners, Rolling Stones, the next best thing to the Rolling Stones, only better musicians!

August *And as a man who's been married for 25 years, I see more of my life every day in the hilarious "Pickles."*

"Pickles" has become my favorite comic strip. It would make a good animated show, like "The Simpsons," but with Boomers. Or not.

September *All of FA's vocals are sung in Esperanto. Bring an open mind...and body armor, because they're REALLY, REALLY LOUD! And awful.*

It turns out I was peering into the future when I wrote this. I should have been writing about Alice Cooper, who put on a terrible, half-assed, obscenely LOUD show for about 1500 revelers at Harrah's Rincon Casino on Halloween. The PA system could have been used at Coachella or Woodstock, for crying out LOUD!

October *Legendary San Diego disc jockey Steve West called me a few days ago to ask me if I liked being on during Glenn Beck's show, adding that he listens every day because Beck pisses him off.*

Now Beck pisses me off, too. The scary thing is, a lot of people believe him.

November *WOW. This is one smokin'-hot band. Johnson, a hetty left-handed gui-*

Continued on page 10.



by Peter Bolland

SO THIS IS CHRISTMAS

So this is Christmas, and what have you done? Another year older, a new one just begun.

— John Lennon

In his immortal song "Happy Xmas (War Is Over)" John Lennon asks an accusatory question, a profound question that cuts through the layers of treacle and tinsel like a chain saw: are you really living the life you want to be living? Really?

Whenever this song comes on the radio as I'm zigzagging across town on my oh-so-important errands, I have to pull over. The swirling waltz tempo, the circular, ascending chords, the pendulous melody, the lyrical balance between solemnity and celebration all brought to life by the beloved voice of a long lost friend - has there ever been a more powerful Christmas song? (And the competition is stiff). Like a ghost in Dickens' A Christmas Carol, Lennon comes back from the grave every Christmas to strum his Gibson, rattle our chains, and drag us into an essential, transformative awareness. Are we living authentically, awake to every precious moment and opportunity that comes our way, or are we merely a cog on a wheel in someone else's machine, going through the motions of our so-called lives like a sleepwalker? He never was one for beating around the bush.

With his opening lines Lennon pulls us into deep self-examination. Knowing that for many of us this a vulnerable time - our emotions are close to the surface - Lennon strikes to the heart with a profoundly powerful question. Here at the end of the year, as we reflect on the passage of time and more important, our use of that time, it is a very good time indeed to ponder the cumulative effect of our choices and actions. Our dreams, like ghosts that haunt the shadowed edges of our lives, are ever-present. We want something better than this. We long for love and connection and purpose. There is so much beauty waiting to emerge. Our potential mastery, prosperity, and joy are waiting in the wings, waiting for their cue to take their rightful place center stage. All of these potentialities. Another year over, a new one just begun. And what have we done?

Each moment is an end, and each moment is a beginning. The circularity of the seasons reminds us of this. We are ever born anew. Yes, the past is what got us here to this present moment. But we are unbound. History is not destiny. We are not determined by the past. We are forever and infinitely free in this next moment to reemerge from the womb of our incompleteness and stand tall as beings of infinite value. Do you dare? That is Lennon's taunt.

And so this is Christmas, I hope you have fun, the near and the dear ones, the old and the young.

But let this not be a solemn process. We do not stand accused. Lennon's goal is encouragement, not condemnation. Let us also celebrate the joys and gifts of being alive. And the depth of our happiness is only realized in community. We have met the enemy, and it is isolation. As we open our hearts and our arms and drop our fears, prejudices, and limitations we find ourselves in the middle of warm, caring communities. Our friends, families, neighbors, colleagues, and strangers alike stand ready to take our outstretched hand. Talk to somebody. Hear their story. Give the gift of time and attention. Love is not complicated. It is simply the act of presence, without expectation or demand. Let yourself be amazed.

A merry, merry Christmas and a happy new year; let's hope it's a good one, without any fear.

