

# T SAN DIEGO TROUBADOUR

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



August 2010

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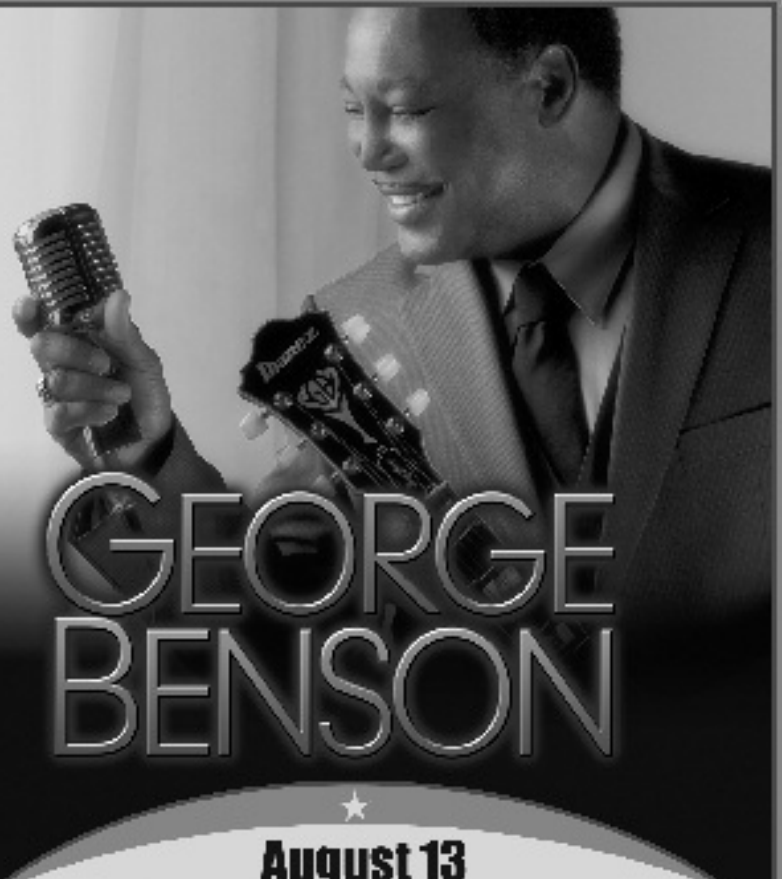
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at  
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**PAT  
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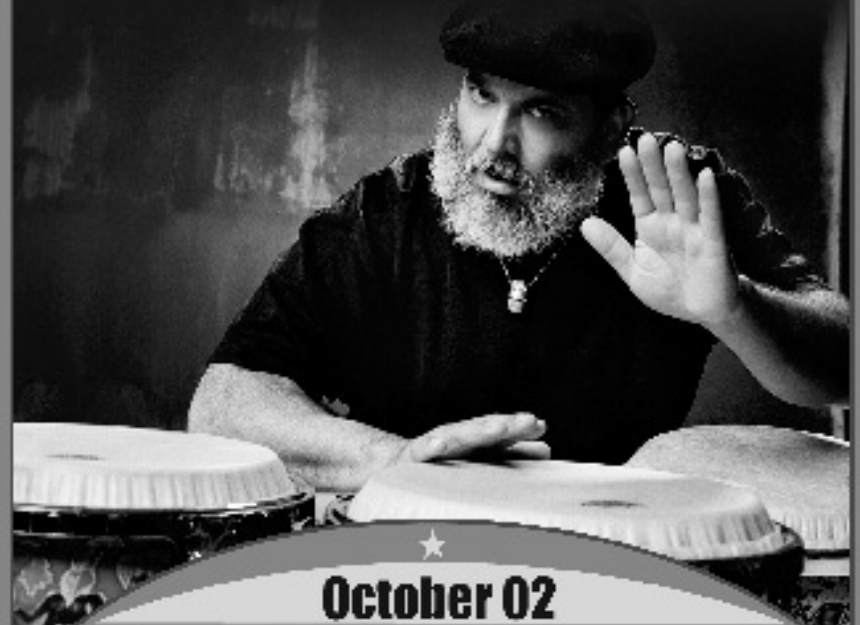
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**LOS LONELY BOYS**  
LIVE IN CONCERT



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August 15

**PONCHO SANCHEZ**



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**TAJ MAHAL**



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October 21



# T

**SAN DIEGO TROUBADOUR**  
Alternative country, Americana, roots, folk, blues, gospel, jazz, and bluegrass music news

## 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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Dear Troubadour,

At the risk of sounding maudlin, I want to say that in my years of playing music in this town, no one in print media in this town has ever treated me as well as you guys have and for that I am very grateful. For reasons having to do with luck and general incompetence on my own part, I have seldom come to anyone's attention much less favorable attention in print media. I did get a taped show on County TV network one time that circulated both here and in Las Vegas for awhile and that was cool, as I got a few gigs out of it.

Thanks for the consideration of inclusion and thanks again Allen for the jaunty, rhythmic, riding shotgun in a '56 Ford down a moonlit road style of writing the article. I liked the way you involved yourself in a personal way in the article, making note of your vulnerabilities and the all too long and true time traveler connections. We are, after all, children of the fifties and sixties. I knew you right away when you came in the door because you had that look of the beat scene from the fifties. You looked the way a writer on the music scene should look in my mind.

Long ago I gave up on the idea of seeing my smiling face on the cover of the *Rolling Stone*. My goal now would be to see it on the cover of the *Troubadour*. You may not have seen the last of me yet.

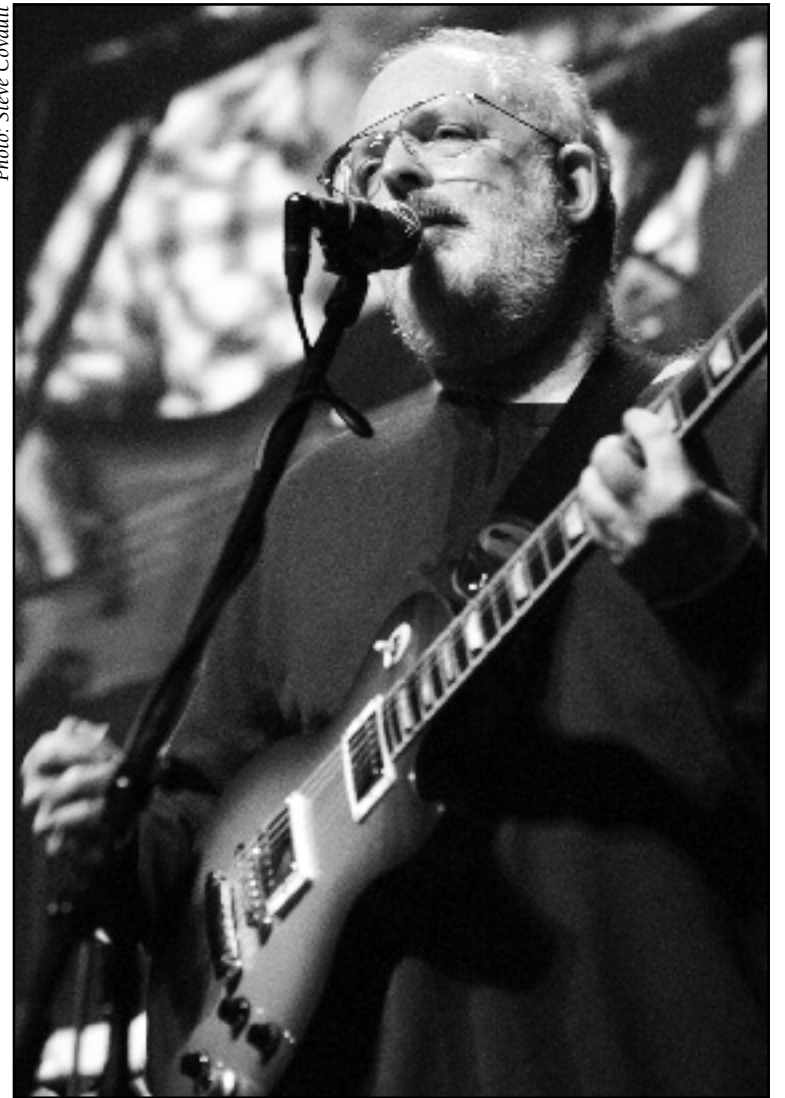
And if I should make it to the cover I'll grab five copies for my mother. I know she'll know, wherever it is, that she is resting in this universe.

Thanks again.

Hugh Gaskins

Photo: Steve Covault

# Jack Tempchin: The "Feeling" That Keeps on Giving



by Raul Sandelin

"He's a great songwriter...  
He's just really good at it."  
—Don Henley

Early last month, a handsome assemblage of San Diego singer-songwriters with some of LA's finest got together at Anthology to honor our city's own Jack Tempchin, author of the Eagles' "Peaceful, Easy Feeling" and "Already Gone" and Johnny Rivers' "Slow Dancing." The occasion was to celebrate Jack's 45th year in the music business and included performances by Lisa Sanders, Candy Kane, Berkley Hart, Alex Woodard, Mike Riley from the Allman Brothers, Richard Stekol from Tempchin's old band the Funky Kings, Steve Wood from Honk, Carlos Olmeda, and Laura Jansen.

The show was a partnership with KPRI's Homegrown Fridays and MC'd by KPRI DJ Cathryn Beeks. (This in itself is refreshing to see the independently owned KPRI supporting local music in this day of corporate formatting.) Starting at 10pm, later than most Anthology events, the show was sold out well ahead of time. And, a long line of ticket holders filed down the block an easy hour before the doors opened. After his friends serenaded him with, first, an all-acoustic, then an electric set, Tempchin took the stage to round out the night.

Flashback 45 years: growing up in Rolando, home of both the first Jack in the Box and America's first shopping mall, Jack graduated from Crawford High School at 54th St. and El Cajon Blvd and began hitting the local coffee shops with guitar in hand. He is well remembered for hanging out at Lou Curtiss' music store where he taught guitar and met fellow San Diego singer-songwriter Tom Waits. Most notably, he was the opening act-in-residence at the Candy Company, located near the old Alvarado Drive In on El Cajon Blvd. in La Mesa. It is at the Candy Company where he honed his craft and where he met two other young musicians who drifted in. They were Glenn Frey and J.D. Souther. During this time too, Tempchin was managing the Backdoor at SDSU and meeting many

national touring acts.

This is how Jack Tempchin cut his teeth in the music business. He wrote songs. He went on stage alone with just his guitar and performed his own material. Between it all, he'd tell stories, creating a one-on-one connection with his audience. This was how Jack started 45 years ago. As the record deals were signed and the royalties started rolling in, however, the Candy Company gave way to national tours and shows with the likes of Ringo Starr, Jackson Browne, Dave Mason, Poco, Dolly Parton, Karla Bonoff, Chicago, Christopher Cross, Kenny Loggins, Timothy B. Schmit, Barry McGuire, Tom Rush, Al Kooper, and Emmylou Harris. Playing for larger and larger audiences, Tempchin opted to hire a backing band. And, this has been his live format since the early '70s: Playing within a group context with all of the comfort and support that comes with having other musicians on stage.

However, over the last year, this has all changed. As part of his 45th anniversary in the music business, Jack has decided to go back to the lone singer-songwriter format of his youth, allowing him to stretch out a bit, get to know his audience, and banter back and forth. One thing he is really enjoying is the chance to tell stories, not just the stories behind the songs, but stories that stand alone by themselves. In the 1980s, Jack was writing for a number of newspapers and newsletters, including the newsletter put out then by the Belly Up Tavern. The pieces he wrote were humorous and clever and focused on his abilities to spin a yarn without musical accompaniment. For the last 20 years, however, this "other side" of Jack's creative engine has been hibernating ... until now.

Another side of Jack has also been emerging lately. Known more for his more serious romantic tunes and subject matter that upholds the SoCal cowboy lifestyle, Tempchin has been putting out songs that reflect his sense of humor and less dramatic side. "Light a joint" reflects Jack's passionate advocacy for legalization. "Thongs 4 U"

continued on page 7.

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# NANCY PORTER

## HELPING MUSICIANS FIND THEIR INNER CHANGE

by Steve Thorn

In the 800 block of Turquoise Street in Pacific Beach stands a nondescript structure, a building ignored by the hundreds of local and Arizonan motorists driving past. Its neighbor to the left is an assisted living facility; to its right, the ubiquitous beach area condo.

But if the sands of time could momentarily flow in reverse to the 1990s, the building would have had a more cheerful paint job, and the sound of acoustic guitars would have been heard from inside. This was the home of the Inner Change coffee house, a short-lived but important chapter in San Diego music history. A transplanted Alaskan named Jewel developed her songwriting craft at the coffee house before her meteoric rise and international following; Joy Eden Harrison, now living and working in the Midwest, also called the Inner Change home; and former Rugburns turned solo artists – Steve Poltz and Gregory Page – still maintain their vibrant stage personalities, which evolved from late night shows in PB many years ago.

The one San Diegan who best recalls the Inner Change's highlights (surprise guests taking the stage) and the less glamorous elements (mopping up the messes) would be the coffee house's former proprietor, Nancy Porter. A member of the original espresso bar and beat poet generation, Porter has lent her support to musicians of all ages. "Generation Gap" has never been – and will never be – part of her lexicon.

How appropriate for Porter to have been born in Colorado, as employment in the music business requires an element of the pioneer spirit. Porter grew up in Denver, mentioned in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* and the city that gave Judy Collins her start.

"In elementary school, I was introduced to the flute," said Porter. "They asked me not to sing." The memory triggers laughter from Porter. (Laughter – along with a smile that could light up Carnegie Hall – are perhaps her most endearing traits.)

"I played through my last year of high school, playing classical, jazz, and marching to the great music of John Phillip Sousa. "Rhapsody in Blue" is one of my favorites, along with Herbie Mann, Ella Fitzgerald, Louis Armstrong, Quincy Jones. I would sit and listen for hours, listening to every instrument, hanging on to notes, melodies, lyrics."

After high school, Porter frequented the

candlelit espresso bars of Colorado's capitol city.

"The only one that stayed around was Yum Yums on Colorado Boulevard," said Porter. "That's when the beatniks were around and I loved going to hear the improvisational notes of the jazz musicians, poets spewing words of the war, while the flower children were following Peter, Paul, and Mary. I was wearing my black beret, listening to Joan Baez, the Kingston Trio, and wondering who I was going to be. I couldn't get enough of all that the music was offering. Not enough coffee houses around Denver to satisfy my appetite for music. I moved to L.A. in 1964."

By the mid-1960s, Los Angeles had established itself as the new mecca of the recording industry. The studio productions of Phil Spector and Brian Wilson influenced the teenage market; music fans with more sophisticated tastes were still enjoying the rich harvest of West Coast Jazz, led by pioneers Barney Kessel, Art Pepper, Stan Getz, and Chet Baker.

"The music scene was incredible," Porter recalled. "In Hermosa Beach, the Lighthouse was packed with people waiting to hear a lick or two from Miles Davis or John Coltrane. You could go to Hollywood to the Brown Derby and after hours, the bar turned into a jam with all the big names in town gathering to play together. You could have coffee and great conversation between the sit-ins. Then it was off to Venice Beach for the mystical sounds of the new invented surf culture music. A lot of the jazz musicians were looking to play the new rock or funk stuff; Miles Davis made the transformation with ease, helping along the younger musicians in the jams."

Porter and her former husband developed a friendship with actor-singer Bobby Sherman, who was a teen idol before the emergence of David Cassidy and the Partridge Family era. "It was the early '70s. My husband told me about this new recording studio on Ventura Blvd. in Sherman Oaks. Bobby suggested we get involved and it would be a good investment. Val Garay, who owned the studio, met with us in the studio and we invested. Getting to sit in on the recording of albums was so exciting. Val, who is a genius in the studio, would make the music happen. To be able to hear and understand how it works from the beginning to the end was a gift. It was a long process – hours in the studio."



Music supporter Nancy Porter



Jewel at Inner Change, mid-1990s



Inner Change flyer with Robin Henkel, George Sluppick, and Clark Stacer

Porter said the studio, called Record One, was "the first privately owned recording studio in L.A. The studio hosted James Taylor, Kim Carnes, and Linda Ronstadt. Linda was also a close neighbor of mine. Those years were filled with creative musical geniuses all around us. It was a time in music when you could sit in intimate settings and be able to experience the music and its makers."

Porter eventually moved to San Diego in 1990 and found a music scene that was smaller than Los Angeles but no less enthusiastic. "I opened the Inner Change in 1992. I wanted to create a place where you could communicate through music, art, spoken words and laughter, and to share in all that is offered. The Inner Change was a true coffee house where the sharing of intellect, ideas, and moments of insights happened daily. It was the people's coffee house; musicians brought their own music, artists expressed their visions, poets rung out their words of wisdom while the comedians brought the laughter."

Local legend has it that Nancy formulated her ideas for the coffee house on the back of a Grateful Dead poster.

"Yes I did! I wanted a people's place where everyone had a part to share about

their lives. I drove about the freeways (roads) and came up the 'Innerchange' of life. Usually, if you came to the Inner Change feeling bad, you would leave with a better feeling than when you had gotten there."

Porter believed the attitude adjustment carried over to the artists on stage. "Having Joy Eden Harrison on stage was always exciting; she was working on songs for her upcoming album *Angel Town*, and the best way I can describe Joy is a class act. She was filled with a spark that would light up the room when she started to sing – sultry, engaging, soft spoken, always surprising lyrics that would make you think. The Inner Change became a mecca for musicians who felt at home and comfortable and it was a place where you could play for the fun of it and work out the kinks in your act and still smile at yourself."

Performers sometimes had to perform gracefully under pressure. "Steve Poltz and Gregory Page played one night when the power had been shut off due to not being able to pay the bill. We ran an extension cord from the back house to the coffee house and between songs, Gregory and Steve would pour coffee. Both were having a serious moment and played



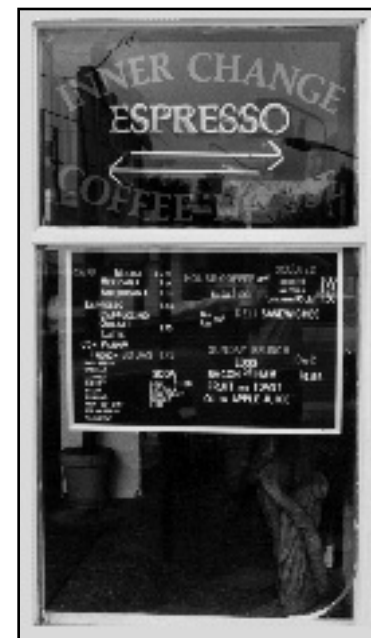
Inner Change at night



Ron Ratola and Peter Sprague



Inner Change music line up



through some classical chords, showing another dimension to their musical talents. They were true wonderful geniuses and to have both together was an amazing gift. I can close my eyes and hear Steve and Gregory. Along came Jewel with John Katcher and Jimmy Lewis and Steve, wanting to play, and I gave Jewel Thursdays. Jewel would go to the beach and take fliers and hand them out to all the surfers and they would come on Thursdays, hoping to get a date...and then they realized that she was really really good and talented and beautiful."

Creative application of an extension cord could only last for so long. In 1995, Porter made the difficult decision to bring the curtain down at the Inner Change. "I closed after running out of money, decided to close before I couldn't pay the people that had been so wonderful to make my dream come true. I closed the doors with \$5 in hand and a big smile on my face. Seeing all the talent expressed and the growth from within all of us was the reward cherished forever. I can close my eyes and listen to the music and words, [recall] the mural that would take your breath away, and smile from the inside out."

The Inner Change coffee house may be a memory. But 15 years after its closure, there are many musicians in town who still seek Nancy Porter's advice and unwavering support.

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# Recordially, Lou Curtiss

THE SEARCH FOR "HASSAYAM-PA SAM" AND A LOT OF OTHER STUFF



My Grandad played the mandolin and sang a pile of old songs, one of which got passed down to my Dad, who used to sing bits of it to me when I was a little kid. He'd always

tell me that "there was one guy worse than you and that was old Hassayampa Sam who chewed his Daddy's fingers off because he scolded him." I remember parts of the song about him drinkin' "pizen juice and tigers' blood to boot." For some reason my Dad quit singing it after we came to California in 1952. In fact, he quit singing altogether about that time). Sometime in the '60s I got him to write the words down for me but I've misplaced them with all the shop moves that have gone on since that time (I'm talking about Folk Arts Rare Records relocating three times since those days).

This is a time when I'm trying to get a good list of family songs and that is certainly one of them. My grandad was named George Curtiss (as was my Dad) and he worked in the lumber camps and sawmills in western Washington after coming out there with his brother Jim from Indiana (who was a Colonel in the Union Army during the Civil War; he actually retired a Brevet

Brigadier General, but everyone called him Colonel Jim). Along with working in the mills my grandad was involved with union organizing and the IWW (he played in a street band from time to time, singing some of those old songs from *The Little Red Songbook*; Dad said he knew Mac McClintock). Grandad was shot and killed during the events surrounding the Everett Massacre, which took place in the teens. I didn't come into this world until 1939, so I never got to know him, but I have my Dad's stories and a few remnants of an old song about a mean old cuss named "Hassayampa Sam."

Sometime around 1960 Harold Darling opened the Sign of the Sun bookstore at Adams Ave. and College near El Cajon Blvd. It catered mostly to San Diego State University students with used textbooks and magazines of a political and artistic nature. That was the era when folk music was making its play on the pop music scene. Harold, who didn't exactly approve, put in a

stock of the more traditional type records of the time (labels like Folkways, Prestige International, Delmark, Arhoolie, Orgin Jazz Library, Riverside) and hired people to work in the store who had a bent toward traditional music. A concert series was the inevitable result, and over the next five years or so a pretty wide range of traditional, folk, and blues artists appeared at the Sign. Most of those concerts were taped. When my tape to digital Grammy grant came through in 2007, some of the first concerts transferred (and sent to the Library of Congress and to UCLA) were the Sign of the Sun Concerts featuring Bessie Jones, Jean Ritchie, Guy Carawan, Rev. Gary Davis, Hedy West, Stu Jamieson, the Chambers Brothers, the Scottsville Squirrel Barkers, Jack and Marilyn Powell, and Jean Redpath. Now, I know there was some taping done at other Sign of the Sun concerts. I'd sure like to find material by the Kentucky Colonels, the New Lost City Ramblers, Mike Seeger, Rita Weill, Ramblin' Jack Elliott, Rosalie Sorrels, Mississippi John Hurt, Skip James, Slim Critchlow, and others. All too often tapes wander home with people and get lost. Now, of course, folks don't listen to reel-to-reel and some may not know what it is. This material needs preservation. We will be starting our second round of digital transfers soon. It'd sure be nice if we



Photo: Steve Covault  
Lou Curtiss

could have some more material from the Sign of the Sun to share with folks and keep them intact.

A few years back we started a SINGERS CIRCLE on the front porch at Folk Arts Rare Records and after a while moved it down to a noisy little bar at Adams and 30th called Kadan, which ran its course a few weeks ago. We tried the front porch again and finally decided to move it out to our home in El Cajon. So, the Lou and Virginia Curtiss Old Time Singers Circle is now at 1725 Granite Hills Drive in El Cajon (corner of Garrison Way) on the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month, starting at 6pm. Please join us!

Recordially  
Lou Curtiss

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by Renetta Asaro

Not so high on a hill above the town a breeze floats along the golden pasture and across the dusty grill of the '39 International, bringing with it the unmistakable plunk of a banjo played by someone who knows the strings well. Bluegrass music is home once again at the Antique Gas and Steam Engine Museum.

For the eighth year, Summergrass San Diego welcomes award-winning bluegrass artists to the stage of the rustic Vista museum August 20th, 21st, and 22nd. Opening the festival Friday at 3 p.m. will be local legends Chris Stuart and Backcountry. Chris, together with fellow band members Janet Beazley and the Uglum/Ward family will also be leading the Summergrass Bluegrass Camp for Kids this year. They'll return to the festival stage at 4 p.m. Saturday, and at 12:30 pm Sunday just after the Kampers' performance.

Enthusiastic bluegrass fans have the rest of the weekend to enjoy some of the best bluegrass in the industry including John Reischman and the Jaybirds, Michael Cleveland and Flamekeeper, the Special Consensus, Bluegrass Etc., Virtual Strangers, Lonesome Otis, the Tail Draggers, FaultLine, Bluegrass Brethren, and (relative) newcomers, the Anderson Family.

Headliners John Reischman and the Jaybirds bring on their elegant West Coast style with tunes and songs composed by each of the band members and highlighting the strengths of mandolin master Reischman, "rhythm czar" Jim Nunally, multi-talented fiddler Greg Spatz, Trisha Gagnon's sweet bass and amazing voice (or is it amazing bass and sweet voice?), and Nick Hornbuckle, whose rocker past steams up in his hot banjo. This eclectic group of musicians will surprise with their diversity, but not with their solid and dynamic presentation. Catch the Jaybirds on the main stage at 5 and 9 p.m. Friday, or Saturday at 5 p.m. only.

Individually and collectively, few artists have amassed the array of awards and nominations of Michael Cleveland and Flamekeeper. Like many Summergrass performers this year, Michael began learning his instrument at a very young age and was onstage at the 1993 IBMA award show with the man himself, Bill Monroe. Michael and his incredible fiddling bring together the talents of Jesse Brock on mandolin, Tom Adams on guitar, Marshall Wilborn on bass, and Jesse Baker on banjo. All of these artists bring an

# BLUEGRASS AT ITS BEST: SUMMERGRASS!

incredible range of experience to the band, having played with some of the most celebrated performers in bluegrass. Flamekeeper will be onstage Friday at 8 p.m., and twice on Saturday at noon and at 9 p.m.

The Special Consensus celebrated their 35th anniversary this year with the spring release of their appropriately titled CD, 35. A look at the band's members make that a little unbelievable given that mandolin player Rick Faris, bass player and vocalist David Thomas, and guitarist and vocalist Ryan Roberts appear as though they may have yet to see 35 years pass by. But the story of the Special Consensus as directed by founder (and banjo player) Greg Cahill is a significant part of the history of bluegrass, and the group carries on that tradition with professionalism and a true passion. Summergrass attendees can enjoy this musical heritage Saturday at 11 a.m. and 8 p.m. and Sunday at 3 p.m.

The mix of world-renowned bluegrass musicians and local talent is one of the features that have brought the Summergrass Bluegrass Festival to the top of the list of bluegrass festivals statewide. Bluegrass Etc. is the personification of this blend. John Moore at vocals, mandolin, and guitar; Dennis Caplinger at vocals and strings; together with Bill Bryson at bass form a formidable and legendary bluegrass trio. Each one of these men owns a vast and impressive résumé. Don't miss them onstage at 4 p.m. Friday, and at 2 and 7 p.m. on Saturday.

More local bluegrass goodness flows from Faultline, Lonesome Otis, Tail Draggers and the Virtual Strangers, who, fortunately, aren't strangers to the local bluegrass scene at all. In fact, Mike Tatar Sr. on banjo, Jon Cherry on mandolin, Kit Birkett on guitar, and Yvonne Tatar on bass lend their harmonic vocals and melodic, traditional style to bluegrass festivals across the West, but are local favorites for many events. They're scheduled for the main stage Friday evening only at 7 p.m.

Faultline will open the Saturday

morning festivities at 10 a.m. Bring your hot coffee and breakfast goodies from the Antique Gas and Steam Engine Museum Bake Shop and enjoy this group of bluegrass musicians whose self-description includes words like non-traditional, eclectic, and unique. Appearing on the stage at Summergrass will be founders Harry Joe Reynolds (guitar, harmonica, bass) and Kathleen Johnson (vocals, autoharp, and fiddle) accompanied by steel guitarist and mandolin player Don Reed and bassist Fred Wade.

Sunday, Lonesome Otis will take the stage twice, at 10 a.m. following the Bluegrass Brethren, then again to close the festival at 4 p.m. If their recently released (June 2010) CD *Weary Travelers* is any indication, festivalgoers can expect strong, classic bluegrass. Chris Ruud, who is singer and guitarist for the band, will be highlighted at IBMA's Songwriter Showcase for his song from that album "Come Weary Traveler." Besides Chris, band members are Steve Stout, fiddle and vocals, Chris Cerna, mandolin and vocals, Dave Richardson on banjo, and Celeste Cerna on bass.

The Tail Draggers, whose name allegedly is a reference to their premiere gig at Montgomery Field, will take the stage Sunday only at 2 p.m. This "ram-bunctious" band is Jason Weiss, banjo; Michael Williams, flatpick guitar; Given Harrison, upright bass; and John Mailander who plays mandolin and fiddle and appears to be the only band member who is not a vocalist.

Last in the lineup, but not least – and certain to be a favorite for many – the Anderson Family will be onstage Saturday at 3 p.m. and again Sunday morning at 11 a.m. Hailing from Grass Valley, California, the four youngsters – Paige, Aimee, Ethan, and Daisy – have made bluegrass music a family affair. Together with mom Christy and dad Mark, they're receiving attention for great harmonies and skillful musicianship, especially sixteen-year-old guitarist Paige.

If you've been inspired by all of this

to dust off your guitar or tune up your fiddle, you'll be interested to know that this year's Summergrass once again includes the very popular Jamming 101 with Sid Lewis. Lewis is a master at using his humorous and profoundly simple concept of "edutainment" to infuse each attendee with motivation and skills in the "art of jamming." This great workshop is an educational, hands-on, group class for all ages and levels of expertise, and is scheduled for Friday at 6 p.m., Saturday at 11 a.m., and Sunday at 9:30 a.m.

Ever wonder just what makes those "dang banjers" work? Well, wonder no more. Back by popular demand, Greg Deering, owner of world-renowned Deering Banjos located in Spring Valley, returns to host his Operation Banjo workshop. Dr. Deering will perform a banjo dissection on Saturday at 3 p.m. Other instrument workshops include fiddle and banjo, guitar, resophonic guitar, autoharp, mountain dulcimer, mandolin, and a Slow Jam hosted by Corky Shelton at 7:30 p.m. on Friday for those folks just getting started in jamming techniques.

This year Summergrass is proud to offer Bluegrass Boot Camp for intermediate to advanced adult players. Happening Friday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., this new seminar will be held on the museum grounds before the festival begins. Professional musicians from the stellar Summergrass headliners (Dennis Caplinger, John Moore, Jim Nunally, John Reischman, Trish Gagnon, and Megan Lynch) will be teaching six instrument classes. Demand has been very high and classes are filling up fast, so enlist today by calling Dan Elkerton, Boot Camp drill sergeant, at (619) 203-5337 or email him at bluegrassbootcamp@summergrass.net.