With the help of the children of the Harlem Community Choir and a bottomless Phil Spector wall-of-sound production, Yoko Ono leads us into the childlike simplicity of the chorus and the central theme of the

PHILOSOPHY, ART, CULTURE, & MUSIC

STAGES

song: the triumph of optimism over pessimism. It is a master stroke of casting. These utterly disarming voices form the perfect counterpoint to Lennon's sage presence. For me, the emotional core of the song is the second half of the chorus, with its descending melody and stop-you-dead-in-your-tracks honesty. Rarely does pop music get this naked, this raw, this real. On the surface, a simple hope; at the core, a ground breaking affirmation. No matter what lies in the past, there lies before us a sacred opportunity, the opportunity to realize the ancient dream of peace and dignity for all. With childlike innocence we claim the promise of the ages: the end of fear, the dawn of peace, and the simple sanity of love.

War is over; if you want it war is over now.

Underneath it all, woven through the fabric of the song like a golden thread, are the words of John and Yoko's anti-war campaign. Taken verbatim from the billboards they created and put in major cities all over the world protesting the Vietnam War, this mesmerizing chant moves through the shadows like an unconscious thought. Affirming the infinite power of the collective conscience of humanity, John and Yoko share their boundless optimism that if the people lead, the leaders must follow. But we needn't see this as just an anti-war song. It goes beyond politics and global conflict. As Gandhi taught, the real war is within. What are we doing to create peace in our minds, in our homes, on the road, in our offices, in our classrooms, in our marriages? What Lennon is really teaching is this, that reality is simply a product of the mind. Our thoughts create our words and our words create our actions and our actions create our habits and our habits construct our character. Our greatest gift this holiday season, or any season, is how we show up in our own lives. Who are you going to be? How does your presence impact others? What kind of world are you co-creating? War is not inevitable. Peace is possible. We are always creating, whether consciously or not. Let's choose consciousness. Peace is not the destination. Peace is the journey. As Thich Nhat Hanh said, "There is no way to peace. Peace is the way."

And so this is Christmas, for weak and for strong, the rich and the poor ones, the road is so long.

We have an opportunity. We have a chance at deepening the reach of our own humanity, of broadening the scope of our vision, of expanding our sphere of influence. And Christmas is the right time to begin. All of us are hurting. We're all struggling. Times are hard. There's never enough money. There are health issues and relationship strains. Trouble at work, trouble at home. And the future is fraught with danger. But beneath all the waves of woe lies an infinite sea of stillness. Even an atheist like Lennon gets it. There is a sacred source at the core of all of these overlapping spheres of experience. We only need to sink down into the roots of our inner Being, available to us in each moment. We continually drink from the boundless source flowing forever from the center, and as we do, we are strengthened and encouraged to live the lives we have always imagined. Soon we will be another year older, and another, and on and on until the last ragged breath leaves our tired body. Now is the time to create the lives we all so richly deserve. You don't have to fix the world. Don't turn this vision into yet another egoistic achievement. Instead, simply enjoy your life and find the myriad small ways to connect to the people around you through kindness, through song, through the healing touch of a hand. Draw the presence of the Real to the surface with intentional, conscious action. Whenever you get caught up in the harried, hurried pace of the madness of life, stop, take a good look around and sing to yourself, "and so this is Christmas."



Will the Real Laura Freeman Please Sing a Children's Song?

by Terry Roland

What follows is a highly fictionalized account of the life of characters that exist only in the life and mind of singer-songwriter Laura Freeman. Which facts are true may be unclear to the reader; but still read on. One thing is true, Laura Freeman should not be regarded as "just" a writer and performer of children's songs, but as a talented performance artist and musician whom adults will enjoy as well. So, if you dare continue to read, see if you can find the real Laura Freeman.

A SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF LUNA TART

There are strange goings-on in Austin these days. If you go there, beware. There's no need to worry about vampires, werewolves, or even right-wing neo-cons. No, but there is a woman playing a man dressed as a woman; a torch singer of uncommon wit with a forever broken heart, the very definition of a woman of the night. Her name is Luna Tart. She wears a beret, hangs out in smoky dark cabarets, and sings in her tortured voice about the virtues of drag and the men who have broken her heart. Each time she hits the stage she brings a piece of her heart, which has been torn out by some cruel lover. She seems to think she lives in Berlin in the '30s. She may be the mentor of Marlene Dietrich or she may be her illegitimate child born on some foggy night in the backstage of dingy bar. But, she is there for the taking. And she loves to tell her stories and sing her songs, channeled by a lady named....Laura Freeman.