As noted above, Summergrass is again offering Kids Camp to children 6 to 16 years of age. Chris Stuart & Backcountry are the Kids Camp faculty who will teach the Kampers for three hours each day. Their finale will be a mainstage performance by the young 'uns at noon on Sunday. In its sixth



Bluegrass Etc.



John Reischman & the Jaybirds



Michael Cleveland & Flamekeeper



Special Consensus



Chris Stuart & Backcountry

year, this Summergrass tradition is a definite highlight of the festival. It's a neat experience where kids can meet new friends, hone their musical chops, and have a blast! To enroll contact Jeff Johanning at kidscamp@summergrass.net or call (951) 302-1503.

Camping, both dry and with electric hook-up, is available on the museum grounds when purchased with a three-day ticket. The fee, \$90 without electrical or \$220 with electric hook-up, includes one three-day admission pass (\$48 value) and is good for Thursday evening through Sunday evening. If you plan to be at the festival all three days, the jamming and jawing around the campground is a great part of the Summergrass experience.

Walking among the barns and work sheds filled with farm essentials, inhaling the aroma of the smokehouse style barbeque mingling with the sounds of guitar, mandolin, and banjo, there's no doubt Uncle Pen would be right at home at Summergrass 2010 at the Antique Gas and Steam Engine Museum. It's a great way to spend the summer weekend.

More details on this event can be found on the Summergrass website, www.summergrass.net or by calling (858) 679-4854.

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STAY IN TUNE WITH YOUR AUDIENCE



# Wendy Bailey and True Stories: Really, It's a True Story

by Sandra Castillo

When Wendy Bailey and True Stories graciously agreed to play a one-off gig at Macy's Horton Plaza last December, they had not planned to do so the same day an unforeseen winter storm had met them, simultaneously, at the curb. However, these good-natured rockers were all the more determined to give it a go and make the most out of a cold and blustery afternoon.

You see, most rock and rollers worth their salt (and the Converse sneakers or Beatles boots they come a-struttin' in) have spent many a midnight hour sometimes playing to a beer-soaked crowd of five or less (six, if you count the bartender), only to gather enough dough earned among band members to grab a few burritos at La Posta after the show. These die-hard mortals are the ones who proclaim music is the manna of the soul and the main incentive to haul tons of gear or slosh through sleet, snow, or the driving rain to play a gig anywhere – even at Macy's.

Wendy Bailey and True Stories was born out of a single season to harvest new ideas and make great music, while building a solid reputation and fan base. Bart Mendoza, longtime San Diego musician and staunch advocate for the local scene, decided it was time to seek out other musical avenues with like-minded comrades who shared similar artistic goals as he. Nonetheless, he had to start with the proverbial crossing-of-paths with this person and that musician to end up with this current incarnation. So, this is how the true story goes...

Mendoza and drummer Danny Cress, who has also helped out in the Shambles (Mendoza's other band), played together in the Rarities, a short-

lived folk-rock ensemble. Eventually, the Rarities became True Stories, which included bassist Joe Poma. At one point, Mendoza discovered guitarist Wendy Bailey's music on MySpace, and in time, she was invited to sit in with True Stories for a show.

"I just heard one of her songs on MySpace and really liked it. We made [a connection] from that. Everybody just hit it off so well that we've all been going ever since," Mendoza said.

The initial line-up with Mendoza, Bailey, Cress, and Poma lasted for only one performance, which was held at Brick by Brick. Soon afterward, Poma decided to leave True Stories in order to pursue his academic studies. Upon Poma's departure, Cress brought in bassist Billy Fritz through their mutual affiliation with local stalwarts, the Coyote Problem. Fritz's own musical past included turns with Rhythm and the Method, the Neverly Brothers, and Chelsea Flor and Dreamstalkers, which made him a perfect fit for the outfit. When the house of Wendy Bailey and True Stories was finally complete, with two guitarists who write, a bassist, and drummer, Mendoza knew he had found his mission accomplished. He reflected on what makes this band the "right stuff."

"They're all multi-instrumentalists. What I really like about these musicians – Wendy, Danny, and Billy – is that everybody plays lead. There's intricate stuff going on in the music of True Stories; there are counter-melodies, harmonies, things like that. That's really important. Right now, the members of this band are people who are versed in all of this and, intrinsically, know the music. It's almost mental telepathy [with us], because we can all look at each other and just know what we're supposed to be doing," Mendoza said.

"This group adds up to more than the sum of its parts."

So, what would drive a musician to give his soul to music, even to the pages of True Stories? Bassist Fritz pondered this inquiry in his usual, thoughtful way.

"Several reasons...there is the 'oneness' felt among band members when we're playing together, as well as being part of the larger community, as a family of musicians. [There is] the joy of playing and the performance. [There is also] peace of mind attained through the mental focus required, forcing one to be in the moment."

True Stories was more than lucky to strike gold in recruiting the multi-faceted Bailey, whose namesake now graces the band's title. While sharing lead vocals and songwriting duties with Mendoza, she brings a certain elan to the group, albeit the kind of spirit and drive that make interacting with her such a breeze. A seasoned musician, Bailey was more than eager to share a personal glimpse into her professional career with the *Troubadour*.

"I've been playing and have been involved in music most of my life, but I guess you could say I've been actively performing my songs for 15 years or so. I've only been in a couple of other bands, as I've primarily focused on my [own] songs and performing as a solo artist. I was lead guitarist for an all-girl group called the Pick-Up Girl and even had a brief stint as "Nancy" in a Heart tribute band," Bailey said.

An incredibly prolific songwriter with a penchant for clever, yet introspective lyrics and catchy melodies, Bailey captures the finer nuances of the human condition, traversing life's agonies and ecstasies. When asked what she specifically draws from to create music, she had this to say:



Photo: Jane Berry

Wendy Bailey & True Stories: Wendy Bailey, Danny Cress, Billy Fritz, Bart Mendoza

"Oh, my...everything! Heartache, heartbreak, happiness, joyfulness, frustration at others, frustration at self. Seriously, just about any issue or event in life can be written about, especially if it's something you learn from."

The next inquiry, and a most obvious one, needed to satisfy the personal curiosity for the writer of this article—What are the advantages of being the lone female in an all-guys troop with True Stories?

With a sly wink and a nod, Bailey quipped, "I've got dudes to help me lug my gear."

Wendy Bailey and True Stories' signature sound, described as "indie-rock with touches of sixties power-pop," resonates throughout the band's spot-on chord progressions and absolute knowledge of the material they are delivering. These rockers groove on an eclectic mix of past and present numbers, along with their own original tunes thrown in for good measure. It would not be out of the ordinary for them to ride in on the Jackson Five's "I Want You Back" or "Temptation Eyes" by the Grass Roots to end their set with "Another Girl, Another Planet" by the aeventies band,

The Only Ones.

At a recent show at Second Wind, in Santee, True Stories served up their audience a rollicking version of T-Rex's "Bang-A-Gong," while later shifting artistic gears on Led Zeppelin's "Houses of the Holy." A bar patron, seemingly amused, yet befuddled at this random, musical maneuver, could be heard commenting, "That's a weird combination of songs." It's this type of spontaneity that keeps the band alive and kicking while indulging their fans with some chestnuts from their own storied pasts.

When asked what has been their most successful performance to date, Mendoza remarked, "Probably a recent show at the Ruby Room...big, boisterous, enthusiastic crowd. Every once in a while, you are lucky enough to get a gig that's special, and that certainly was the one!"

That said, this last question begs to know the real truth: does True Stories live up to its name?

It is living up to its promise," Mendoza smiled.

Jack Tempchin Tribute, continued from page 3.

explores his appreciation of the fairer gender clad in, well, thongs. "Thongs 4 U" has also been made into a video that is now posted on YouTube.

Speaking of the internet, a medium that Jack embraces fully, it should be mentioned that a new blog – MyPeacefulEasy Feeling.com – has been created. This blog is dedicated to that song that made Jack (and the Eagles) famous. People can log on to offer their own testimonials about "the song" – where they first heard it, how it provided a soundtrack to their lives, etc. All the while, viewers can access various covers of the song by artists from Dwight Yoakam to Jackson Browne to the original live Eagles performance. There are other pieces of memorabilia too such as the Jack's handwritten lyrics sheet.

This 45th year also marks the first time Tempchin has played in the UK. It is surprising that a tour of England has taken so long: one, because of the Eagles' own popularity there, and two, because Jack has maintained musical relationships with much of England's rock royalty including Ringo Starr with whom he toured in the 1990s. The "tour" really consisted of several dates around greater London performing with an Eagles tribute band, Talon, a group that enjoys its own fanatical following in the UK.

What might be the most exciting thing to emerge out of this yearlong celebration is a long forgotten audio bootleg of Jack, with friend Robb Strandlund, performing "Already Gone" the very night Jack wrote the tune at SDSU's Backdoor. As Jack explains, "We were hanging out backstage after drinking a batch of cider together.

After I wrote down the words, we immediately performed it. I don't know how it happened, but someone in the audience recorded the song live." That someone just recently contacted Jack about the song. And, now it sits in Jack's possession, waiting to be released when the time is right. With Jack's new CD of new acoustic songs due out by year's end, perhaps fans won't have to wait too much longer.

If all of the above doesn't redefine the word "busy," Tempchin refuses to even take a day of rest. His new songwriting project is what he calls a "song a day" in which he will post himself online (probably YouTube), going through the songwriting process, from the initial embryonic spark through the final polished song. This idea is to document his craft as a composer.

A stay-at-home family man while here in San Diego, Jack still works the clubs when he's in LA, which is regularly. He frequently sits in at places like the Hotel Café and Largo at the Coronet where he has befriended the new generation of songwriting talent such as Tim Jones of Truth and Salvage Co. and Sean and Sara Watkins of Nickel Creek.

So, should we call him the fifth or sixth Eagle? Certainly, Jack along with J.D. Souther and Jackson Browne made that supergroup truly more than the sum of its parts. Yet, Jack is much more than one of the many architects of the 1970s Southern California Sound. Besides writing two songs on the Eagles' *Greatest Hits 1971-1975*, an album that, with 30 million in domestic sales, is the best-selling U.S. release of the 20th century, Jack wrote

many more hits including "Someone That You Used to Know" (George Jones), "White Shoes" (Emmylou Harris and Randy Meisner), "Rollin'" (Glen Campbell), "To Feel That Way at All" (Patty Loveless), "Somebody Trying to Tell You Something" (Tanya Tucker), "You Can Go Home" (Chris Hillman and the Desert Rose Band), "Your Tattoo" (Sammy Kershaw), "East of Eden" (Tom Rush), "15 Days Under the Hood" (Paladins, New Riders of the Purple Sage), and "Who's Been Sleeping in My Bed" (Phantom Blues Band, Candye Kane). Of course, he's padded that resume even further by writing songs for Johnny River's last album, not to mention co-writes on the 2007 Eagles' *Long Road Out Of Eden* CD.

When we add all of this up, we see that Jack is a songwriter's songwriter. His "song a day" idea shows how hard he pushes himself. And the endless string of hits shows how good he is at his craft. Tom Waits once remarked, "The first real songwriter I really saw and really got enthused about was Jack Tempchin and that was in about 1968." That observation was made some 40 years ago. But, it's as true now as it was then. What's also remarkable is that Jack has no plans of stopping anytime (not just anytime soon but anytime period). "I'm going to keep on writing, singing, and playing as if I'll live forever," Jack adds, poetically.

So, if this is how he celebrates his 45th year in the biz, can you imagine what the silver jubilee will be like? Let's stick around until 2015 and find out.

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Greg Amov

by Mike Alvarez

Although Greg Amov was born in Los Angeles and eventually returned there as an adult, the electronic composer and musician spent his formative years in San Diego where his family still resides. While here he attended Patrick Henry High School and Grossmont College before pursuing higher musical education at UC Santa Barbara and Cal State Northridge. He was a solo artist as well as a member of the progressive rock trio Systems Theory in which he served as a composer and multi-instrumentalist. Though he sadly passed away last November after his second battle with cancer (just a few days shy of his 50th birthday), he left behind a body of work that includes three solo albums as well as a number of compositions with Systems Theory. His work could be described in a number of ways, as his influences were eclectic and far-reaching. Not surprisingly, he lists Tangerine Dream, Brian Eno, and King Crimson among them. Less obvious are the more acoustic song-oriented artists like Carole King, Pete Seeger, and Fairport Convention. It's interesting to try and hear how they might have informed his music. Like many musicians of depth and substance, he was also well-grounded in the classics, so his tastes included such composers as Aaron Copland and Beethoven along with less well-known names like Arvo Paart and Hildegard von Bingen.

Having made his living as a software professional, Amov was very much at home using technology. As such, electronic looping and digital editing became as crucial to his creative process as actual instrumental performance. After capturing the sounds he needed, he meticulously crafted them into the ebbing and flowing colors of his musical visions. Although he brought a wealth of knowledge and experience to his art, he did

not feel constrained by traditional forms. His compositions are as long as they need to be, frequently going well beyond the ten-minute mark. Listeners must be able to approach his work with a fresh and open mindset, eschewing conventional notions of songcraft. Because Amov made extensive use of looping technology, there is a lot of repetition although something new usually arises with each iteration. In this regard, one could justifiably make a comparison to someone like Philip Glass. Many of his arrangements and sonic choices create vistas that are vast and panoramic, bringing to mind Vangelis, another legendary electronic composer.

Experiencing Amov's music is somewhat like watching a flower unfold. It requires patience and an openness to unexpected outcomes. Subtext is everything. At times it can be mood-setting, perfect for meditation, but always lurking behind it is an intelligent purposefulness that will reward the more attentive ear. His music is instrumental and consequently open to interpretation, but the titles he chose take their cue from the imagery and emotions they evoke. "Tokyo on Third" easily conjures a bustling Far Eastern metropolis, whereas vast echoing spaces and ornate embellishments are what define "The Cathedral at Ys," his tribute to Claude Debussy. Science fiction, mythology, and technology are recurring themes, as evidenced by the extended tracks "The New Worship of Old Gods" and "Nightfall on Io."

*The Dark Within the Dark* was his first solo release in 2001, and it certainly lives up to its name. Electronic synthesizers merge with other instruments and effects to create a sound that is unconventional, sometimes scary, yet always fascinating. He does not shy away from creating dissonance, often embracing it when a desired effect is called for. Huge washes of electron-

# Greg Amov's Music Is the Light Within the Dark

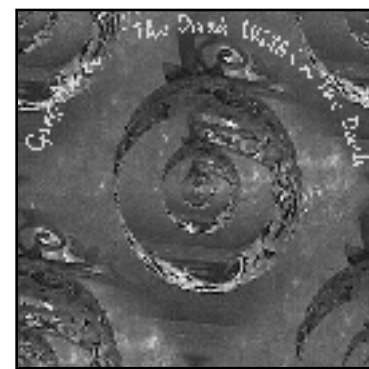
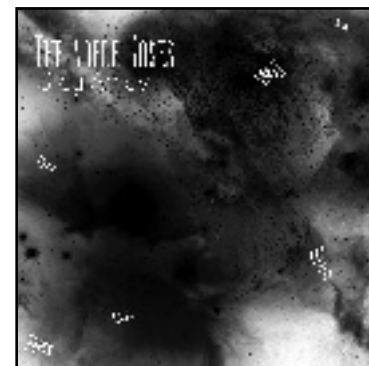
ic sound cascade from all directions, often to the world music pulse of electronic and acoustic percussion. The futuristic and the primal intertwine to create a singularly unique emotional response. Exotic sounds from faraway places like the Orient and the Middle East make surprising guest appearances. While Amov composed and performed all of the music himself, it must be noted that his wife Diane, an accomplished flautist and writer herself, assisted with the cover art and song titles. Amov's whimsical side takes center stage on his second solo album, *Gecko Highway*. It has a brighter, more rhythmically based sound with certain passages actually being danceable! Some of the songs have humorous titles like "The Flooka Sat on My Head," "Gecko Highway," and "Ma Belle Egg Shell." A surprising R&B influence, complete with a sampled brass section, comes to the fore in the energizing "Tail Wags Dog." Snippets of dialogue playfully pepper the album, proclaiming things like "That was interesting!" or "It's a nuclear device...." While *Gecko Highway* still includes tracks that are darker and brooding, it's gratifying to see him explore new ground as an artist.

Music was always in Amov's blood, having come from a family of musicians and music lovers. His mother Diana teaches piano and his sister Rachel is a highly regarded violinist who performs regularly throughout the local area. While not a musician himself, his father Mel is a retired college professor who has loved classical and operatic music for his entire life. By all accounts, he is the kind of dad who was always tremendously supportive of his children's musical pursuits. While Mrs. Amov started her children's musical education at the keyboard, she reveals, "I encouraged him to play the violin because he loved it. But he eventually switched over to viola." She credits a teacher named Tony Porto (conductor of the Grossmont College Sinfonia) with helping him to master that instrument early on. "He made music fun!" Greg continued to study the viola while attending college, although his father recollects that his temperament was not suited to a very strict and demanding instructor he encountered at Cal State Northridge. Mel Amov speaks proudly of his son's intelligence and abilities. "He would have been a first class physicist; top scientists are all musical. There's a connection between mathematical and musical ability." Rachel fondly remembers her brother as being very

encouraging. When she was very young he made a violin and bow out of newspaper to tide her over until she could get her own instrument. She returned the favor many years later by suggesting that he add more of a groove to his music, the results of which can be heard in the techno and R&B flavored beats in his later recordings.

His final album, the posthumously released *The Noble Gases* is a suite of compositions based upon the titular chemical elements. His lifelong best friend and Systems Theory bandmate Steven Davies-Morris spearheaded the effort to get it produced, mastered, and released, calling it "the work that Greg was most proud of." Although divided into discrete tracks, it is intended to be heard as one long composition with no gaps between songs. The music is still as abstract as any that Amov has created, but there is an added dimension of rhythm and catchiness that makes it perhaps his most infectious. One can only speculate why the gas Argon inspired him to name the album's most exuberant track after it. Following the otherworldly strangeness of "Helium" and "Neon," "Argon" is a veritable dance party complete with funky guitar and horn blasts! He follows this with the highly charged "Krypton," the exotic and leisurely "Xenon," and finally the extended electronic jam of "Radon" before tying all of his themes together in *Group Zero (The Noble Gases)*. It's a fascinating final journey through the artistic mind of a man whom Rachel describes as "incredibly smart. He was a deep thinker who could sometimes be prone to depression, but he also loved puns and bad jokes. He was an awesome brother!"

I had the pleasure of running into Greg Amov at the 2005 CalProg festival, an annual celebration of progressive rock, the genre of music that is characterized by intricate compositions and virtuosic musicianship. Although Systems Theory is not a performing entity, he and Davies-Morris were present in the festival's vendor room to market their music to listeners with a taste for the adventurous. All day long Amov easily struck up conversations with potential customers. An affable and engaging gentleman, he eventually talked me into buying his first two solo albums. My first impression was that they were rather impenetrable. Even his mother admits to being somewhat perplexed by his art. She sheepishly confesses, "There's no tempo. There's no ending!" And she has a point. But when subjected to



Three of Amov's CDs

deeper scrutiny, it becomes readily apparent that this is meticulously crafted music with a great sense of artifice and purpose. Within it one finds towering darkness as well as lighthearted whimsy. Amov was definitely not a commercially driven artist. He fully pursued his musical instincts with no compromises. His work demands that one let go of many listening conventions. Those who knew him best report that he was a multi-faceted renaissance man possessed of great abilities as well as the frailties and insecurities that beset us all. Although he is no longer with us, one can still come to know him through the music he created. It is available for free download courtesy of Mike Dickson, the third member of Systems Theory. Links to it can be found at his website, <http://mikedickson.org.uk/>

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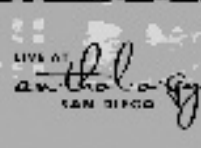
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by Bart Mendoza

## There's no one quite like Skid Roper.

Instantly identifiable with his trademark facial hair, he's one of the San Diego music scene's unsung heroes. Roper came to prominence during the '80s alongside musical partner Mojo Nixon, a rare virtuoso musician who can play just about any instrument he can lay his hands on and has invented a few of his own. A popular side man, his career is intertwined with many of the area's most celebrated musicians, while the '80s found the duo a staple on MTV. Keeping track of Roper's musical activities would be a full-time job for anyone, as many of his projects overlap, but it's been a long amazing career any way you look at it.

### PRE-HISTORY

He was born Richard Banke, on October 19, 1954, in National City and graduated from Sweetwater High School. While no one in his family was a professional musician, there was always music around. "I am the eighth of nine kids, so I always heard a variety of music in the house," he recalled. "'50s and '60s rock 'n' roll and doo wop, country, blues, pop, rockabilly, etc. Also, my mom was always singing around the house. Mostly pop tunes from the '20s, '30s, and 1940s. I remember when Tiny Tim came out with 'Tiptoe Through the Tulips' in the late '60s, I thought to myself, hey, that's one of the old songs my mom sings."

There was a piano at his house, though he never played it. "My sisters and brother played, but I never got a lesson [sniff]," he said. Instead, he took up the guitar, "borrowing" his sibling's. "My sister, Kathi, had a crummy nylon string guitar that I plunked around on when no one was looking," he said. "Luckily it came with a Mel Bay chord book, so I glommed onto that for awhile. I remember how amazed I was when I learned C and G7 and could play 'Skip to My Lou' without saying "wait, wait" between chords," Roper joked. He soon graduated to electric guitar, "It's the most versatile portable instrument there is," he noted.

His love of unusual instruments began around the same time. "I've always been a swap meet addict since I was a kid," Roper explained. "Besides old records, I would pick up kooky instruments for cheap. A lot of times, they were broken or missing some part, so I learned how to fix things, just by doing it. And I'd teach myself how to tune it and play something on it." He lists mandolins, basses, autoharps, steel drums, regular drums, steel guitars, regular guitars, harmonicas, fiddles, marimbas, banjos, ukuleles, and "many, many, goofy, homemade instruments that probably don't have a name," amongst his finds. "I was fascinated by the similarities and differences between a tenor banjo and a five-string banjo or a mandolin and a mandola. These things still hold my interest and I still take in swap meet orphans!"



Mutt & Jeff, 1980

### EARLY DAYS

His first of many groups was actually more of a jam session. "We didn't even have a name, but I like to remember it as the Saturday Jammers," Roper said. "Sometime in the mid-1970s I bought a whole Slingerland drum kit at the National City swap meet for \$50. I set them up in a little isolat-

ed room behind the garage and invited friends over to make noise every Saturday. There was me, Mike Trahan, and Sam Reyes. We'd trade off playing two guitars and drums; we didn't have a bass. Of course, everybody wants to bash and crash on the drums, so we had to have a time limit behind the kit." They played early rock 'n' roll hits such as "Fortune Teller," "Be Bop A Lula," "Angel Baby," "Carol," etc. "I have lots and lots of reel-to-reel tapes that are...uh...entertaining," he laughed.

In the late seventies, performing with legendary local bluesman Tomcat Courtney on guitar, as part of a duo. "I met him at a solo performance he did at a church in Normal Heights where he played acoustic guitar and sang Texas blues. I asked him if he needed a rhythm guitar player and he said 'yes.' I knew a bunch of old blues tunes from having collected blues records for years and we fit together well. We played together as a duo many times, with two acoustic guitars or two electric guitars." Later, Roper played drums with Tomcat and the Bluesdusters for many years.



The Evasions with Tim Rutherford & Dave Goodwin

### SURF'S UP

In 1980 Roper also performed as part of an acoustic duo – Mutt and Jeff – but his next band of note was a surf band, the Evasions, who started up that same year. "This was right in the middle of new wave and disco so it was something different," Roper said. "People loved it. We were kings of the back yard parties back then in the early 1980s." It was at this point that his prolific songwriting talent first appeared. "We did surf instrumentals and other seldom-played oldies, but right away I started writing my own songs," Roper said. "A lot of melodic instrumentals came flooding out along with rockabilly and other rootsy stuff. There was no road map, but the music just had to come out."

The Evasions released a highly collectible picture disc album, *Son of Surf*, in 1981, featuring artwork by world-renowned artist Rick Griffin. "Someone gave me the number of a guy in Los Angeles who was looking for a surf band to put out a picture disc," Roper stated. "I called him, he came down to San Diego to hear us, and he liked it." Griffin's involvement came through a visit to Comic Con. "I had met him at the Con and asked him if he would be interested in doing a cartoon in color for a picture disc. He is the guy who is almost solely responsible for that psychedelic lettering that's hard to read on old Fillmore rock posters, like Quicksilver's first LP and *Aoxomoxoa* by the Grateful Dead. He was an old surfer from the sixties and he said yes." Months went by and then he delivered an amazingly gorgeous blue green oil painting ... with our instruments turning in a wave, with a thousand individually air brushed drops of water. The dark and reduced picture in the picture disc doesn't do justice to the original painting." Griffin took great care in the design. "He wouldn't sign it because he said that it shouldn't have an up or down position. All the skill he used to put a round spot in the center went out the window when the record company weasels intentionally printed the picture off center," Roper stated. "It would have looked great on a turntable spinning around symmetrically, but instead the picture spins off center and makes you seasick!" he laughed.



The Pleasure Barons at the Spirit Club

### MONTE ROCKERS

1982 would prove to be a banner year for Roper. While international cult status was still a few years away, he was now working with most of the performers who would be a big part of his music for the next few decades. In addition to performing with the Rockjets, 1982 saw him team up with Mojo Nixon for the first time and begin working with Dan McLain, soon to be "Country Dick" Montana.

"I first met Dan McLain when he ran his own record store, Monte Rockers, in the late '70s on El Cajon Boulevard, near College Ave." he recalled. "We both had a passion for old rock 'n' roll music and records." Around this time McLain was playing drums for R&B kings the Crawdaddys and started the Penetrators. "I was in the Evasions then and liked to check out other groups," Roper said. "Sometime later, he put together a conglomeration band, Big M.R. and the All Bitchin', All Stud, All



Skid Roper & Mojo Nixon

Stars, where he was the star and lead vocalist! Everybody in the band was in other groups and I went to a few shows, notably one at the North Park Lions Club and another at the Zebra Club. It was a fun act with lots of goofy old songs, like "Chug-a-Lug" and "Folsom Prison Blues." I knew the bass player, Mark Zadarnowski, who played with the Crawdaddys and was, in fact, the original bass player in the embryonic stage of the Evasions. When he couldn't do a show, I took over the bass position." The name of the band was changed to the Pleasure Barons, when Joyce Rooks joined the band a little later. "The Pleasure Barons is another great band name thought up by Chris Davies of



Country Dick & the Snuggle Bunnies

the Penetrators," Roper noted. "He also came up with the names Beat Farmers, Snuggle Bunnies, and Three Heavy Geniuses, among others."

By 1982 McLain had become Country Dick and his band was the Snuggle Bunnies. "I really enjoyed playing electric mandolin in the Snuggle Bunnies, doing old-timey country songs," Roper said. "It's a shame I was kicked out, but by then they were doing too many Rolling Stones songs." The band did record an as-yet unreleased album at Hit Single Studios. "I did an original called 'Snuggle Bunny Boogie' and a rousing, rockin' version of 'Mule Train,'" Roper said. The Beat Farmers soon followed the demise of the Snuggle Bunnies. "Mojo and I played on hundreds of shows with them over the years. Our first tour was opening for them in 1985."

#### MOJO AND VOODOO

By 1985, the music Roper made as a duo with Mojo Nixon was beginning to make a national impact, and they soon signed to Enigma Records, releasing their eponymous album that year, followed by five more discs through 1990. The pair scored hits with such songs as "Elvis Is Everywhere" and "Debbie Gibson Is Pregnant With My Two-Headed Love Child," and the iconic figure of Roper with his washboard was soon all over MTV. But it could have turned out much differently. "I like to build crazy instruments and one day I made a washtub bass out of a rake handle, a washtub, and a long gut string," he recalled. "Just for laughs I nailed a washboard to the stick. It didn't do anything, but looked cool. I was trying to sell it one day at the swap meet, and an old man came along and bought the washtub by itself." Earlier, Roper had met Nixon, then Kirby McMillan when the Evasions played at the Spirit Club [now Brick by Brick] with the Majestyks, where he played guitar. "We hit it off well and he asked me to play a snare drum in a duo he was forming. He was already Mojo Nixon by then and wanted me to be Voodoo Agnew!" Roper laughed. "I thought Skid Roper was a cooler sounding name than Voodoo Agnew, so we became Mojo and Skid. Meanwhile, I had sold my old Rogers Holiday drum set to Country Dick after he borrowed my snare and liked it so much. So, I didn't have a drum to play with Mojo, but I did have this kooky washboard on a stick."

Though he is most identified for his time with Mojo on the upright washboard, Roper points out he used it in other groups around the same time. "I started playing with Mojo while I was playing with the Evasions and the Snuggle Bunnies," he said. "With the Bunnies, I used the washboard live when we did old songs that didn't need any mandolin. It wasn't mic'd or anything. It was just for fun. In fact, Joey Harris also played the washboard when he didn't play guitar on some songs." He notes that despite its simplicity, the washboard was tricky to amplify. "In places like the Spirit Club, the stage made a nice bass drum thud when the stick hit the floor, so I had a full 'boom chick' sound. But when Mojo and Skid played My Rich Uncle's, the stage with shag carpeting was so dead that the very next day, I built the Skid Box. With a microphone inside it, it sounded like a thunky bass drum. The percussion was completed with



The Syndicate of Soul

the addition of one small splash cymbal."

Roper admits to being taken a bit by surprise by Mojo and Skid's success; after all, the eighties were more about new wave and hair metal than roots-based acoustic rock. "Yes, I was surprised, but Mojo was always good at rousing an audience and stirrin' 'em up," he said. The duo's first national press was in *Spin* magazine in 1986. It was penned by a familiar scribe. "I did 'The Story of Mojo' for *Spin*. It's by Richard Banke, but back in New York they didn't know I was also Skid Roper," he laughed. "And they paid me too!"