THE LONG BIOGRAPHY OF LAURA FREEMAN,

WOMAN BEHIND THE MYTH OR THE MYTH BEHIND THE WOMAN . . . OR WHATEVER!!!

Then, there's the person behind the persona just mentioned: Laura Freeman, a musician extraordinaire, talented songwriter, dog loving children's musician. She is like a meteorite when she is performing for children. She is a true Pied Piper of folk, venturing into the world of children and engaging them in a way that will leave most serious adults in her dust while the kids cheer, laugh, and play with more imagination and fun than they could imagine. Witness her YouTube videos and you will see an artist who fully embodies her art with passion, wit, and a style all her own, transcending age and generations. She will not allow adults to do anything short of being kids again. From fan comments on her website she has made both adult and child conquests with her music and live performances. If she is full of energy, she is not hesitant to share it with others.

What is most impressive about her recorded releases for children, including her debut, *A Baker's Dozen*, is that she has recorded and written songs that leave parents returning to play her music long after the kids have been tucked into bed. Her writing and music is of such good quality she can skip rope across the age-bridge that separates us with her own original musical imagination. There is a rainbow that constantly follows her children's music, just as sure as there is dark cloud that follows Luna Tart. Her 2005 release, *Color Wheel Cartwheel*, a concept album about the world of colors, takes her audience through each color with a song devoted to it and a word about the term "rainbow" from people all over the world.

Prior to going into children's music, she found herself craving more than the music she was playing and writing. She wanted something unique to herself. She began by playing songs for the children in her New Orleans neighborhood and found that she

had a knack for it. Thus began her entertaining and magical dance into music for children.

Though her album releases are few, they are mighty. Her first album, *Laura Freeman's Greatest Hit* in her 20s and 30s, is for adults and includes her unique style of songwriting and singing that amounts to a Sally Bowles meets Maria Muldaur approach. Her next, *Baker's Dozen*, has titles like "Creepy, Crawly Stew," "Compost Heap," and "Little Yella Dog." Her song themes are original, imaginative, and engaging with songs like "My Brother Is a Monster" and a journey into "Antarctica." In 2004 her song "Fruit Boogie" was included on an album *Shaking It Up! With Fruits and Veggies* which was used in the Los Angeles Unified School District.

Her most recent release in 2009, *Somersault Season*, is themed around the seasons and physical movement. The songs are meant to get the listener, child and adult alike, to dance, march, walk, and run. It works. I was chased out of Starbucks by marching around the coffee shop without my shoes shouting, "My brother's a monster and I'm a monster too!" After I was released from the state hospital I continued to listen and found this to be one great record for young and old alike.

Her approach is not the kind of music that patronizes kids as though they are only capable of taking in primary and blandly animated music. Rather, Laura surprises kids and adults alike with highly skilled, excellent quality '20s and '30s ragtime jazz and the liveliest of folk and jug band music.

These days she tours the Austin area with her band, the Hey Lolly Lollies, performing for children. There is also the puppet show called "Iris Saves the Land of Black and White." The show tells the story of the little girl, Iris, who must bring color to a land of only black and white. This becomes a great vehicle for teaching life lessons about the variety and diversity of experiences in the

world. According to the Austin Chronicle Laura's show is consistently about universality and the multicultural nature of the entire world.

"Laura Freeman's monthly children's music performances—often held at Ruta Maya cafe—coax wide grins from the grumpiest people. Her newest show, "Color Wheel Cartwheel," sets Roy G. Biv a-spinning in his rainbow footie pajamas. This happy, bouncy, and poetic children's music is written and sung by our local redheaded chanteuse, who leads the listener through the names of the colors of the rainbow in nine different languages: English, Spanish, Dutch, Japanese, French, Italian, German, Farsi, and Hindi, respectively. She trills about the colors in tunes that mix the personalities of Patsy Cline and Carmen Miranda. Recommended for the younger set and anyone who needs to bounce around a-bopping without stopping."

— Austin Chronicle Best of 2005

And let's not forget about Luna—remember her? Her album, *Luna Tart Dies*, was released in 2007. It gives the listener a chance to hear the best of Ms. Tart's long and colorful career. Though the music is meant to be tortured (thus, she is a "torch singer"), it also comes with a wink and smile from Laura Freeman herself. In the YouTube clips of her on-stage performance it's clear Laura is having the time of her life and so is the audience. Her live performance is not to be missed!

But, let's not commit the theatrical sin of confusing Ms. Tart and Ms. Freeman. In the engaging 2007 release, *Luna Tart Dies* (of a broken heart, of course!), she brings a sense of shocking theatrical performance art to her material on this CD. It portrays a woman who is self-possessed or perhaps a more accurate term would be self-obsessed. And this obsession is most clearly found in her desire for fame. During the course of the album she joins a circus, finds a sugar daddy, spends all of his money, finds her own lovers in the meantime, and then moans and moans about her broken heart when he dumps her. The instrumentation on the album includes saloon pianos, trombones, accordions, and even a toy piano. The key here with both the album and her live show is that it's not for children and it's very entertaining and well done.

At this time, Laura would like to see the show broaden from folk clubs, since she



Freeman in character

feels it's become a viable piece of theater. She certainly captures the feeling of a character as well. Indeed, she has recently completed a play with Rudy Ranirez called "Luna Tart Dies of a Broken Heart." It has won the BEST of the FEST in the Austin Frontera Fest January 2007.

With her her unique style of performance art, Laura Freeman deserves to expand far beyond Austin to the world of theater as well as to her current venues. Her work with children's music will continue. This is how she is best known. However, her alter ego may emerge at any time with the need to vamp and tramp on a cabaret stage filled with smoke and despair. Hopefully, this never happens at a children's show.

But, seriously now, Ms. Freeman is a diverse and unique talent who will go far with her originality and willingness to thoroughly absorb herself in her performances be it for adults or children. She is the consummate troubadour being a jester, a musical clown of sorts, and a genuine artist underneath the facade. And when she says her real persona is the one she becomes in her children's shows, you can add that she is a wonderful lady as well.

Don't miss Laura Freeman in concert on Sunday, December 6, 7:30pm at the home of Jimmy Duke. For reservations call 619.443.9622 or email jimmyduke@cox.net



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Dawn Mischele In the Moonlight

by Mike Alvarez

Take a heaping tablespoon of Sarah McLachlan's vocal timbre, a pinch of Sheryl Crow's phrasing, and mix them with a generous helping of originality. Stir thoroughly until the ingredients take on the timeless textures and flavorings of revered acoustic artists like James Taylor or Carole King. Very soon you'll end up with a pretty good idea of what Dawn Mischele's album *In the Moonlight* sounds like. The arrangements are spare, giving these songs a light and airy quality that perfectly frames Mischele's ethereal vocals. These well-crafted songs really shine when laid bare in this manner. Her expressions of hope, joy, melancholy, and yearning are best heard unobscured by excessive production. Oftentimes they coexist within the same tune. Her sound is firmly in the acoustic realm with guitar and sometimes the piano providing the bulk of the support. Hand percussion and live strings are used to great effect, lending their warmth and immediacy to the songs in which they appear.

The gently strummed guitar chords of "Water" are a deliciously moody introduction for what follows. Subtle brushed drumming, minimalist bass notes, and a liquid cello countermelody create a backdrop for Mischele's metaphorical ponderings on love, existence, and their transitory nature. This theme is further explored on "Dominoes," and, indeed, throughout the album as a whole. This particular track has the potential to be the breakthrough single with its memorably hook-laden melody. Musically, things get sunnier on the title tune, with strings taking a prominent supporting role. It is here that the songwriting is most reminiscent of James Taylor's best work without being derivative.

The piano becomes the dominant instrument on "Kiss You." Some very tasteful cello lines embellish it, sometimes echoing the vocal melody at strategic points. Combined with the sincere vocal performance, the overall effect is very affecting. On "Deep as the Sea," she takes a stylistic journey into gospel and blues territory. Two chiming electric guitars bring to mind the Deep South as she sings an ode to impossible desire. This song is definitely one of the album's high points. A Brazilian samba-like feel infuses "Same Sad Story," which creates an oddly bouncy mood for the somber words that tell of a desperate search for sense and identity. It's a nicely telegraphed incongruity that catches the attention and makes one think.