His favorite thing about his years with Nixon? "I liked the persona of the silent musical partner," he said. "Some people actually thought I was mute because I didn't say anything." He notes they "worked well together and he never told me what to play. Any musical backup I came up with was just fine with him. If I wanted to play echo harp on 'Rockin' Religion' or a goofy beat on some other song, it just fit." Sometimes a song they recorded in the studio was literally the first time Roper had ever heard it. "The song 'Where the Hell's My Money?' is one of those. It's a long tune and I came up with an odd rhythm on the spot for the washboard and box. I remember being committed to that hard-to-play beat once we started and I almost fell down laughing in the middle of the lengthy Mojo rant. The whole song was written about playing Jerry Herrera's Spirit Club and trying to collect the money at the end of the night. It was one of Mojo's best songs and recorded in one take."



The Rockjets Trio: Dave Goodwin, Tim Rutherford, Roper

Roper considers the duo's appearance on Fox-TV's "Late Show" a major highlight. "It was hosted by Arsenio Hall before he had his own show. It was 1987 and Mojo sang 'Elvis Is Everywhere' for the ten year anniversary of Elvis' death. Everyone in the audience had on Elvis masks. We actually made it over to the couch for a Q and A." Roper's offbeat humor is in full evidence on the segment. "I was known for not talking because Mojo is a great motor mouth, but out of the blue, Arsenio asks me something. I answered with a cryptic comment about Tony Musante, the actor who played Toma on a TV show [laughs]. He quit the show and 'Barretta' with Robert Blake took its place."

Another highlight was working with movie star Winona Ryder on the video for "Debbie



The Shards duo: Skid Roper & Chris Davies

Gibson..." Ryder played the title character. She had recently been working with Nixon on the Jerry Lee Lewis bio-pic *Great Balls of Fire*. "I remember her as a teeny bopper who used the expression 'eeewww!' a lot," he said. "The next day after the video shoot in New York City, she invites us to see her latest movie, *Heathers*, at a local theatre. So I had the unique experience of watching 18-year-old Winona Ryder on screen, sitting right next to her in the movie theatre! Nobody recognized her because she looked like she was 12 in person. I have a great Polaroid of her all dolled up in a wedding dress [for the video]. Another nice photo for my book!"

Mojo and Skid parted musical ways in 1990, but Roper still has the old washboards he played. "They only lasted a few months before the metal would break apart," he said. "So I went through a couple dozen in eight years." Even though airline security wasn't quite the oppressive nightmare it is today, he still had issues trying to get through the airport with his chosen instrument. "I had to explain the washboard on a stick at every airport we went through," he laughed. "It was in a guitar case, but the rake handle stuck out at both ends. I used to walk it on the plane with a coat wrapped around it and always asked the stewardess if I could put it in the coat closet and they always said yes!"

Restless to a fault, during his tenure with Nixon, in addition to the groups already cited, he was also a member of Jett Black and the Blackouts ('83), The Rockjets Trio ('83), Cowboy Skid Roper ('85), Three Heavy Geniuses ('86), Skid Roper and the Whirlin' Spurs ('88), the Roundups ('89), the Mozeriders ('90), and Skid Roper and Buddy Pastel, Jr. ('91).

#### CHRIS DAVIES

The 1980s saw the formation of two of Roper's favorite combos, the Syndicate of Soul and the Shards, featuring longtime friend and collaborator, Chris Davies. "I'd always liked the obtuse guitar playing of Chris Davies in the Penetrators," Roper said. "We jammed one day and started writing good songs together early on. Actually he's the only person I've ever written songs with." Meanwhile, The Syndicate of Soul was an extension of another band Roper was playing with that year: Mitch Cornish and the Hellhounds. "While I was playing bass with the band, Mojo would come up on stage for a few rockin' soul songs and so it evolved into a separate band with the addition of Mojo and a trumpet player." As with most of his projects, Roper has many unreleased tapes. "I have five or six live recordings of that band that could be distilled down to one great live CD. It's so fun to hear these songs after all these years and I'd like to share them with the world. Or, at least, San Diego. The deaths of friends like Buddy Blue just underscores for me that you don't want to die with music in you."

#### SOLO YEARS

Roper released his first solo album in 1989 with his group the Whirlin' Spurs, *Trails Plowed Under*, but it was his second, *Lydia's Café* ('91) that got the biggest notice. "Not to be braggadocious, but I played everything on the whole album," he said. "All the instruments and vocals. Everything, except for the one bonus song on the vinyl only, 'Banjo Blues,' where the washboard is played by Mojo



The Whirlin' Spurs: Roper, Lance Soliday, Jayne Robson, Dan Vazquez

Nixon." It was the last album on that label (Triple X) that was pressed on vinyl, along with the CD and cassette versions. "I was there at Capitol Records in Hollywood when it was mastered and the guy in the lab coat asked me if I was sure I wanted the extra track on the vinyl record, not the CD." [laughs]



The Shadowcasters: Chip McClendon, Dave Anderson, Roper

#### ROCK 'N' ROLL PART 3

It was 19 years between *Lydia's Café* and *Rock 'n' Roll Part 3*, but it wasn't for lack of want or material. The reason? "The simple answer is a profound lack of dough. This latest CD is probably way too ambitious," he said of the album's 13 songs recorded on 24 tracks, over a decade. "It's embarrassing to admit that it took more than ten years to complete it, but it was done three hours a week and sometimes a few years would pass between sessions!" he said. "I just ran out of money. That's not the way to record an album." Basic tracks were done at Hit Single Studios. "The whole thing started when owner Randy Fuelle called me and said he was looking for a Fender Precision bass for his studio. I had a nice '70s P-bass so I traded it for two days of recording time. That's when Joel Kmak and I went in and did the basic tracks live, with guitar and drums. I tip my hat to Joel for being well-rehearsed so things went smoothly. It was so long ago that it was done on two-inch Ampex tape. There aren't too many studios that still have a two-inch machine. Hooray for old school technology; I'm glad it was done on tape," he said.

A true labor of love, Roper scrimped, saved, and sacrificed to record it. "I sold off my old guitars and basses to pay for the studio time. I also sold my rare old blues and rockabilly 45s and my prized collection of obscure girl group 45s. For a long time there looked like there was no light at the end of the tunnel, but eventually I got it finished." Mixing, in particular, took longer than he had hoped. "Luckily, there was no big deadline, so I kept mixing things again and again until my ears were satisfied. I always hear the voice of a young Muhammad Ali saying, 'For all time, for all time!' I used to have a nifty collection of snare drums from the 1920s to the 1960s. They're all gone now, but my CD is finished."

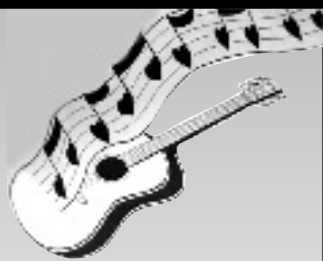
Guests include Joyce Rooks (vocals), Johnny Viau (sax), Steelbone Cook (trombone), Jose Sinatra (vocals), and Mojo Nixon on bongos.

continued on page 16



# Bluegrass CORNER

by Dwight Worden



## Two Bluegrass Learning Opportunities

Are you an adult interested in advancing your bluegrass playing skills? If you play at the intermediate or better level Summergrass is offering what may be a great opportunity for you. This year, for the first time, Summergrass is offering an adult boot camp that caters to adults learning to play guitar, mandolin, fiddle, banjo, and bass. The instructors are some of the top performing musicians on the Summergrass bill. Here's the lineup:

**Lead Guitar:** John Moore (Bluegrass Etc.)

**Rhythm Guitar:** Jim Nunally (John Reischman and the Jay Birds)

**Bass:** Trisha Gagnon (John Reischman and the Jay Birds)

**Mandolin:** John Reischman (John Reischman and the Jay Birds)

**Banjo:** Dennis Caplinger (Bluegrass Etc.)

**Fiddle:** Meagan Lynch (Chris Stuart and Backcountry)

Bluegrass Boot Camp will include four hours of instruction beginning Friday morning, August 20. Class size will be limited to 10 students, giving you more access to your instructor. Confirmed registrants will receive detailed information about the camp, what to bring, etc. **Registration is \$75 and closes on July 31.** Tuition includes lunch, instruction, and instructional materials. You can download the application form and read more about Boot Camp at [www.summergrass.net](http://www.summergrass.net).

## Slow Jam



Slow Jam on third Thursdays

If you are a beginner or an intermediate player, of any age, who would like to improve your chops and be able to participate in jam sessions, then the San Diego Bluegrass Society's third Tuesday of the month "slow jam" may be just the ticket for you. The slow jam is led by nationally acclaimed teacher Janet Beazley (who also plays in **Chris Stuart and Backcountry**) and takes place at Old Time Music (corner of University Ave. and Utah St. in North Park), happening every third Tuesday of the month from 6:30 - 7:30pm. Admission is free to San Diego Bluegrass Society members and \$5.00 for non-members. To sign up send Janet an email at: [jmbeazley@gmail.com](mailto:jmbeazley@gmail.com). She will then send you an e-mail with music and other information. Janet specializes in teaching classic bluegrass tunes at non-breakneck pace and in making some of the great bluegrass classics accessible to those just learning their instruments. Class members will also learn how to play back up, how to approach a solo, and how to play in a jam session.

## AGSEM Saturday Jam



Eric & Suzanne Bentley

There is a new jam taking place in North County. Organized by Eric and Suzanne Bentley, the jam takes place every Saturday at the Antique Gas and Steam Engine Museum in Vista. The Museum, as you may know, is also home to the Summergrass Festival. This new jam session features swing music starting at 11am every



AGSEM Jam on third Thursdays

Saturday, then moves into bluegrass at 1pm.

Held on the Summergrass main stage, the setting is beautiful, the breeze is refreshing, and the music is uplifting. Many well-known faces and players are regular attendees at the jam, including outstanding guitar player Billy Frisbee, tenor guitar player James Rust, and many others. Some of the regulars from the Thursday evening jam session, hosted by Jason Weiss at Today's Pizza in Encinitas (every Thursday from 6:30 - 9pm), are also in attendance at the Saturday jam.

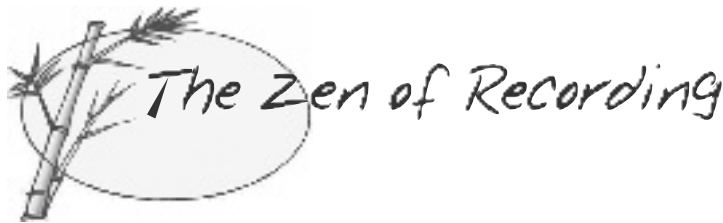
Eric and Suzanne thought it was a waste of a valuable and beautiful space to have the Museum's main stage sit vacant most weekends. Accordingly, they cooked up the idea of holding a jam session on the stage. The sessions are open to anyone who wants to attend, free of charge, although donations are welcome and they go to the non-profit Museum. Suzanne Bentley is a member of the Board of Directors of the Museum. If you are a North County player, or a player from anywhere who is willing to drive, stop by the Museum on any Saturday and join the fun. Many of the musicians stay for both the swing session starting at 11am and for the bluegrass at 1pm, but if your cup of tea is one and not the other, you are welcome to attend only one session. You will find this a great jam session with friendly and welcoming folks making some great music.

## Summergrass

San Diego's premier bluegrass festival, Summergrass, is again upon us. Held at the Antique Gas and Steam Engine Museum in Vista over the weekend of August 20-22, this year's festival looks to be one of the best. Outstanding national bands **Michael Cleveland and Flamekeeper, Special Consensus, Chris Stuart and Backcountry, John Reischman and the Jay Birds, and Bluegrass Etc.** promise to provide some great music. There is also a great complement of local and regional bands. And, there will be the usual presentation of free music workshops for all Summergrass attendees, taught by some of the performing artists.

The annual kids camp will also take place, culminating in the ever popular Kids Camp performance on the main stage on Sunday. And, there will, no doubt, be great jamming in the campgrounds throughout the festival. Great food is also provided, including barbecue, Mexican, and the usual hamburgers, etc. If you've never visited the Antique Gas and Steam Engine Museum this should be your year to go. You will find an intriguing collection of antique American farm equipment, including an old schoolhouse, a model railroad, a blacksmith shop, and other interesting sites to intrigue even those not that interested in bluegrass music. For more information and to see the schedule of performances, or to buy tickets, visit: [www.summergrass.net](http://www.summergrass.net).

So, whatever level and experience you are, we urge you to get out and participate in one or more of the great bluegrass opportunities that San Diego has to offer. We hope to see you there!



## THINGS CHANGE

Blink. Squint. Blink. Open eyes wide. Blink, blink. Rub eyes until you see spots. Squint a little more. Blink a lot more... For those of us not gifted with 20/20 vision, the early morning hours are often fraught with these little "adjustment periods"...I narrow my eyes a little more, but then like a blushing geisha, and still, I just can't seem to get things to stop "fuzzing out" and fall into focus this morning...

So it's a week ago and more than a few miles from home, it's 11:30am and I am enjoying the country gravy-ladled eggs and potatoes that I always crave upon commencing any travel whatsoever. As the egg yokes and gravy begin their swirling carbohydrate-meets-protein dance, the subject of "tubing" down the river is broached again. And again, I state my case. "Look, it's not that I don't wanna go. I do. I'm just saying that paying \$20 each to rent an inner tube seems a bit excessive."

"Yeah, but...how else are we going to go down the river? Kayaks? Rafts? How much will they cost, anyway?"

"We could do it for almost nothing," I counter. "All we really need is something that floats for an hour or two."

"Like what, a floatie?" comes the sarcastic response.

At this point I gather up my courage and discard my humility, two things that always happen right before I do something relatively cool or horribly stupid. "I can prove it," I say, dabbing the corner of my mouth with my napkin. "Lemme grab my iPhone and I'll GPS a Wal-Mart or something."

15 minutes later, we're standing in the "Toys/Novelties" aisle.

"Here's a deluxe model with a cup holder!"

"How much?" I ask.

"\$15."

"No. Plus, isn't keeping your beer elevated at all times part of the experience?"

"True, true..."

And then I saw it. Meticulously folded into a flattened see-through polypropylene package with a picture of a full-grown bikini-clad woman on the cover. I snatch it off the hook like it was the last Wonka bar golden ticket and begin to read. Just as I suspected, this model is perfectly proportioned to accommodate my manly-sized frame and weight. To top it all off, it's the most shocking color of neon pink imaginable. It's the kind of color circus clowns would find too loud.

"Grab 'em!" I say, feeling the giddy effects from the intoxicating cocktail of

enthusiasm, vindication, and gravy. "I'm buying."

Less than an hour later (most of which was spent manually inflating these horrendously acrid smelling things), we stand at the river's edge.

"That looks cold."

"I'm sure it is," I say matter-of-factly. "At first."

I continue to discard all items of clothing (save my ultra-cool, brown camouflaged board shorts that I bought in Lake Tahoe the last time I had a water-related brainstorm), taking care to place my wallet, cell phone, and keys into my shore-bound shoes.

"Well," I say with the matter-of-fact calmness of someone who knows he's about to prove himself right. "I'm goin'."

With that, I scooped up my giant pink donut and holding my Coors Light tall-boy aloft, victoriously sat my butt into the center of my pool toy.

"Okay, it's a little cold," I concede, trying to keep my voice from wavering due to the fact that I've just iced my cubes, if you get my meaning.

"Wait!" came the cries from shore.

"I can't!" I yell happily.

Truly, I couldn't. The current had already sent me spinning on my way south and as I floated merrily along like a fly on a Fruit Loop I thought, "Hmmm...I'm already getting used to the water temperature..."

Wham!