This is an album of very strong material, delivered with a gentle and spacious sound. There is no wasted motion here. The songs speak for themselves, going directly to listeners' hearts without a lot of studio artifice. Dawn Mischele has a firm grip on her artistic vision as well as the talent to bring it to fruition as she fearlessly explores folk, pop, jazz, Latin, and blues sounds. The richness of her lyrical imagery, even when it's occasionally obtuse, reveals an uncommon depth of artistry. Her delicately mellifluous voice and excellent command of the songwriter's language are a potent combination. "Good Morning," the bonus track,

continued next column



Highly Kind Don't Wake Albert

by Jennifer Carney

Highly Kind, where have you been all these years? *Don't Wake Albert* feels more like your eleventh studio album than your debut. You say all those guitar solos are played by a teenage guitar prodigy? What about the poignant lyrics? The Little Feat meets Traveling Wilburys sound? I can't believe that you put together your first album together this year. Crazy.

This Alabama quartet's debut, *Don't Wake Albert*, is tuneful and lyrically evocative. Overall, *Albert* has a very soft-rock feel, but Highly Kind fights strict categorization. They are not a jam band. Albert Simpson (the album's namesake) and Randall Bramlett have infused *Albert* with the sounds they love best – cheerfully mixing rock, blues, folk, country and western, and soul music. Josh Gooch, an 18-year-old blues guitar phenom and familiar face in the San Diego music scene, adds his versatile chops to several songs on the CD. He was invited to Alabama specifically to record with the band and easily adapted to the eclectic sound of the record.

Albert opens with "Don't Wake Elvis" – the song that prompted the title of the disc – kicking things off with Clash-like riffing on electric guitar. "Have a Little Faith" follows, its acoustic guitars setting the tone for a rock shuffle with some great, distorted slide guitar playing. "You Think You Know Someone" is next, a country-tinged tune with hints of soul.

"Bury My Soul" is a slow country song about the heart's burdens. The pedal steel guitar and country piano floating in the background recall old time C&W. "Bits and Pieces" is a shimmering blues/soul song about little things that bring back strong memories. "Home" follows – a light rock 'n' soul song with jazzy piano solo reminiscent of Bruce Hornsby.

At this point, the album jumps genres more noticeably. "Table of the Lord" and its descriptions of shady surroundings and shady people takes Greek-like turns with its mandolin-cum-bouzouki. A jaunty clarinet starts off "Done My Time," a light-hearted New Orleans jazz-inspired tune. Next is the darker, Latin-influenced sound of the not-too-sad-about-it breakup song, "Somebody's Got to Make a Move" with its Santana-like guitar effect, Hammond organ, and congas. Then it's back to rock with the album's only jam-y sounding song, "Looks Can Be Deceiving" and the more somber "Fell off the Wagon." The ethereal "Fading" closes out the CD like a shooting star on a summer night; the lovely pedal steel and harmony vocals round things out with a perfectly soft touch.

Don't Wake Albert is a very strong debut, almost anachronistic in its range and polish. This is an album that is chill, earnest and inviting, and makes listening to it a sonic experience. Simpson and Bramlett are so intently focused on songcraft that it's no wonder Highly Kind has a sound beyond their years.

Dawn Mischele, continued

shows the same level of craftsmanship and musicality that permeates the rest of the album. It's definitely not an afterthought. Quite the contrary, it serves more as a punctuation mark to a very satisfying artistic statement.



Derren Raser Home in This Direction

by Frank Kocher

San Diego's Derren Raser has been developing his folk-pop chops for several years, releasing an album with the Derren Raser Band in 2005. Now, the singer/songwriter is back with a solo debut, *Home in This Direction*.

Raser is a soft-rock ballad specialist whose website describes him as "an old soul in a new age." The new disc definitely affirms this, as his smooth, perfectly expressive pop vocals resonate not only acknowledged influences Paul Simon and James Taylor, but also other '70s popsters like Todd Rundgren, Steven Bishop, and David Gates, the voice and pen of radio monsters Bread. While his voice may sound like these guys, his songwriting stands very well on its own, combining lyrical imagery with familiar-sounding hooks.

The sound on the 13 tracks here, with a sharp production job by Chris Hobson, frames Raser and his acoustic guitar with a studio full of session players providing a lush musical cloud to build up, lift, and fill out the songs.

The title tune opens the album with a soft, folk-style song that gets the listener acquainted with Raser's comfortable voice as it goes effortlessly high. "Deliver Me" rocks harder than most tracks here, yet he sounds right at home on the acoustic rocker with a powerful vocal. Another soft, folksy ballad follows with pedal steel behind Raser's personal lyrical story, "When Enters Love." Next up, the obvious single, "Warn the World," cranks up the beat and uses a perfect arrangement and infectious melody to show Raser at his best. This track measures up to the kind of songs that separated Rundgren from the pack in the '70s, like "Hello, It's Me." It is that good, maybe better.

"Missing the Point" shows that Raser is willing to try something a little different, weaving an unusual time signature, jazzy sounding verse together with soaring chorus in regular time that gives it even greater impact. An obvious tribute to Simon, "Friends and Lovers" is next, and this sounds so similar to Paul's "Something So Right" and "Still Crazy After All These Years" that it is distracting. "Slow Down" is another highlight, as Raser captures a Beatles-in-*Revolver*-mode vibe, using smooth harmonies and another killer hook. Accordion and keyboards move "Goodbye" forward, a change of pace that helps burn in yet another catchy pop lick. "Fill Me Up" is a good acoustic folk song with a memorable melody and lyrical message, and may be the only arrangement misstep here, as what sounds like a string quartet overdresses the sound and makes it sound in parts like Paul McCartney's "Yesterday." "Out of Luck" has a Radiohead-Coldplay flavor, with a hard guitar chorus and rock keyboards. It works really well as Raser has the pipes to sing just about anything and nail it.

Home in This Direction is a delight. This disc should not only expand Derren Raser's audience but should also get him even more attention as a songwriter on the rise.



John Foltz Grounded

by Frank Kocher

Temecula resident John Foltz is a singer/songwriter keyboardist who makes pop, soul, and rock music built upon his jazzy piano stylings and delivered in a versatile tenor. He released an album in 2001, *Indigo*, and has played all over Southern California; his new disc is *Grounded*.

This disc offers a spectrum of musical styles from gospel to jazz and all shades in between, and Foltz shows a rare ability to compose music on many of the tracks that seems instantly memorable, without simultaneously mimicking a song previously recorded by someone else. Not that his influences can't be heard in the sound – Billy Joel, Steve Winwood, and early Bruce Hornsby vibes are there, but Foltz cooks up a different rhythm pace and vocal arrangement to each tune so there is an eclectic feel to the project.

"One or the Other" kicks things off with a soulful slow-tempo jazzy pop tune, as Foltz gives the listener some social observation in a strong, soulful vocal wrapped in some of the best keyboard work on the disc. The gospel-R&B approach taken in "Got to Be Who I Am" is okay, although when Foltz adds some vocal affectations and tries for gospel shouting, it sounds like this just isn't his real voice. Nice try, though. Next up, "This Is Where I Belong" sounds like a hit song from the golden age of '70s radio. Taking a nod from Billy Joel without stealing any riffs or melodies, this one is a keeper that will have the listener wanting more, and the next song delivers. "On My Way" works a different groove as more of a dance song, but is just as infectiously catchy; these two standout tracks alone make the disc well worthwhile, but there are plenty more coming.

The 13 songs feature unobtrusive lyrics about the trials and travails of daily life, relationships, and Foltz's experiences. Nice production by Foltz, Alta Loma producer Lorenz, and San Diegan Sven-Erik Seaholm, and mixing by Seaholm help give each song a different texture, with horns, guitars, and string effects used well.