I smack sideways into a partly submerged tree limb that looks and feels at that moment like the arms of fate itself, reaching out to explain to me once more that I'm not always quite as clever as I would like to believe.

I'm underwater. The current, which so masterfully had intensified right at this bend in the river so as to shoot me into adversity at the maximum speed possible now has me pinned to the limb. The water temperature is not a comfortable one for full-body submersion and my breathing becomes labored, shallow, and fast. With one arm pushing off the limb, I kick my feet hard and reach my body as high I can out of the water (thank you, high school water polo class).

I sheepishly grab my "tube" and wade ashore, emboldened only by the fact that I did actually float down the river on my still-inflated argument ender. We begin to track our way back to the spot where I first entered the river.



Sven-Erik Seaholm

"Hang on," I say. "I've just got to get my..."

My blurred vision tells me even before I dive back into the icy waters and begin searching frantically under the swiftly moving depths: I've lost my glasses.

Not just any glasses. These were progressive bifocals with hi-impact carbonate lenses and were "Transitions" so that in the bright summer sun, they looked like sunglasses to everyone else. The ones I need to drive, read, and just plain see with. The most complicated and expensive pair I ever owned. The ones I forgot to take off of my smug little mug just prior to embarking upon my little aquatic adventure. Bummer.

In order to make the trip back home, I needed to see. But glasses like these take weeks to order, much less afford.

I stopped and cleared my mind. I thought for a while. The answer came.

I found a Costco, scheduled an exam, got a new prescription and was fitted with contact lenses. I could see again the same day for less than \$100.

Of course, I don't like them all that much and reading and writing are a pain because I need the contacts and some reading glasses to do those things and frankly I get "carsick" just turning my head with them on...so I'm wearing some glasses from four years ago (see byline pic above). I'm blinking and squinting and rubbing and laboring over the simple mechanics of even writing this column, much less what I'm writing about...which is this:

Even when you're right, you can still be wrong. You may not be able to see that until afterwards, but one should at least recognize that possibility exists, before it's proven. And always remember who's name is on the front of the CD.

Now if I could just see enough to type that...

*Sven-Erik Seaholm is an award-winning independent record producer, singer and songwriter. What he lacks in eyesight he hopes to make up in vision. Catch him this month at the North Park Music Thing, Friday August 13. First, as a panelist at 1pm and as a performer at Claire de Lune that evening.*

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*photo: Connie Dault*



# Hosing Down

by José Sinatra

## THE "COOL" CONCLUSION

*Previously: Those who refuse to use the word "cool" as their primary (or, ideally, only) positive adjective have been targeted for assassination by the clandestine consortium responsible for the on-going brainwashing of America. The Hose, who dared expose the nefarious conspiracy in print, has finally been located and sanctioned for "final cooling."*

Amid the danger, my own voice startled me.

"Please don't! Don't kill me! I'll be cool! Don't shoot! Please! I'm sorry! Let me live! Let me be cool!"

Then the hills came alive with the sound of uzis. The intruders' guns blasted their staccato slaps onto the naked cheeks of the tape player I had hidden among the towels and pillows under the blankets. It sounded like a hundred porno movies all playing at once (and I must confess I never understood that slapping stuff).

Half a minute later the noise stopped and the three armed enforcers began high-fiving each other and whooping and heading back out the shattered front door.

"What a wuss! Cried like a baby!"

"Like a chick! Sure plugged that hose, heh-heh!"

"Totally! Call it in, dude. How cool."

"So cool!"

Once I heard their car peel out into the night, I stepped out of the back room and into the kitchen to review the surveillance tape.

Their faces had come out more clearly than I had thought possible. I'd have no problem recognizing them at the Comic Con. All three were on the Con staff; I would be disguised as Xena the Warrior Princess.

Besides being avenged, I was going to document the root of the danger once and for all.

Each year from all over the globe, hundreds of thousands gather to recharge the Dread Word and at the Convention's end, carry it as a virus to every multisex village and farm. It was a diabolic plan that some fanboy had cribbed from Ian Fleming's masterpiece, *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*. The entire world would soon be helplessly enslaved and infected by the only adjective ever spoken (22, 345 times, on average, every ten seconds) by attendees during four July days at the Convention Center.

It's been the largest gathering of its kind in the world for decades now. San Diego is rightfully proud of being number-one-in-the-world in this respect, but evidently the people running the Con don't feel that they're getting respect enough. They want to get even bigger. They've got to get bigger, dammit, and if San Diego doesn't frigg' expand the Convention Center, they're threatening to move the Con to some other city. Sure, those folks are the coolest, but they need more cool like a cokehead needs more coke or a multimillionaire needs more millions.

Just more victims of the cancer of cool.

How many more attendees will they require before they realize that the Con's ever-expanding size had long ago dulled its enjoyability factor? Oh, sure, it'll always be cool, and people will feel so cool to be there. And just being cool is lots of fun, so they'll have pantyloads of fun when it's all so cool.

I remember when the Con was simply magic. Early-to-mid 1970s, it was close to paradise, even as I toiled on the staff as Film Coordinator for two years. Autographs were free. I fell in with a group of underground comic artists, and, with Hunter Thompson's recent *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* as our bible, we were able to absorb and retain every precious moment while creating memorable pleasant insanity whenever the mood struck. We did it



The Hose himself: idol or idiot?

purely for fun.

Now it's all for the bucks. Now the staff is paid. Maybe the bigger it gets, so do the egos and the wallets. Is there a limit to how cool people can be?

And they've got the city by its sensitive parts now, haven't they?

*Give us what we want or we'll move away . . . Be cool, honor us . . . don't doubt us for one second, please, if you know what's cool. And you do know, don't you: we are. You go along with us and we'll let you be cool, too. If we have to move (and understand, we eventually want at least half of downtown; please start the imminent domain proceedings asap), you'll be so uncool, you'll pray for death.*

I'll bet that nearly all Con goers who've seen the original *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* consider it an impressive, important work of art; one of the handful of 20th century sci-fi masterpieces. But why can't they comprehend that the story itself is actually taking place in the *real world*, right now? That they've all become, or are becoming, victims? Substitute those pods with something so innocuous – so devious – that it nearly defines genius. Instead of millions of pods, all it takes is *one single word*! It becomes their goal, their mantra, their reason for being. In the beginning was the Word; this one might as well have plopped out from the butt of a teenage mutant ninja turtle. No, that's too much class.

Suddenly, reason sticks its lovely tongue in my throat and bitchslaps my brain, saving me again. No, I won't set foot in the Con this year, or maybe ever again. I'll throw my assailants to the justice system and stay away from the dangers of the mobs. Although I'm immune to *cool's* power of zombification, the very sound of it nauseates and infuriates me. Were I to hear it so often – choruses of it bouncing off the Convention Center walls in all its proud, subliminally destructive, greedy insistence – I'll be forced to tears, at the very least.

I prefer to keep my tears in reserve for more purely human (and humane) matters. The moment I'm convinced that the word "cool" has not degraded the Human Experience, I'll voluntarily remove myself from it. But as of now, I'm still alive, and being alive right now is very neat.

To the *coolies* who were sent to do me in: You will have met Johnny Law by the time this is printed. Personally, I think killing a tape player is nearly as lame as striking a chick. And even less cool.

To those who attended the Con: I'll continue to think or pray for a way to save you.

To everyone else: **YOU'RE NEXT!!!**



# RADIO DAZE



by Jim McInnes

## THE DSC IS BACK!

**T**he ultra-popular morning radio show team of Dave, Shelly and Chainsaw (aka the DSC) has returned to the air on 100.7 JACK-FM, which is where I work. We last worked under the same roof in 2002. (All of us eventually met the inevitable fate of all Clear Channel employees: termination.)

And the circle is a wheel, whatever that means, because I was there at the inception of the DSC show.

In late 1989, KGB's popular morning show team of Mike Berger and Jeff Prescott defected to rival 91X. KGB's then-owners, Brown Broadcasting, refused to put anyone under contract, so Berger and Prescott were there one day and gone the next.

During a momentary lapse of reason over beers at a local bar, I told program director Ted Edwards that I'd anchor a morning show until a permanent host could be found. I figured I'd have some name recognition, since I'd been on KGB for 15 years at the time. Cookie "Chainsaw" Randolph (NOT his real name!), who was already at KGB, having been a part of the Berger and Prescott show (but who didn't want to go with them to 91X), would be my co-host/sports reporter/brains of the outfit. Erik Thompson, one of KGB's infamous "News Brothers," would be our newsmen. This contraption, named the "Morning Machine," debuted in January of 1990.

The "Morning Machine" used to wheeze and rattle to life weekday mornings at the ungodly hour of 5:30. One of the first things I whined was, "Who gets up at this hour? It's so frigg' early. It's the crack of dark outside." I frequently complained about having to get up at 4:18 am, calling it cruel and unusual punishment. And that was on the days I actually got up in time. There were a few days when all-night jock Coe Lewis took my place because I'd overslept.

Chainsaw and Erik Thompson never really got along, so E.T. was booted. Chainsaw said he knew this woman he'd worked with at KDKB in Phoenix who might be interested in being our news anchor. Soon I was introduced to Shelly Dunn. Like most 'Zonies, she jumped at the opportunity to work in San Diego and be a part of the "Morning Machine."

After a couple of months of generally well-received shows, I was ready to return to my mid-day program, (mostly so I could sleep until 8 am!) I was eager for KGB to find someone better suited to the punishing schedule. "Someone younger," Chainsaw told me. I didn't care; I just wanted out.

For nine weeks Chainsaw had listened to hundreds of audition tapes from morning show hopefuls across the country but couldn't find anyone who stood out . . . until the day in late February of 1990, when he listened to a young Denver rock jock named Dave Rickards. Rickards, who was once saddled with the



by Peter Bolland

## SMOOTH AS STONE

**I** have a smooth palm-sized river stone on my desk, right beneath my computer monitor, a nice juxtaposition of high tech and no tech. I sometimes hold it in my hands when I don't have anything to say. Silence is the language of stones.

It feels heavy and cool on my skin. I feel it pulling toward the ground, waiting for my wrist to twist or my fingers to part so it can slip from its perch and return to mother earth. I never let go. Stones teach patience.

No rock begins this way, smooth and round. Rocks begin jagged. Then sand and water and other rocks bash and scrape and grind away at the edges until only the smooth round middle remains. Everything unessential is gone. Songs and poems and people and ideas and nations and marriages begin the same way: messy, unfocused, complicated, overwrought, cluttered. Then along comes the scouring. Without the friction and the conflict and the constant, painful cutting away, the beauty of the final stage is never revealed, cloaked forever beneath peripheral layers of obfuscation and detritus. The secret of life is learning to love the cutting away.

As we strive to create our best lives, as we endeavor to hone our craft, fortify our fortunes, and magnify our excellence, we learn the art of intention and practice the law of attraction, thinking that by drawing toward us everything we lack we will eventually be fulfilled. Manifesting situations, conditions, and objects out of the field of pure potentiality is a worthy goal. But lost in this model is the simple truth that we already are everything we seek.

Maybe we have it backwards. Maybe instead of adding this skill and that quality and this new piece of equipment, we ought to be letting things fall away, jettisoning everything that isn't genuinely, authentically real. When we let slip the limiting labels we use to define ourselves, our essence begins to emerge. Thirteenth century German mystic Meister Eckhart said that we become who we really are not by a process of addition, but by a process of subtraction.

In a famous anecdote about the sculptor Michelangelo, he was asked by an admiring patron how he managed to create the masterpiece "David."

"When I approached the marble," he replied, "I simply removed everything that was not David."

Like most philosophical advice, this is easier said than done. How do we cooperate with the forces around us, the forces that will peel back the cocoons of our own becoming?

How did this river rock reach this stage of its own beauty? By bumping up against the messy world, by following the flow of

*nom de air* "Kramer, the Music Maker" at a Milwaukee station, was 28 years old and had already been working mornings for years. His brother was also a morning show jock and his dad had been a radio news broadcaster for decades in Chicago. Rickards was born into the business!

On March 29, 1990, the "Morning Machine" ran out of gas and was thrown onto the scrapheap of history. The following Monday, April Fool's Day, the newly christened "Dawn Patrol" kicked off on KGB, starring Dave Rickards, Shelly Dunn and Cookie "Chainsaw" Randolph, (NOT his real name!) while I began a week's vacation in England, sleeping as late as I wanted.

It's a thrill to be working again on the same radio station with one of America's greatest morning shows.

Welcome back, DSC. You've been missed!

PHILOSOPHY, ART, CULTURE, & MUSIC

# STAGES

larger currents, but letting itself be pulled away and dragged and dropped until it lost all sense of separateness. With each encounter it left its mark on others, at the same time feeling the shape of its own life change. People often try to change all by themselves. Rocks do it together.

We do not have to know what all the steps are. Nor do we have to choreograph them. We only have to willingly surrender to the yearnings of our own deeper nature, then step forward courageously, humbly, and in the consciousness of service. Let the river do the rest. Life will meet us head on. Difficult people will scrape up against us. Circumstance will rip away all our carefully constructed comforts. Our own misguided instinctual drives will draw us into destructive decisions and actions that will take years to repair. Pain will shatter our façades and death will flag our every step. But throughout the rough and tumble of this watercourse, we grow smoother and smoother every year as the disingenuous artifice is ground away by the hardships of our lives. "The trials we endure," wrote Epictetus, "introduce us to our strengths." In our dawning maturity, we thank our enemies and honor our failures, for without them, this growing wisdom would have fallen stillborn to wither on the bright plains of our misspent youth.

"All first drafts are shit," said Ernest Hemingway. Having the backbone to cull the garbage from your writing, your song, your poem, indeed your life, is the mark of a great artist. The only thing worse than a half-baked song is a half-baked songwriter. If our lives are our masterworks, then everything is at stake. We have been given an opportunity in the march of these days to step to the beat of our own drum or follow the beat of another. From the copious bounty of our lives we draw the sustenance that will fuel our muscles for the march, knowing that there is always another meal and another cool drink of water around the bend. Letting go of thoughts and behaviors that no longer serve us, mindfully culling the clutter from our homes and to-do lists, leaving room for new growth to rise up, take root, and bloom – these are the gifts we receive on the road toward our awakening, this joy is the fruit of our renunciation, this verdant emptiness is the silence out of which the music of our lives emerge.

"Pay attention to your enemies," wrote Antisthenes in the fourth century B.C.E., "for they are the first to discover your mistakes." As a devoted protégé of Socrates (and witness to that tragic ending), Antisthenes taught that misfortune and opposition ultimately serve us better than easy living and blind support. Unlike friends and lovers, enemies have no stake in our fortune – they're success is utterly unhinged from ours. In this light, difficult and abrasive people are a profound gift; they are sandpaper to our soul leaving us lighter, smoother and more deeply beautiful.

Would we rather be rough-edged, difficult to warm up to, loud, caustic, inelegant, chaotic, bloated, overblown, ineffective, awkward, and hard to love? Or would we rather be simple, smooth, graceful, centered, grounded, powerful, clean, elegant, quiet, concise, clarified, and effective? Let life wear away your sharp edges. Thank your enemies. Honor your challenges. Know that when you lose, you win. Welcome the struggle. Let it bring your essential, authentic self to the surface. Learn to glide. Let everything that's false fall away. Become who you really are. Become as smooth as stone.