"Standing Still" starts slow and somber, another strong track that uses dark atmosphere as it builds to a string and guitar crescendo in one of Foltz' strongest vocals on the album. Echoes of Joel definitely inhabit "Murmur," though it clicks as an observational ballad. Likewise, Foltz' tune to his kids, "All About You," recalls early Elton John. "Live Love" is another one of those immediately memorable songs, this time using a style like Bruce Hornsby's first few discs by rocking a keyboard riff and chorus hook to near perfection. After the slow, spare ballad "Done to You," Foltz closes the disc out with another rocker, "Lost on Sunset" with a nifty bit of piano riffing.

Grounded is a very entertaining and solid recording by a talented musician who has found himself as a songwriter, with several outstanding songs. It will have the listener playing it again and again.



Peter Sprague String Consort The Wild Blue

by Erick Pettersen

Jazz guitarist Peter Sprague's latest CD, *The Wild Blue*, is a musical journey that sets a series of stories to music. The veteran San Diego area musician uses a string quartet and percussion to produce sounds that are at times reminiscent of chases, conversations, and moonlit dreams.

In the opening title track, the string quartet sets the stage and snare drums quicken the pace, causing the string quartet to follow suit. After Sprague's guitar joins in, violin slows the pace of the song, then the song ends as drums again quicken to provide a faster pulse. "The Beatles" is softer, with the guitar and violin playing a duet, while light touches of snare in the background. It's off to a smoky jazz club for the vibe of "The Bomb Scare Blues" as Sprague cleverly uses the string quartet and some nifty bass work by Bob Magnussen to convey the sound of a live gig, the listener can almost hear glasses clinking together. The string quartet steps up in Bach's "Prelude Number 9," which creates orchestration of drums, bass, and guitar with interludes of classical baroque flavor by the quartet. The jazz guitar and drums merge seamlessly with the strings as the music spans the ages. Sprague's lyrical finger-picking and expressive scales dominate "Day Danse," as the violins and his flamenco-influenced guitar play off of each other.

Written many years ago for Sprague's friend Karin Schalm, "Karin's Psalm" opens softly with the string quartet. Guitar and drums join in, creating a dream-like sound, the rhythm changes with the guitar, and drums add an unmistakable turn.

As on his 2008 disc, *Peter Sprague Plays Solo*, Sprague is so technically flawless and versatile that the listener may tend to forget that he is one of the very best jazz guitarists out there. The use of a string quartet on an entire disc is also a stroke of genius; this music is different.

A lovely viola solo is part of "Mudra," which begins with slow guitar figures and strums, as the string quartet and other instruments harmonize with it. Sprague pays his due to Duke Ellington in "The Duke" as he plugs in and lays down some sharp improvising, as the sound here is mostly jazz combo-guitar, bass, and drums with some nice embellishment by the quartet. For "Mahavishu," he mixes hypnotic sounds of the tamboura and guitar to create an alluring sound. Featuring Ron Wagner on tablas along with the string quartet, this tune features the steel-stringed acoustic guitar playing an exotic instrumentation that brings to mind John McLaughlin's early fusion jazz bands. A tango-influenced version of Chick Corea's "Isfahan" wraps up the disc.

The Wild Blue conjures up memories of alley cats wearing fedoras and plucking the strings of their bass, episodes of family shows whose make-believe families invite jazz legends over to their house for coffee, and romantic movies of two estranged lovers reuniting after a moonlit stroll. For those who sit back, listen, and enjoy, *The Wild Blue* tells a story for everyone and tells everyone's story.



O, BERKLEY WHERE HART THOU?

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Show Finale



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Robin Adler & Calman Hart



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Astra Kelly



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Barbara Nesbitt @ AMSD



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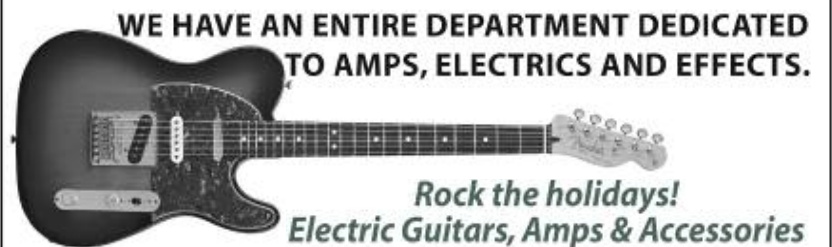
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