*Peter Bolland is a professor at Southwestern College where he teaches eastern and western philosophy, ethics, world religions, and mythology. After work he is a poet, singer-songwriter, and author. He has a band called the Coyote Problem. He also leads an occasional satsang at the Unity Center and knows his way around a kitchen. You can find him on Facebook at: [www.facebook.com/peterbolland.page](http://www.facebook.com/peterbolland.page) or write to him at [peterbolland@cox.net](mailto:peterbolland@cox.net)*



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# Cindy Cashdollar and Dave Alvin Take Us Where We've Already Been

by Terry Roland

Where do the roots of our music come from? During a recent interview slide-steel player Cindy Cashdollar stated the obvious: roots music comes from going back to where we've already been and creating something new and timeless. Cindy should know. A virtuoso lap steel, dobro instrumentalist, she was raised in Woodstock, New York, during the '60s when Dylan and the Band found their way to Big Pink. She absorbed the diverse music coming from her town and emerged a gifted and in-demand slide guitar player. This is no small feat for a woman in a field dominated by men. Her talent and skill led her to session and live work with what reads like an all-star roster of rock and country legends, including Bob Dylan, Van Morrison, Levon Helm, Rick Danko, Rod Stewart, Beausoleil, Daniel Lanois, Ryan Adams, and Redd Volkaert.

Her most significant musical collaboration happened during her eight years with Asleep at the Wheel, which led to five Grammys. In 2009 she joined Dave Alvin's the Guilty Women, which include Laurie Lewis and the late Amy Farris. This led to a close friendship with Americana great Alvin. So, when the call came from the Museum of Making Music to perform in Carlsbad, she called Dave. The August 14 concert will be acoustic, highlighting Cindy's talent on slide, steel, and dobro.

## INTERVIEW WITH CINDY CASHDOLLAR

*San Diego Troubadour: How did you get together with Dave Alvin?*

CINDY: I had met Dave in Austin over the years. Dave had this band, the Guilty Men. When his friend and accordion player Chris Gaffney died, Dave wasn't able to do the gigs anymore. He'd look and not see Chris and it was just too hard. The producers of the Hardly Strictly Bluegrass Festival in San Francisco called, wanting him to bring the Guilty Men, but he had to do something different. So, he changed the band to

women and put together the Guilty Women for the show. We had about 10 minutes of rehearsal. I thought, this is so insane; we should be rehearsing like crazy to do this. But, he had faith in us. We did the show. Yep Roc records was there and asked us to do a CD.

*SDT: So, it's just you and Dave for the San Diego show?*

CINDY: Yeah, this is just a very different thing. I got a call from the Museum of Making Music in Carlsbad to do a show. I thought as long as I would be in California, it would be nice to work with Dave again. It was a kind of a happy accident. Not really planned or anything. Dave's such a phenomenal singer-songwriter and one of the nicest people to work with. We do every kind of roots music for this. I was there last year with Redd Volkaert for a history of slide guitar event. This year we're doing it in an auditorium. I think that's phenomenal.

*SDT: So, this is not a tour. I noticed you've sold out McCabe's already.*

CINDY: I hear that. That was a surprise. We thought as long as we were in California, we might as well throw in McCabe's. I'm excited about it. I've never played there.

*SDT: There's a lot of talk about you and Dave and roots music. Can you tell me about that?*

CINDY: I think the name says it all. It's the beginning of a certain kind of music that took root and grew in all kinds of directions. But, it's timeless, it continues. It won't go away. You know, we know it's not gonna be number one, but that's not what it's all about. It's an ever-growing, ever-present process, ever changing, but it always has been there. Look what film has done for roots music. *O' Brother, Where Art Thou?* is a good example. So many people discovered the genre through that film. You can look at certain soundtracks. Now you've got *Crazy Heart*. It's always been there in one form or another. You really can't be in it for the money, but for the love of the music. People just keep discovering it.

*SDT: How do you think that discovery happens?*

CINDY: Curiosity. People keep going back to find the original source. They investigate to find out where it all came from. Where I grew up in Woodstock there was lots of roots music. It was a melting pot of country, blues, swing, jazz. I worked with Asleep at the Wheel and they were like Duke

Ellington on country instruments. You'll hear a lot about it at the show. Dave can tell a lot of stories. He's an amazing scholar, not just of music but of history. His songs are stories, really.

*SDT: It seems like today's singer-songwriters like Dave and Tom Russell are writing things that are equal to great literature.*

CINDY: Yes. They take you somewhere you've been, where you are, and where you're going. And it's always a great story.

*SDT: So, in a sense, roots music is taking us places we've been before. It's going where it's already been.*

CINDY: Yes. But, it's more than just the music. It's how we look at the world, with this curiosity about the source of things.

*SDT: You're right. When I was 14 I went from the Monkees to Hendrix because I found out they listened to him. Then I found out Hendrix listened to Dylan, so I listened to him. Then, I read that Dylan listened to Woody Guthrie; that led to Woody and finally to the Carter Family: the source.*

CINDY: That's right. That's exactly it!

*SDT: So, what kind of music will you be playing at these shows?*

CINDY: There'll be some instrumentals. It'll be different styles. Something for everybody - jazz, folk, blues, different guitar styles, and I do, well, slide guitar.

*SDT: How did you get started as an instrumentalist?*

CINDY: I started with guitars. When I was 11 I started slide guitar and then from there took up the dobro. I loved the different sounds you can get with the slide, either acoustic or electric. It's a vocal instrument.

*SDT: What kind guitars will you be bringing for the upcoming show?*

CINDY: One will be from Larry Pogreba Custom. He's from Montana. I'll be bringing a Bill Asher lap steel. You know, if I could bring 20 guitars, I would.

*SDT: Tell me about your influences.*

CINDY: Well, when I first started playing, it was John Fahey. He's not known for bottleneck, but he had this song on this one album, *Of Rivers and Religion*. I bought the record for the photo on the front - this boat going up a river. I thought if the cover looks good, the music gotta be just as good. He did a few slide songs. I was only playing guitar and didn't know what a dobro was. I started copying the tunings on the record. I had a couple of lessons, and that was it. Important players to me would be Josh Graves, Michael Auldridge, Lowell George, Bonnie Raitt, and Ry Cooder.



Cindy Cashdollar and Dave Alvin

*SDT: Did growing up in Woodstock have any influence on you?*

CINDY: Oh, yes. The music was everywhere. Before the Woodstock festival there were Sound Outs. They were music festivals on farms. I was 12 or so and our dads would drop us off. We'd hang out and see people like Paul Butterfield. One of the first concerts I ever saw was a benefit with John Hammond Jr., Odette, Van Morrison, and Happy Traum. In my early years I was exposed to a lot of music like Muddy Waters and Willie Dixon. They were our heroes. I'd see them all. Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee. It all just seeped in. I grew up with the beginnings of roots music reaching the public. There was a lot of talk about Dylan and the Band being there. It was around the time Dylan used the Band at Newport Folk Festival. Later, I got to work with Levon Helm; I toured with Rick Danko and Van Morrison. When I worked with Levon, I was with the All Stars. He had shot his leg accidentally while filming a movie, so we did all acoustic rehearsals.

*SDT: Did you have music around in your family?*

CINDY: Yes. My Dad was a big lover of country music. My Mom loved world music, jazz like Stan Getz and Dave Brubeck.

*SDT: Was there any special moments you remember in your recording career?*

CINDY: Recording *Time Out of Mind* with Dylan was a wonderful experience, wonder-

ful! He had lived in Woodstock, so I think there was this nice connection between us. Now, to meet Dave Alvin is coming full circle because he embodies it all. He's a genius singer-songwriter and guitar player. It'll be a wonderful show.

*SDT: What about other influences in terms of gender in roots music, especially those who were instrumentalists?*

CINDY: Yes. There was one special influence on me. Her name was Marian Hall. She played steel guitar. As far as I know she was one of the first female steel guitar players. She played western swing. She was in a house band on a TV show in California called "Town Hall Party." It was on during the '50s. They were an amazing house band. It was a popular show with guests like Patsy Cline and Johnny Cash. But Marian never became known. I did a piece on her for *Vintage Guitar* [magazine] some years ago. She had a family and toured. She did so many things under contract for record labels. She never became the household name she should've been. I spent years trying to locate her. I finally found her in the late '90s. We became close friends until she passed away a few years ago. You know, it's these people who are missed without roots music. Most people are gonna listen to a Ralph Stanley song done by Alison Krause and that's enough.

*SDT: So, as far as a direction, would you say roots music is going where it came from?*

CINDY: Yes. That's it. That says it!

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## PHIL HARMONIC SEZ



"Many of the insights of  
the saint stem from his  
experience as a sinner."

-Eric Hoffer



Skid Roper, continued from page 11.

"Ironically, my next CD is half finished, because it's originals, but all acoustic." He notes some differences between *Lydia's Café* and *Rock 'n' Roll Part 3*. "Since it took ten years instead of one month, the latest album is a lot more 'produced.' If one track of Hammond organ is good, four tracks of Hammond organ is better, I had the opportunity to add lots of extra stuff besides guitar, bass, and drums." While listeners will find everything from mandolin to African slit drum, this time out there is no washboard.

The album was recorded with longtime friends and sidemen, drummer Joel Kmak and bassist Chip McClendon. "I've known Joel since the early '80s when he was in the Hitmakers," Roper explained. "Somewhere in the late '80s or early '90s we played together in the Saint James Voodoo Rockers; I played bass and he played drums. I've always liked his propulsive stick work. And his drumming too! [laughs]" Meanwhile, bassist McClendon is also coming up on the two decade mark. "He's the only bass player I've played with who likes it when I come up with a bass line or pattern. Some bass players don't want to be shown anything. He's always got some high-tech, new-fangled amp, but I did get him to play through an old tuck and roll Kustom Charger bass amp for a few years. He now plays a five string bass, which I like a lot. Those low notes really fill things out, especially in a trio."

Each song on the album has its own feel, from folk to psych to blues. For Roper the sound and placement of instruments on each track is important. "This is the first time I did the final mixing of songs using headphones and it really helped a lot." He cites the song, "The First of Shadow," as an example. "There's a ragtime guitar, played by me, and also a trombone, played by Steelbone. You don't want them too close to each other on the right and left because they would fight each other in the fills but also

you don't want them too far apart when they complement each other. These are things only a record producer would think about. The average person just hears the overall sound, like seeing a painting that's blue, but the picture has many other colors when you look closer."

Notably, Roper was willing to go to extraordinary lengths for the right sound. "I couldn't find a baritone electric guitar to play a solo for 'Monday Afternoon,' so I ended up building one at Zolla Guitars. Bill Zolla let me cut out the unique headstock and neck and he got the correct scale for the fingerboard fret slots and glued the fingerboard to the neck and then put in the frets. I took all the guts out of a Silvertone bass with lipstick pickups and carefully duct-taped everything together on a unique tear drop shaped body. It worked out well and I got to play my baritone guitar solo. By the way, that's a four-string electric mandolin playing the same notes in the solo, just a lot higher."



Charo Trick

The album's lone cover, Claudine Clark's "Party Lights" is a nod to his early days. "One of my older sisters used to play that 45 a whole lot when I was a kid and I've always liked it," he explained. "I used to do it live in the Whirlin' Spurs, with Jayne Robson singing the lead. This time I'm singing it as a duet with Joyce Rooks. I gave the song a festive, New Orleans feel with dueling parade snare drums and a groovy sax played by Johnny Viau." There is one outtake from the album — "a nutty beat poetry song that got bumped when I wrote a better one called 'Hope,' Roper said. "Hope" was kinda inspired by the Last Poets, an early 1970s pre-rap group; Nixon guests on bongos on this tongue-



Jose Sinatra & the Troy Dante Inferno: top row: Miff Laracy, Buddy Pastel Jr., Roper; bottom row: Jose Sinatra, Troy Dante

twister of a tune. Some of my songs can be a little long and wordy. Verbose is the word that Chris Davies used. Verbose! Hey, that's another good name for a band. Thanks, Chris!" [laughs]

POST ROCK 'N' ROLL

Roper hasn't been performing live lately, though not necessarily by choice. "Well, the phone just stopped ringing," he laughed. "I used to look in the Reader at all the bands playing at the Casbah and I would know most of them, but now I only know one or two in a week. I've never been a good self promoter." He did score a major coup in June, unexpectedly getting an opening spot with Jonathan Richman. "A few months ago I went down to the Casbah early for his sound check to say hello. He doesn't have an opening act so I asked him if I could play mandolin instrumentals from 9 to 9:30pm. He said, [does Richman impression], 'Hey, that sounds pretty good to me.' But that's not the normal way to get gigs [laughs]." Both the Shadowcasters and the Skid Roper Combo are considered active concerns, two sides of a musical coin. "The Shadowcasters can play anything, but theoretically, the Skid Roper Combo does all originals. Maybe an odd cover song or two."

As much as Roper is looking forward, to new music, he's also increased his efforts to catalog the music in his vast archive. "I've taken inventory of a whole bunch of completed songs that have never seen the light of day and I now believe that they need to be heard," he said. "In my 20s and 30s I figured there was plenty of time to do it later. It's now later and time's a-wastin'. I didn't realize just how many good unborn tunes I had lying around, until I start-

ed collecting them in groups of 15 and putting them in separate folders with their own titles and ended up with another 13 CDs that I'd like to put out." To give an idea of the size of this treasure trove, this is separate from all the live CDs that he'd like to see released. "I've got old tapes nobody else has: the Syndicate of Soul, the Rockjets live at Bodies. Mojo and Skid live, Jett Black and the Blackouts live at My Rich Uncles, the Shards live, 3 Heavy Geniuses, the Shadowcasters, Skid Roper and Jayne Robson, the Splinters, Charo Trick at the Casbah, the Evasions, and the list goes on and on! I need a grant or a wealthy benefactor-music fan who could help put this stuff out. Even if I end up giving them away, at least the music won't be lost," he said.

Roper has been going to Jack Butler's (Private Domain, Glory) studio once a week, for a few hours, to transfer tapes. "I'm about halfway through my box of live cassettes," he said. This is an involved process. "Luckily he has a tape deck with speed adjustment for those tapes that were recorded too fast or too slow. We tune it to the key of the song using a tuning fork."

Though not prolific at releasing solo albums, Roper is a prolific songwriter. "I can be when I need to be," he stated. "I've rarely been at a loss for words. I'm always scribbling down words and phrases that hit my ear in a good way. That's why I always carry a tiny pencil in my pocket. Once in the early '80s I wrote down 25 titles for new rockabilly songs and finished most of them in a week! Lots of the use of words like "bop," "rockin'," "mama," "shakin'," etc. But that was just an experiment in production line songwriting. I've only recorded five of six of those songs since then." One of *Rock 'n' Roll Part 3's* best tunes, 'The Return of Rodan,' is one of those, though now recast as a slower blues tune, with a Jimmy Reed feel.

Even a cursory look at Roper's resume shows a career that's both prolific and intertwined with many others, but there's been no master plan. "I was content to float along like a leaf in a stream, landing here and there," Roper said. "A strange thing happened many times. Since I sold lots of fixed up musical instruments to

musicians all over town, people would call me, looking for a certain instrument player. This happened over and over. Don Strandberg called me and asked if I knew of a bass player available. Yes, I do. Who? Well, me! Oh, you play bass? Come to rehearsal and see how we sound together. So I brought my Mosrite bass down and joined the Hellhounds. Same thing with drums in Big Time Operator and Charo Trick. Or bass with the Scavengers or Saint James. It's only all these years later and writing down and organizing groups in a timeline list that I realize I've played a whole bunch of music on different instruments." Roper is working on a book covering all these events and more, complete with a free CD containing unreleased tracks from 30 different Roper associated acts. "Luckily, I kept these recordings and photographs all these years. But I still have the same simple ambition I had back then: Just to be able to pay the rent every month. It seems to get harder and harder these days. That's right! I shop at the 99¢ store! [laughs]" Roper's favorite thing about making music remains the same. "I like creating something that wasn't there before and sharing it with the world," he said.

Skid Roper's latest CD, *Rock 'n' Roll Part 3*, is available at SkidRoper.com. Skid can be contacted directly at Haulofrecords@yahoo.com



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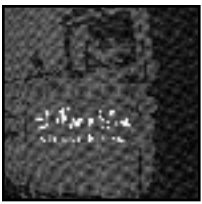
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## El Monte Slim Kill Myself to Sleep

by Frank Kocher



Ian Trumbull is a singer/guitarist with local country-rockers Ghost Town Deputies, and "Mocha" Joe Camacho has played pedal

steel with a number of local country and rock performers, including MEX. The two combine their talents in El Monte Slim, and play Trumbull's original tunes on *Kill Myself to Sleep*. The EP was "recorded in 2009 in San Diego bedrooms."

The sound is deliberately spare and rough, with minimal overdubs. The homemade charm is balanced by moments on this seven-song disc when the listener feels like the sonic skeletons sound a lot like demos of tunes not yet fully realized.

The title tune sets the tone: quiet, laid back, soft country-rock balladry by Trumbull, with familiar-sounding hooks and Camacho's decorative touches. "Turn for the Better" blends some nice guitar work by both players, using a minor key to create a mood. "Got It Bad" uses a swing beat, with Trumbull doing some Tom Waits-style meandering on the vocal, but it works anyway. On "AM Radio," the pair add mandolin to good effect. "New Bad Habit" is the closer here, and like several of the other tracks, it is pleasant, with good pedal steel licks and clever lyrics.

*Kill Myself to Sleep* is very laid back, and unhurried, as El Monte Slim might sound jamming in a living room. There isn't much of a beat, and a few of the tunes sound like they might sound better with a full band treatment, but it's interesting and worth a listen.

## Northstar Session Winter Collection

by Frank Kocher



Showing experience and seasoning from three previous discs, former San Diego (now LA) band the Northstar

Session has released an EP of polished pop and rock called *Winter Collection*. Singer/guitarist Matthew Szlachetka, drummer Kane McGee, and keyboard/sax player Dave Basaraba all helped write the seven tunes. The music is a sort of Tom Petty/Wallflowers mix of light rock harmonies, keyboard riffs, and very memorable melodies.

"Crazy Jade" opens, and reveals that the sound here is smooth, layered, and catchy, with Beatle-inspired tight vocal harmonies. "You Come Up Like Rose" keeps the level high, slowing things down as the singer sings, "I tried to bury you a long ago/but every time you come up like a rose." "When It Ends" has a strident beat, sharp guitar chord rhythm, and a punchy sax solo that keeps things moving. The band goes for more of a folk-rock approach on "Not Alone," a slickly-produced song that listeners will be downloading. The debt to Tom Petty is clear on "A Piece of Me," which sounds like vintage Heartbreakers. The best song is the last, "A Letter Each Morning." The lyric is a first-person love letter from a coal miner to his beloved, and the music is soft, restrained, and floats to the listener with dignity on the sound of accordion, banjo, and acoustic guitars. It's a standout cut.

Fans of straight-ahead harmony rock and power pop will love *Winter Collection*, a batch of refreshing music that really has no weak tracks.



## Danny Langdon Hard Lessons

by Frank Kocher

Originally from New York, Danny Langdon has relocated to San Diego, playing guitar and singing with local band the Blues Brokers. He has also been busy on his own, writing and recording songs for his CD *Hard Lessons*. Fronting a blues band hasn't much to do with the music on this project, which Langdon burned in West Virginia with studio musicians. The overall sound is chiming guitar-keyboard rock, and Langdon is a sort of update on 1980's Canadian pop star Bryan Adams, mixed in with a taste of 2000's pop star Ryan Adams. This isn't just a play on words – he pushes the rock envelope like Bryan, but adds softer country touches like Ryan. Notably, Langdon's writing contributes some lyrical heft with themes of spirituality and tough reality.

"Don't You Give In" has the message of nonconformity, Rickenbacker-sound guitars, and folk-rock harmonies of the early Byrds, along with a catchy melody. A child witnesses his mother being battered by his dad – and wants to know why – in the title tune, a rocker with a lesson. Langdon sings "Daddy don't you do it/ Don't you hit her no more." A slow rocker follows, "The Only One for Me," which pushes his vocal range to its limit, and almost over it. "Save Me" uses churning acoustic guitars for bottom, then gradually brings on everything else in the studio for a winning, rocking statement about Langdon's faith. This is sort of an open letter from him to his Lord, managing to be a rock prayer without being overtly religious. Unfortunately, "Found the Love," which follows, tries for funkiness and falls flat despite its message celebrating devotion.

Spiritual themes continue in "All I Want," as Langdon takes a snappy chorus hook that could be from a Badfinger track, sets it to minor chords, and grafts on preachy lyrics. This one would have worked better if the words about the ways of the wicked and walking on water had been saved for something less bouncy. "In Time" is the slow ballad here, about how broken hearts mend, with Langdon doing a good job holding back on the vocal dramatics.

Langdon's songwriting steers away from love song cliches and most traditional country-rock themes like the road, women, and hard living. While several of the songs clearly have a something devout to say, this isn't a contemporary Christian disc.

Dan Hartman's 1972 hit "Free Ride," originally recorded by the Edgar Winter Group, is covered, a nice cut with wah-wah guitars, lots of female backup singers, and a spiritual subtext. It doesn't sound remotely like anything else on this disc. "Give It All" is Langdon's final word, a short, quiet devotional keyboard ballad; though the disc has a hidden, lengthy alternate take of "Save Me" that follows.

Danny Langdon offers listeners some music that is different, rocks, and has lyrics that are thought provoking. *Hard Lessons* has some deeply personal music, and Langdon clearly has something to say.



## MandoBasso Bill Bradbury Gunnar Biggs

by Paul Hormick

After years of prodding and encouragement from friends and fellow musicians, local bassist Gunnar Biggs finally released a CD of his own last year. Placing himself in trios or forming duos with other local top caliber musicians, Biggs called the disk *Footprint*, and it proved to be one of the best local releases that we've had in a long, long time. One of the disk's surprises, contrasting with Biggs' straight ahead jazz and avant-garde compositions, was "Zanesville Breakdown," an Appalachian inspired toe tapper that the bassist performed with mandolinist Bill Bradbury. A year later Bradbury and Biggs have reunited to produce *Mandobasso*, a whole disk of mandolin/bass duos derived from or inspired by Ireland and Appalachia. Fresh and filled with excellent musicianship, the disk is a pleasure from beginning to end.

Biggs and Bradbury are not the first to pair the mandolin and bass. In 2008 bassist Edgar Meyer and mandolinist Chris Thile released a CD of their duets. The bass and mandolin are at polar opposites of the musical range, extremely high and low, and their timbres are also quite different. Meyer and Thile exploited this disparity to its fullest, the two musicians speeding through licks and arpeggios as though each were a soloist and knowing full well that the disparity between their instruments kept them from stepping on each other's toes. Like Bradbury and Biggs, Thile and Meyer's music has its roots in Ireland, but their pyrotechnical performances and incorporation of dissonance took their folk-based music into a Lester Flatt meets the Mahavishnu Orchestra realm.

In quite a different manner Bradbury and Biggs are somehow able to accentuate the similarities of their two instruments, the timbres of the bass and mandolin blending across the staff of treble and bass. Exceptionally well recorded at California State, San Marcos, the mandolin's strings ring out and the sound of the bass is full and rich. Even on some of the uptempo tunes the playing has a relaxed feel, as though Bradbury and Biggs have been performing as a duo for years.

Recently retired, Biggs taught double bass and was the director of jazz ensembles at San Diego State for the last 25 years. A serious composer, Bradbury holds a doctorate in music and teaches at Cal State San Marcos. With those backgrounds, you might expect this disk to have an academic bent, but the music that these two offer is far from academic or abstract. It is warm, direct, and disarmingly uncomplicated, never straying far from its Appalachian/Celtic roots. If you gave the Meyer-Thile disk a chance but were turned off by the frenetic playing and use of dissonance, you might want to give this disk a try.



## Rusty King Running Through the Stop Signs

by Frank Kocher

Rusty King calls San Diego home, though the singer/songwriter went to North Carolina in 2009 to record his debut CD, *Running Through the Stop Signs*. In Charlotte, he worked on the disc with veteran Americana musician/producers Eric Lovell and Gigi Dover; they came up with a collection of 10 tunes that sample freely from country, rock, and R&B. As a singer, King does fine, he manages to overcome a Southern drawl to flash enough vocal and style range and avoids sounding like just another alt-country hat act or over-tanned beachcomber. The songs are all King originals, and though they don't stray too far from familiar topic territory, there are some tracks that stand out.

"Was It Just Yesterday?" starts things off, with King in good form, yearning about the good times with an absent lover, to a funky acoustic guitar rhythm with nice, R&B organ swells over the top. On this one Lovell, for some reason, uses guitar effects in the background that sound like croaking bullfrogs, but the song still is a highlight. On "Alarm Clock" King sings about how people who work in cubicles sell out, and paying his dues is a rat race; but it seems to end right in the middle, and musically and lyrically it seems unfinished. The familiar country theme of wishing the current lover were the old one makes up "Pretending She's You," again the organ borrows a Stax vibe that helps move the song forward.

King gets down with "Sweet Tea" with a full band playing a stomping blues behind him. This tune is simple but effective, and his lyrics about his baby and her tea provide two and half minutes of fun. "I Haven't Forgotten You Yet" shifts gears slightly as the closest to a rock shuffle here as he laments, "I'm too old to be lonely/and I'm too young to die," while slick guitar licks dart in and out of the beat. In his ballad "What You Live For," King reminisces back to 1992, and again seems to despair of a friend who spends his days working in a cubicle with a boss. Note to Rusty: Yeah, it can suck, but sometimes you deal.

Filler alert: "Make You Mine" and "Old Dirty Movies" are among the tracks on the project that fade very quickly.

The title tune uses good dynamics as King builds up to power-chord choruses about going your own way despite what the world throws you. The keyboard/guitar mix is augmented by Dover's backing vocals for a track that stays with the listener. The closer is an interesting, quasi-gospel song, "Easy Jesus." Against an out-of-tune, pounding piano background, King sings from the perspective of a homeless who wants help, with a little less religion along with it. The song works, and King shows some musical daring to even try it on the disc.

As a whole, *Running Through the Stop Signs* shows promise. If Rusty King can match his vocal presence with more of the songwriting that is evident on such tracks as "Sweet Tea" and "Was It Just Yesterday?" his future efforts will be even better.



## Tyler Grant Up the Neck

by Frank Kocher

Tyler Grant is a bluegrass multi-instrumentalist who has played with Adrienne Young's band as well as Chris and Casey and the Two Stringers. Lately, he has been playing bass in Emmitt/Nershi Band and guitar in the Drew Emmitt band, which features mandolin whiz Emmitt. Grant can play a few licks himself, too, as turns out; he won the National Guitar Flatpicking Championship in Winfield, Kansas, in 2008. His new disc, *Up the Neck*, is an all-instrumental affair, focusing on bluegrass and country acoustic guitar tunes. These include several traditional standards arranged by Grant, a former Nashville cat who now calls Colorado home.

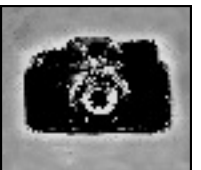
The music on this generous 14-track disc puts the guitar out front and differs from many bluegrass recordings by not having fiddle. The banjo and, occasionally, the mandolin, take their turns chopping and the guys on this disc are smooth pros: Jordan Ramsey on mandolin and particularly Andy Thorn on banjo keep the notes flying, giving Grant some serious company.

Grant is a young, technically gifted player. Cross picking with excellent timing and clean execution, he starts off with "Springtime Flatpicking," an impressive piece of solo progressive bluegrass guitar that lays to rest any doubts about his technical skill. Then, "Funky Boulder" shows that Grant isn't staying in a safe bluegrass groove, as jazzy chords and the melody line give Thorn a chance to unleash a shower of notes before giving way to Grant, who plays an imaginative solo that mixes blues, jazz, and soul. Bluegrass fans don't despair – the next tune, "Witch Creek," is Tony Rice-style full speed hoedown licks, and Grant has them all, taking the scales up, down, here, and there. "Forked Deer" is an old fiddle tune, done solo in a contest-winning arrangement. Another traditional favorite, "I Don't Love Nobody," is country swing, and Grant is all over the fretboard on this one, laying jazz scales down with bluegrass alternate picking. The vibe is subdued on "Bill Frisell," as a Latin flavor prevails; Grant's free form jazz picking gives the tune a haunting allure in a style changeup that is a highlight.

After more in the traditional style with the technical jaw-dropper, "Beaumont Rag," another solo guitar standout is "Lady of the Lake." This original, which melds Grant's bluegrass abilities with his folk and jazz side, has intricately built latic works of melody that sound medieval and mysterious. "Cache La Poudre" is a slow ensemble piece that gives each soloist a chance to do some interesting riffing to an unusual but memorable guitar figure.

*Up the Neck* has plenty of just that. The big advantage of this disc is that it is split evenly between straight bluegrass, played well, and music that could be called anything from progressive bluegrass to jazz, as Tyler Grant is a multifaceted guitarist. One thing is for sure: fans of both bluegrass and acoustic guitar in general will love this.





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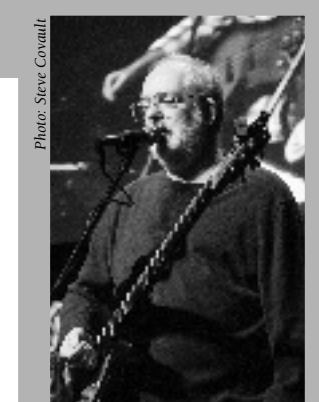
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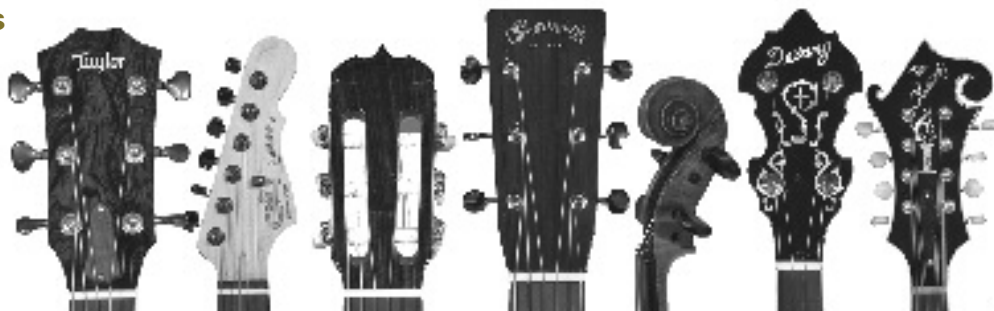
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